

# Lateral thinking

*The Dentist* talks to **Anupa** and **Matthew Stephens** about launching a squat practice while expanding their family.

## Did you always the plan to build a business together?

**Anupa:** Matthew was the one with the clear goal of owning a practice from very early in our careers. As dental students, we attended a lecture on setting up a practice. As the speaker was emphasising how a project can impact time for family and socialising, Matt turned to me and said, "Sorry!" Luckily, the goal became a shared vision. The advantage of this is that it is now a family project, allowing us time to see each other.

## Where were you working beforehand?

**Matthew:** I moved into private dentistry early in my career. Being detail-driven and focused on creating an improved patient experience, I struggled to provide the dentistry I wanted to within the NHS system after I finished my foundation year. I worked at a small private practice in Rotherham one Saturday a week and gradually increased this to a full-time position. As the practice expanded, my focus shifted to restorative and cosmetic dentistry, including Invisalign. I still work part-time at this practice, finishing cases while building my list at Lateral Dental.

**Anupa:** Since graduating, I have worked for a series of mini-corporates and larger dental corporations, providing general dentistry to a mix of NHS and private patients. I realised that if I wanted to pursue sedation dentistry, I would need to branch out and forge my own path. While my list of achievements was still growing, I kept my part-time position at my associate practice, all while juggling motherhood, pregnancy and building Lateral Dental.

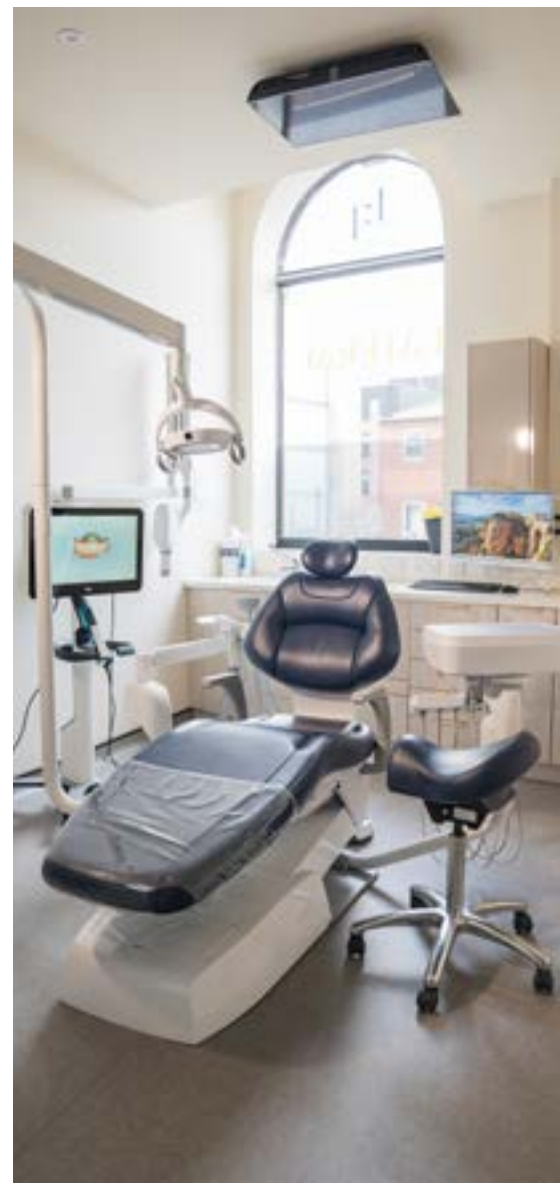
## Why did you decide to open a dental practice in Sheffield, and what were the initial challenges?

