

'We saw potential deep under all the clutter'

A generous measure of good humour, a 'can do' attitude and shared enthusiasm propelled **Neil Colquhoun** and **Anton Ward** into practice ownership. Here, they share the Rooted Dental story

Neil Colquhoun

Co-founder of Rooted Dental

Anton Ward

Co-founder of Rooted Dental

Within a year of opening, Rooted Dental scooped three Dentistry Scotland awards – Best New Practice, Best NHS Practice and Practice of the Year 2022 – and came highly commended in the Practice of the Year in Scotland & Northern Ireland category at the Dentistry Awards.



Welcoming NHS and private patients to their newly refurbished practice in Kilmarnock, East Ayrshire, in November 2021, owners Neil Colquhoun and Anton Ward could not have foreseen how far they would come.

Both graduated from the University of Glasgow – Neil with a degree in dentistry and pharmacology and Anton in dentistry. They briefly went their separate ways – to Clydebank and Paisley respectively – before seeing an opportunity afforded them by the pandemic to buy and renovate a practice and open as COVID-19 eased.

And the timing worked in their favour.

Anton recalls: 'Access to dentistry was poor, and we knew at some point that when we came out of the pandemic, there was going to be a bit of a demand for getting back to the dentist because there had been a spotlight shone on the backlog of dental care.'

'We knew if we could finish the practice, it would benefit us – and the local people.'

We wanted to change the dental environment and offer a more relaxing experience



'We wanted to change the dental environment and offer a more relaxing experience. Kilmarnock is a very tight-knit community, people got the concept quickly and word-of-mouth recommendations worked in our favour.'

Chaos and decluttering

The original site was large, with one surgery running full-time and another part-time. Now, 18 months later, they are about to complete their fifth and final surgery.

It may all sound easy, but the reality is this journey was not an easy one.

They started the project in January 2021, documenting it on Instagram. The building had been a dental practice for 50-plus years but needed extensive modernisation and refurbishment and demanded an appetite for decluttering.

With rebellious optimism and, Anton concedes, some naivety on their part, they embarked on the renovation project – the size seemingly overwhelming but surmountable. What met them is best described as 'chaos'.

'If we had known how much work it would be, we would have been more hesitant. But we are both game for a challenge, which lent itself to a project like this. We now look back at what we were doing six to 12 months ago and laugh. It would have made for an entertaining film,' Anton jokes.

'But to be honest, we have learnt a lot – it hasn't put us off doing something similar again.'

Their tenacity and determination quickly paid off – as did the hours spent painting shutters, shifting rubbish, wading through

boxes of paperwork and ripping out tiles, fixtures and fittings that had seen better days.

Neil recalls: 'We needed our budget to stretch as far as it could go, so we did much of the groundwork ourselves. Anton and I did all the prep work, stripping out the building to create a blank canvas. We lifted the tiles on the stairway and went crazy with hammers and chisels.'



'Often this was after seeing patients for the day. We would have appointments from 8.30am until 6.00pm, and before we put on our jackets and headed home, we would start doing some DIY. We'd then get carried away and be at it for hours, but, looking back, it was good fun. We built the media walls and did some panelling and painting ourselves, so we were involved in the project.'

Instagram also kept potential patients up to date on the progress.

'Treating patients while project managing a big renovation has been exciting, but both are full-time jobs,' Neil writes in one post.

In another: 'We saw the potential deep

under all the clutter! This week has consisted of two skips, three scrap metal collections, 40 confidential waste bags and a fire pit in the garden. What did we get ourselves into?' Others were more upbeat: 'There is nothing better than doing something you love with your best mate!'

A green vision

The 'Rooted' name hits the right notes at many levels. The duo aims to run a practice rooted in the community, accessible to all patients, providing a high standard of both NHS and cosmetic dentistry. Oh, and teeth have roots, too, they add.

