
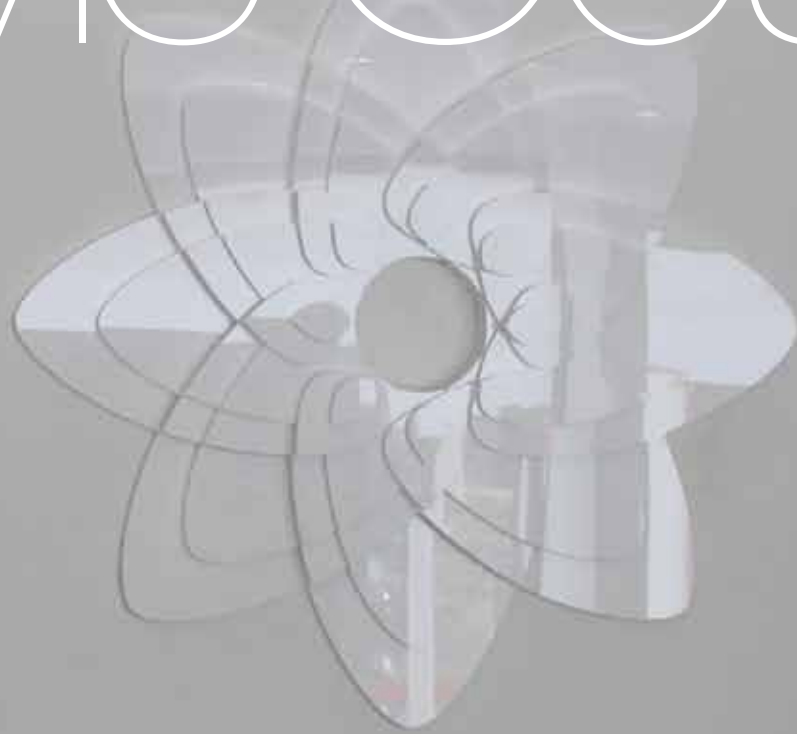




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V O G U E

## Rethink and reinvent

A devastating flood at Luton's Vogue Dental was turned into a positive by principal Kalpesh Katechia, who saw it as a 'chance to rethink', writes **Ellie Seymour**





'I WAS SHOCKED AT THE DAMAGE, BUT ACCEPTED IT AND SAW IT AS A CHANCE TO RETHINK THE PRACTICE'

Flooding can have a devastating effect on people's lives and property, but Kalpesh Katechia, owner of Vogue Dental in Luton, Bedfordshire, wasn't going to dwell on his misfortune when his practice suffered flood damage in 2011. Instead, he saw it as a positive experience - an opportunity to tweak the design of his current practice. 'I was shocked at the amount of damage caused just from someone in the property above leaving a tap on,' he says. 'At the same time, though, I accepted it, and saw it as a valuable opportunity to rethink the development of the practice. I had a few new ideas about growing and improving on it which involved adding another section. We had to rebuild and reinstate almost everything, so it seemed like the ideal opportunity to do two things at once.'

The practice, which is based in a double shop-front retail unit on a small high street in Luton, was initially refurbished in 2002 by DDPC, London, and Kalpesh was keen to work with them on this second renovation project.

'I've worked with DDPC architect, Gary Betis, and his business partner and interior designer, Shirin Seehra for over 10 years and we've come to know each other very well, so it made sense for them to help me with this project, too,' says Kalpesh.

This, it turns out, is due to Kalpesh's quirks. 'Gary knows that I like to look at things from a different perspective,' he laughs. 'I know it's easier to follow the crowd when it comes to dental practice refurbishment, but that would be boring!' he continues. Clearly, he believes in thinking



The practice needed to appeal to both NHS and private patients



big and outside the box. 'My brief was simple,' he says. 'I wanted Gary to design the practice like no other I have seen. To help him understand what I wanted, I gathered images from the internet to convey my ideas.'

## **THE PLAN**

DDPC's brief was essentially to fulfil two main objectives. 'The first was obviously to mend any damage to the reception, waiting room and corridors of the practice caused by flood damage,' says Gary. 'The second was to increase the size of the practice to cater for Kalpesh's growing patient base which meant incorporating two separate practices - one for private patients and the other for NHS patients - both to include separate reception and waiting areas,' he says.

This was a big task which required a careful programmed schedule in order that the building work and in turn the finished results weren't compromised while the practice remained open.

