

Endodontic elegance

The editor sees how Richard Mitzman has transformed a Harley Street suite for Julian Webber

JULIAN Webber and Richard Mitzman have been friends for a very long time, but in the intervening years since they both qualified their respective careers have changed dramatically. Julian, concentrating on dentistry, has become a highly acclaimed clinician and lecturer in the speciality of endodontics, while Richard has metamorphosed from dentist to architect. It seemed only natural therefore that, when Dr Webber was looking for some radical thinking on his newly-acquired suite at 121 Harley Street, he should call up his architect mate Mr Mitzman.

Nothing comes easy in Harley Street, however, where all changes buildingwise are fastidiously overseen by English Heritage and, although Number 121 is only a grade 2 listed property, the tiniest alterations to windows, doors, fireplaces and, worst of all, ceilings are still heavily frowned upon.

With Julian's new surgery area made up of huge, graciously proportioned rooms, very high ceilinged and complete with fireplaces from another era, liberal quantities of lateral thinking were going to be required to make things anything like habitable for the pursuit of dentistry. The previous incumbent, a doctor, had solved the problem as far as he was concerned by simply partitioning up the whole area into a series of impossibly claustrophobic, unaesthetically high, narrow, soul-destroying "cubicles". It was no place to practise high quality dentistry as it stood, and a keen imaginative architectural mind was urgently needed.

Looked at superficially, the plan sounds simple. All you need to do is rip out all the existing partitions and then re-divide the available floor area as required, only this time using only eight-foot-high room dividers to overcome the shut-in feel to the place.

Before any of this could be constructed, however, because of those now well known



All the surgeries are raised a few inches above existing floor levels, with half-ceiling-height dividers and glass sliding doors

Mitzman surgery "trade marks" – substantial service wall at the back, heavy frosted glass sliding doors at the front – a robust skeletal metal framework had first to be put in place to bear the considerable and unusual load. Much extra expense here I would guess, with English Heritage needing to be convinced as well no doubt! All was eventually achieved though, and one has to say that the results are visually magnificent, with only pictures capable of doing it justice.

Because of the metalwork, all the surgeries needed to be raised a few inches above existing floor levels – striking in itself but this, together with the half-ceiling-height dividers,

achieves a really dramatic sense of light, airy spaciousness. The elegant glass sliding doors roll back easily and smoothly for patient

access at the front of each surgery, while the multi-cupboarded "service walls" at the back, opening on to the service areas of the practice, do much to help with the Mitzman dislike of "dentist clutter". The side walls of each surgery are covered in a material resembling marble, and come in eye-catching but restful turquoise or dark blue. The material was in fact polished plaster, Richard told me later.

So much then for the visual effects, but what of the practicality! A word with Dr Webber quickly confirms that he is delighted. Hugely expensive, he readily admits, but well worth the price. "A lovely relaxing modern environment in which to be performing exacting tasks every day of your life", he says. "The patients are impressed too."

Endodontists these days, at least in the upper echelons of the craft, have highly sophisticated pieces of kit at their disposal, especially designed to help them on their way down those canals. For example, pride of place in each of the Webber surgeries is taken by the very special Carr Cart, a designer endo box of tricks only available from Gary Carr in San Diego. Then there are those microscopes which magnify a canal to the size of your thumbnail. Computers too, and printout facilities everywhere. High-tech dentistry indeed, but all looking so absolutely right in this avant-garde setting.



Richard Mitzman and Julian Webber



The frosted glass "theme" extends to the reception area



The very special Carr Cart



The graciously proportioned rooms are complete with fireplaces from another era



The service areas are behind multi-cupboarded "service walls" at the back of the surgeries