

## The Tanshire Clinic

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PHOTOGRAPH BY JANE GOODRIE

# How we did it

Setting up a new practice involves challenges that can be overcome with good advice, says **Richard Brooks**, principal of the Tanshire Clinic in Surrey



The perfect team: Fiona McMichen and Richard Brooks

My wife Fiona McMichen and I qualified together from University College Hospital Dental School in 1986. I then spent five years in the Royal Army Dental Corps, serving in West Berlin, Northern Ireland and Kuwait. On leaving the army I completed an MSc in conservative dentistry at the Eastman Dental Institute, while Fiona worked in a mixed private/NHS practice in Hampshire.

After short spells working as a locum for British Airways and then stints in mixed private/NHS practice, in 1996 I took up a position as an associate in a private practice in Farnham, where we were living at the time. During this time Fiona was accepted on to the first ever two-year part-time 'long restorative' course at the Eastman Dental Institute. The endodontic module was taught by Simon Cunnington and Fiona subsequently successfully applied for a place on the MSc in endodontics, also at the Eastman.

On completing her MSc, Fiona set up an endodontic referral practice within the Farnham practice and she continued teaching endodontics alongside Chris Stock (renowned endodontist and mentor) at the new postgraduate section of the Eastman.

### Life changes

Circumstances change and sadly, in May 2010, we were unexpectedly both given three months' notice to end our contracts.

Although this was unplanned and a great worry at the time, we had to decide whether to work elsewhere for someone or to set up our own clinic. We chose to set up a new practice.

While I am sure the time is never right, two years down the road, we are very proud to have our own state-of-the-art clinic with a first-class team surrounding us. We have never regretted the decision we made at that time.

Planning and setting up the new clinic took far longer than anticipated and, in the interim,



The reception feels like a warm, high-quality hotel lounge

friends generously allowed us space in their own practices to continue working. A large proportion of my patient list and Fiona's referral base of dentists gave us their support.

Within two weeks of leaving our old clinic we were able to move into our 'temporary surgeries' and we have to thank Tony, Steve, Duncan and Julian for their friendship, support and for bravely allowing us into their lovely practices.

### The vision

A change allows you to refocus and we knew we wanted to build on our existing skills and offer the very best dental treatment under one roof. We hoped to expand our patient base by word of mouth from happy patients who would refer like-minded friends and colleagues. Our aim has always been to be the very best we can be.

A few years ago, Fiona attended a lecture by Gary Carr – a world-class endodontist from San Diego, who revolutionised microscopic endodontics and set up his own research facility. He had also set up a 'paperless' office, based on a software management and treatment programme for endodontists, called TDO4endo.

Fiona spoke to endodontic friends Julian Webber and Tony Hoskinson, who used the system in their own clinics, and was convinced this was for her. We invested in the software and hey presto: we had space and equipment but no staff.

Having decided to set up our own practice, we set about finding suitable premises. We

bought all our own essential instruments and materials to take to our temporary surgeries and were very lucky to have two nurses and a receptionist from our old team join us.

As Fiona and I had surgery space in different locations, our main office base was in our home where we had our surgery computers lined up in the study ready for use in the new clinic. We logged into these remotely. Appointments were organised, phone calls were made from the home office and patients were then seen in our satellite locations. Astonishingly, it worked very well. Our wonderful reception team coordinated everything.

One of the other dentists at the previous practice, Joanne Freeman, a registered specialist prosthodontist, also left at around the same time and we asked her to become an associate at our new clinic, which still did not exist! Jo is married to Richard Gidden, an internationally acclaimed ceramic technician ([www.orakdesignlondon.com](http://www.orakdesignlondon.com)) and he was keen to come to the new clinic and offer a bespoke laboratory service.

### The search

Not only is Jo a fabulous dentist, but she also has a circle of friends who have various business interests. She introduced me to her great friend William Martin, a property consultant, who spent some time with us trawling around Farnham.

While Farnham is a very attractive Georgian market town, it is busy and traffic congestion is a problem. It was a difficult

search, but eventually we found the right site.

The Tanshire Business Park is close to the A3 on the outskirts of Elstead. Tanshire Park is about 10 minutes' drive from the centres of Farnham, Guildford and Godalming, and only a few minutes from the A3, allowing easy access to London, and to the south coast.

I still thought that a town centre location was best, but after much persuasion from Fiona, Jo and William, I saw what the business park had to offer. It is in a quiet, beautiful setting, with a small café/restaurant and a bowls green.

Although a little off the beaten track, historically we rarely relied much on passing trade. Most of our patients reach us through referrals or word of mouth, and this continues today.

Raising the funds for establishing a new small business in the doom and gloom of a recession is never easy, and it took about four months to actually secure the site.

William, with his huge expertise with commercial leases, negotiated on our behalf and eventually, 2,000sqft of office space with allocated parking was ours.



Brightly coloured wall art decorates the practice



## The plans

The clinic was to feel like a warm, high-quality hotel lounge at the front desk, while the clinical areas would be minimal but high-tech.

I had been put into contact with a local building services company for the building work. I had my own ideas on the design, and while we hadn't really decided on the style of dental equipment, I had some rough ideas.

As the plans and design for the Tanshire Clinic grew, Fiona, Jo and I visited the BDTA Showcase in London. There we met Matt and the team at Clark Dental and we decided that A-dec was our preferred choice of dental unit.

We have done a fair amount of business with Clark Dental over the years, buying intraoral cameras and the Nomad handheld X-ray, and have always been very impressed with the company's after-sales service, so we went to see them and decided they were the people to go to for the equipment.

In fact, it was Matt at Clark who pointed out that I was going to be charged very heavily by my chosen building contractors and recommended a much more cost-effective alternative before I committed – a very helpful added service!