DDPC spent a lot of time space planning in order to accommodate the new practice. 'We removed the two flats on the first floor and used the empty roof void to create a much larger practice,' says Gary. 'The ground floor formed the private area, the first floor housed the NHS area, while the roof void became the ideal location for the staff facilities and general storage.'

The final scheme had to work on two levels. 'It had to function efficiently and take into consideration the most up-to-date building control requirements,' Gary explains. 'It also had to have an aesthetic appeal to suit his new and existing private and NHS patient base. To achieve these goals, we prepared plans for each floor and also to use as much of the roof void as we could.'

## **THE DESIGN**

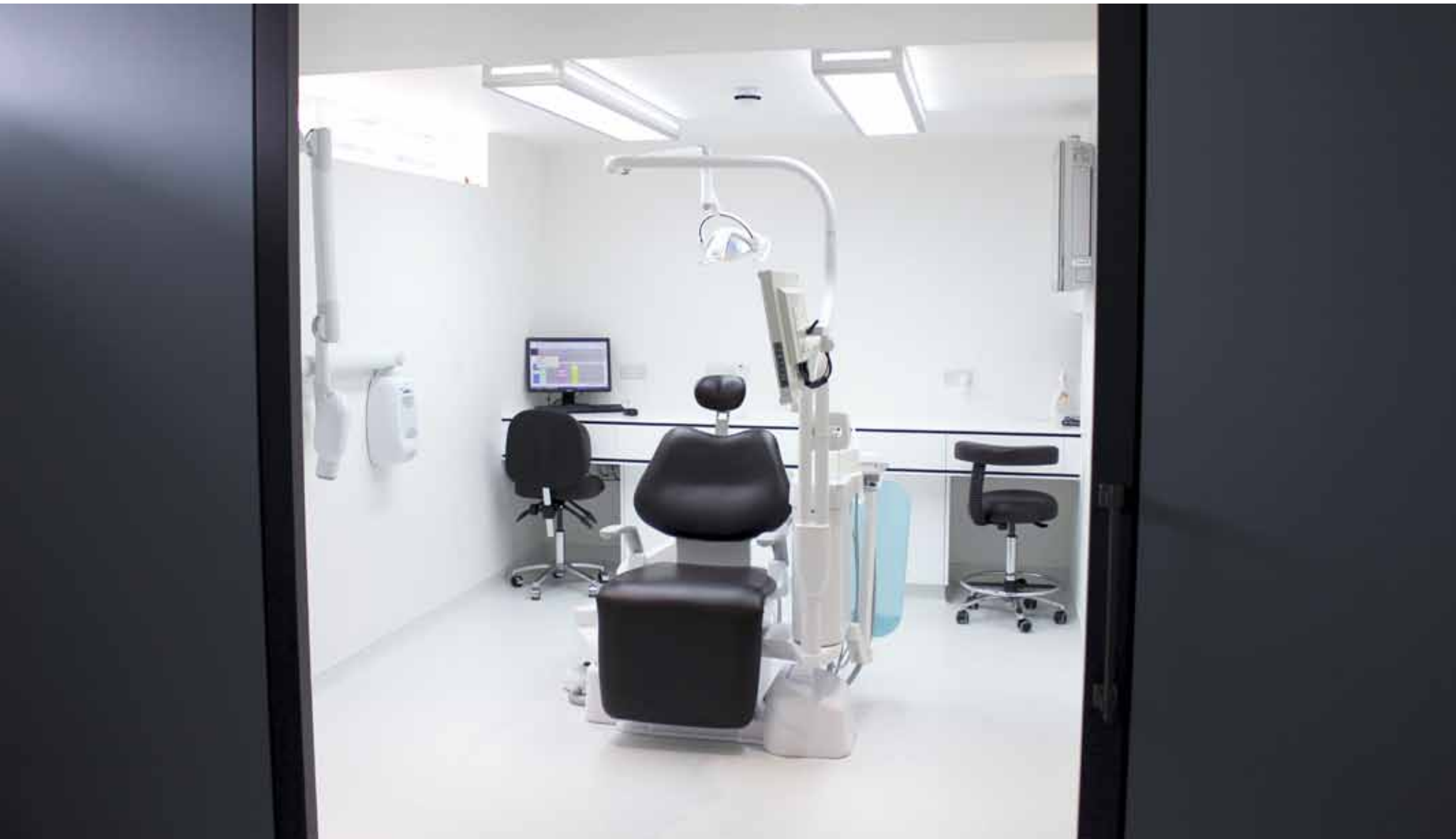
In terms of creating aesthetic appeal, Kalpesh had a clear vision for the interior design. 'As I was looking to split the practice into distinct floors, I had differing objectives for each one, so the use of colour, texture, lighting, sound and even smell were important factors,' he says.