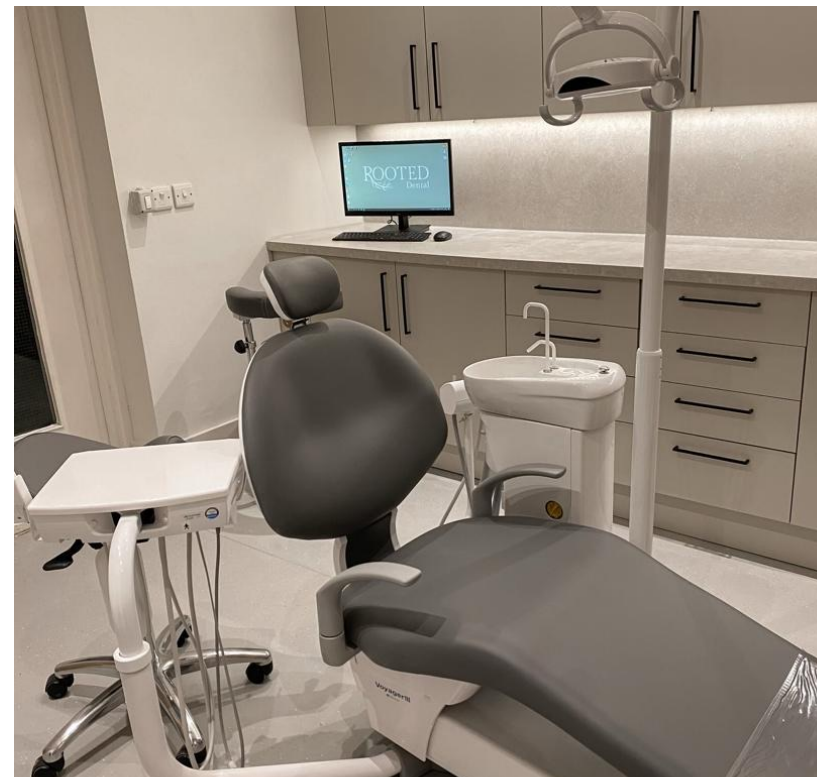
The 'plant' theme is a constant throughout the practice – from the 100% vegan and environmentally friendly British paint brand they chose to the vegan trainers they wear.

And the project evolved organically. As the business came to life, they introduced patterns and colour to the design. Botanical wallpaper and wall panelling complement the green shade of paint. 'It's calm, inviting and not a typical "dental" colour,' Neil notes. Perfect for their vision.

The branding is fresh, minimal and cleverly reflects the nature theme.

Fully aware that patients often arrive at appointments with a degree of trepidation, Neil and Anton were keen to break down the usual barriers to comfort.

The herringbone wood flooring in the waiting



area blends in well with the contemporary sofas, a coffee station, stylised prints, subtle lighting and house plants – all of which enhance the area, with diffusers to eradicate the usual smells of a clinic.

Support and engagement

On Instagram, Neil and Anton generously name-



check every company they engaged with along the way whose teams 'listened, understood and captured what we'd envisioned', often working late after surgery hours.

For the build, they used local builders and joiners in support of smaller businesses. It also allowed involvement from the duo at every stage.

All the treatment rooms have been designed similarly and fitted with the same equipment.

Four new Belmont Voyager III chairs were installed, with a fifth planned for the final surgery – 'everyone we spoke to said Belmont chairs were high quality, good all-rounders, that they last and are easy to service,' they report. 'We're pleased to

say that they lived up to the hype. We're delighted with both the aesthetics and the functionality they offer.'

Interestingly, when they bid a fond farewell to the old dental chair in a sympathetic Instagram post ('This chair is around 20 years old and has worked very hard. Time for retirement'), dentist Mike Gow responded: 'I remember when it was new! It starred in a couple of TV documentaries when I used hypnosis for pain control during two implant procedures.'

A happy coincidence that the previous incarnation of the practice and Neil and Anton's new clinic are on film for posterity.

Rooted in success

Their boundless enthusiasm is infectious and has translated well to Instagram's capacity for visual storytelling. And if it has garnered patient interest, then all the better. But you get the feeling the social media posts have been more of a personal diary than a canny marketing strategy – the journey serving as a reminder of their roots in growing a successful business. **D**



Your practice could be missing out on £80,000 per month!

Watch your Sales grow by offering our Flexible Payment Options

Scan me



Contact us: 0333 32 32 230

enquiries@chrysalisfinance.com

www.chrysalisfinance.co.uk/partners

Some of our many trusted partners

Dentex.

PERFECT SMILE

Together DENTAL

CLYDE MUNRO DENTAL GROUP