Matt also put us in contact with Aspects Design and Build who then recommended Alan Tate at Grey Associates architects.

We now had the plans, the architect, the builders and the equipment; the only thing that really held us up was the bank.

Fortunately, with the home support of Fiona and with the patience of the landlord, we duly completed the financing just over seven months after initially seeing the site.

## The build

The original site was an empty shell and we decided to make changes that would provide us with our own entrance – the standard format at the business park provided a shared entrance to each building, with shared services, but we didn't really want our patients arriving in that way.

The landlord was happy for us to erect a partition wall, create a new entrance and bring in our own services.

The build took three months, duly supervised by Alan Tate, and things went pretty much accordingly to plan.

Once the main build was underway, Matt and the team at Clark Dental came into their own.

We had already discussed and designed a minimalist style for the surgeries to reduce clutter and aid cleaning and sterilisation, so by using bespoke mobile carts, we are able at the start of a treatment session to bring all the necessary instruments and materials into each surgery, depending on what type of treatment is being carried out.

All these items are stored in a central location at the back of the surgeries opposite the decontamination suite. The surgeries are all multi-use and equipped with Carl Zeiss

microscopes, which were fitted by Steve Clapman at Nuvew.

The Clark Dental team were very helpful throughout. As well as useful advice, they provided some bespoke cabinets and mobile units, the A-dec chairs, Schick sensors, a Nomad portable X-ray system and Cattani compressors.

We set up the space for four operating rooms, and we have equipped three so far. All the equipment was financed by Simon Freeman at Snowbird Finance, who liaised with Clark Dental. It was organised so easily, compared to the banking issues, that perhaps Simon and Matt should set up their own dental bank!

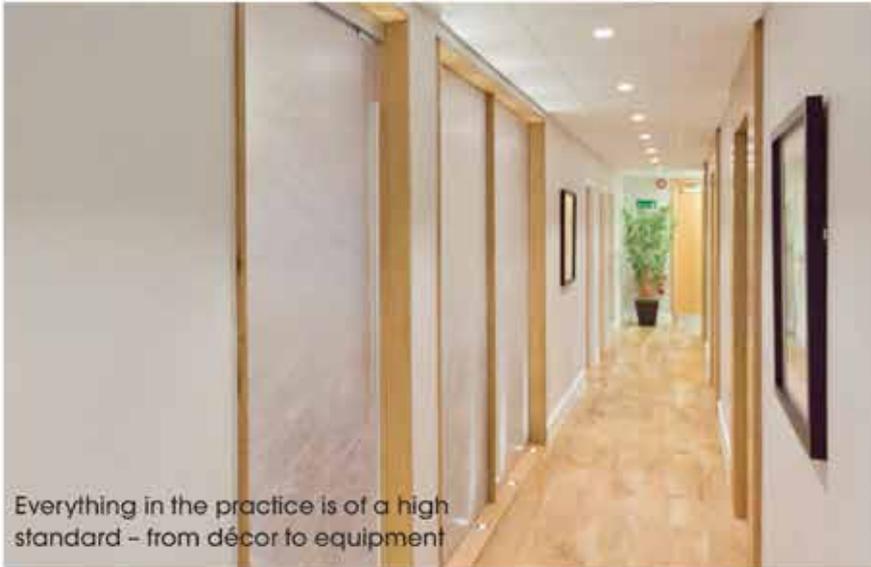
The final piece of the jigsaw was a cone beam CT scanner and we ordered the Kodak 3000 3D machine with ceph as it links directly in with the TDO4endo software.

We have customised the software so that, while it is primarily designed for endodontics, it also works well for perio, ortho and restorative dentistry. Tony Hulbert, who supplied the CT scanner, was great in setting up the machine for our needs and is always there for us with advice.

## The team

We have a lab area in which Richard Gidden carries out all our shade taking. He is based at the clinic at least one day a week. He enjoys looking out onto the bowls green and gardens rather than a basement window in London W1.

From our Eastman contacts we now have Lloyd Seanson, who visits once a month to place implants for us, and Lindsay



Everything in the practice is of a high standard – from décor to equipment



Winchester, visiting every three weeks to carry out orthodontics.

Philip Connell, another great friend from UCH, is a dentally-qualified plastic surgeon who visits the clinic for patients wanting facial aesthetics.

We truly have a first-class team working with us, all of whom we have known for a long time and are our friends. They include a receptionist, three nurses, a part-time therapist and part-time hygienist.

Our staffing levels are low but the nurses, hygienist and therapist are also able to undertake all administrative roles in the

clinic. This means that the atmosphere is of a tight-knit team all pulling in the right direction.

The help we had from our dental colleagues and the links that we had with the supply side of the dental industry from Clark Dental and Snowbird means that we have been keen to refer other dental friends who are refurbishing their practices.

The Tanshire Clinic has grown beyond our initial expectations, and we are receiving a constant stream of new patients for Fiona, Jo and myself, while

new referring dentists are asking Lloyd and Lindsay to see patients because of their reputation.

We have taken on the mantra from The Digital Office (TDO) group of endodontists of 'striving to be the best you can'. To encourage our team and help them share our goals the involvement of business coach Kevin Rose, was incredibly helpful.

Fiona and I have recently taken four team members with us to Charleston and San Diego for further clinical and practice management study alongside other members of the highly talented and motivating TDO group.

We opened in October 2011, just 13 months after leaving the old practice, and things are going well. We are ahead of our schedule and enjoying the challenges of running our own business. Though, of course, having good advice always helps! 



Comments to Private Dentistry



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COMPANIES INVOLVED IN THE PROJECT