**Anupa:** Having a central location was

high on our priority list. Being in the centre of Sheffield provided us with a broad patient base that fit our patient demographic and business model. It included younger professionals attracted to cosmetic dentistry, which is Matthew's area of interest, as well as a range of ages who would benefit from general dentistry under sedation, an area I am developing. The area was undergoing a significant development boost, with substantial funding from the council to convert old industrial buildings into residential areas. We knew it could become a highly sought-after location in the long term, as a growing population would need dental care. The building we chose was large, which allowed us to futureproof the practice to align with our business plan and avoid outgrowing the site too soon. It was also a historic building with amazing, large arched windows overlooking a busy dual carriageway. We could envision our practice name all over them, visible to everyone during their daily commutes. Some of the challenges we faced involved issues with the technical requirements of the build, such as the older building having pipes and drainage, and as we're in a conservation area, working with the council to comply with planning permissions around the placement of external ventilation, and advertising was a challenge.

## Who came up with the design?

**Matthew:** We had an idea of how we wanted the branding colours to feel and what to portray, but not the exact palette. We had help from Align Media for our branding and website, and we've loved



working with them. The colours can be used in so many ways, and they do not resemble a clinical environment at all. There are bold and glitzy elements, dark and rustic elements, and light, modern neutral elements. The interior design was an amalgamation of mood boards from Anupa and a fun collaboration with a two-woman company called Gloss Interiors, who refined all the ideas, leading to what we have now. But we are ever evolving, and it will only develop and improve over time, as there are so many ideas we would love to introduce. We knew some of the bolder ideas weren't necessary from day one, so we are refining and reshaping them to fit our growing practice. The natural progression and evolution will follow.



**Can you share any insights on the features of your clinic and the technology and equipment you have chosen?**

**Anupa:** Design features that are inviting, warm and set us apart are central to everything we do: how we designed the layout, which rooms we included, and the overall experiences we offered our patients. The features we prioritised needed to align with how we aimed to deliver our five-star patient journey.

In our dental suites, we have placed large gold-framed mirrors and modern artwork that complement the practice colours. In our patient lounge, we emphasise comfortable seating, a welcoming coffee and tea station, and a completely transformational scent diffuser with our signature scent. It

boosts our mood daily and is a game-changing feature.

We are continuously refining areas, aiming to shift perceptions of what dental care should be and how it should feel for the public. We wanted to showcase the latest technology by seamlessly combining excellent patient care with modern methods of delivering dental treatments. This is why we chose to acquire an iTero scanner and a fully digital workflow from day one. We opted for ceiling-mounted TVs, cloud-based AI dental software from CareStack and VoiceStack, and the luxurious Belmont Eurus S8s. The comfort of the chair, programmable settings, and ambidextrous set-ups were important to us, as Matthew is left-handed and I am right-handed. We can also adjust our chair positions and



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preferences at the touch of a button. We selected electric motor handpieces and chose not to include spittoons.

### Is a good working relationship with the design and build teams essential?

**Matthew:** Shaun Webb at Bradgate Dental Equipment, alongside Elliott North from Norths of Leicester, formed an excellent team and played a crucial role in our practice journey. Since that first meeting and build visit, they have helped guide us through the practice layout, incorporating our feedback on how we wanted the patient experience to flow. They communicated effectively with John Dickinson, the lead architect from IDC Architecture and a true asset throughout. Shaun assisted us in selecting all our dental

equipment, from choosing our Belmont treatment centre to our NSK autoclave, offering a range of options and providing honest advice on what he felt would best suit us. The Bradgate team then arrived as the practice was nearing completion to commission and install the dental equipment and chairs. Belmont helped us select a suitable range of treatment centres, and after comparing various options and brands, we preferred the features of the Eurus S8.

### Can you expand on the feeling of 'parental guilt'?

**Anupa:** The parental guilt was – and still is – real. Late nights and long hours mean we may miss bedtimes,

preventing us from being there for everything. However, we try to make the most of the time we spend with our three-year-old son. Our advice? Get them involved early. Over the past year, since starting our practice journey, we've watched our son grow from a baby into an independent toddler. During this time, we've ensured he stays involved every step of the way. He came with us to scout the buildings and was (safely) visiting while we worked on a building site. Now, he loves coming in to see what the staff are doing and having a chat. He sees them as part of the family, which is terrific.

Discovering we are expecting a second child at the start of our practice journey has only added an extra layer of determination.