'The NHS floor had to be cost effective, and offer an efficient layout that would work around patient flow while remaining modern,' he says. The private area was purely about luxury. 'I wanted to give the patients an experience beyond expectation before they had even had any treatment,' he says. 'The vision for the patient lounge and reception area was one of comfort and luxury as associated with luxury brands. I took my inspiration from designer boutiques, as well as certain bars and cocktail lounges,' he says.

The result is a super-sized three-floor mixed practice consisting of a three-surgery private practice with consultation room, office, reception area, patient lounge, toilet, X-ray room and cafe area. There's a further three-surgery NHS practice floor, also with its own consultation room, office, reception and lounge area, as well as a decontamination room; and a floor dedicated to non-clinical stores, a library/study room, locker



**'The vision for the patient lounge and reception area was one of comfort and luxury as associated with luxury brands'**





**'I love the clean, minimal and space-age look of my clinical room. The custom-made cabinetry and hidden preparation area help to emphasise the clinical feel'**



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room and staff kitchen area.

### THE PROBLEMS

Like any major refurbishment project, there were some teething problems. 'Having to work in poor conditions during the temporary set up was very demoralising for the team,' he recognises. 'We had temporary lighting and heating with no flooring during the winter months. I also found running a practice and project managing a build very tiring and time consuming. On top of all this, I spent a lot of time collating evidence for the insurance company, which was a challenge to say the least,' he admits. 'This was mainly because so much had been lost in the flood. Everyday was tough because so much was happening at the same time and having to devote 100% to each task was quite draining.'

Gary agrees the project was a particularly challenging one. 'Being a major refurbishment involving expansion as well as repairs, it was obviously going to take months. But dealing with loss adjusters just added to the stress as they tried to drag the whole issue out in the hope we would give up and go away. Kalpesh persevered though and finally received the funds to cover the damage.'

As was to be expected given the complex circumstances, the project overran, but this was not a major issue for Kalpesh. 'I was fully aware that the deadlines were estimates due to many unforeseeable issues.'

### THE RESULTS

With the project finally complete after around 18 months, Kalpesh can sit back and think about what he's pleased with the most. 'I think the patient lounge is my favourite area because it delivers the ambience I wanted, but in a clean clinical way. It's a relaxing area where patients can actually "chill" and not be anxious about treatment,' he says. 'I love the clean, minimal and space-age look of my clinical room as well. The custom-made cabinetry and hidden preparation area really help to emphasise the clinical feel.'

In terms of specific features, he loves the chairs in the new patient lounge. 'They really one of my favourite aspects of the new interior. They're Warren Platner replicas. I also love the cut-out lighting features in the ceiling which mirror the floor,' he says.

For Gary, it's seeing the completed practice. 'The most satisfying part is seeing a practice previously designed by us, grow and become a bigger facility with enhanced services and an interior to match.'

Were there any bargains? Or did Kalpesh blow the budget? 'I sourced a few bargains including the soft furnishings, artwork, and the hanging string curtains which I only paid £200 for, despite originally being quoted £1,300 for the real thing! Mostly, everything inside the practice is expensive though, particularly the chairs in the waiting room, my

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surgery chair and the custom-made dental cabinetry.'

Money aside, both Kalpesh and Gary are extremely happy with the results. 'We were lucky to work with a client who has a good understanding of the building process, and who was motivated to follow the design scheme without compromise,' says Gary.

Other relationships throughout the project led to its success. 'The contractor, Aspect, didn't compromise our drawings or down specify them. This has help us create a practice that fulfils Kalpesh's brief that will serve him well now and into the future.'

Kalpesh agrees, 'The practice looks absolutely amazing, if I may say so myself!' But he isn't planning any more renovations in a hurry. 'For now, I want to take a break for project renovation work! Although I do have plans for the future of the practice,' says Kalpesh. 'I would like to see the private side of the business grow to offer facial aesthetics,' he says. 'I am also thinking about exploring other ventures outside of dentistry, I'd like to open a bar or restaurant, or perhaps a coffee shop, but these are just ideas. In terms of Vogue Dental though, for me, it's a continuing project I don't think we will ever finish!' ■