

The Phoenix Rises

David Smith explains how he gave his dental laboratory in Exeter a 21st century makeover

AT Phoenix we had an excellent opportunity to build a new prosthetics laboratory – the only limits were budget and our imagination. With Schottlander's help we have created a stunning result that our staff and any visitors find amazing.

I first came to Phoenix back in 1992. I'd been running a lab just outside Manchester, and one day I got a call from the then owners, American company Hollister, asking if I could help them. The NHS had just changed its payments system and Phoenix specialised in NHS chrome frameworks and was losing money.

After much hard work and commitment from all the staff, we

managed to turn things around with the laboratory, and ended up doing a management buyout two years later.

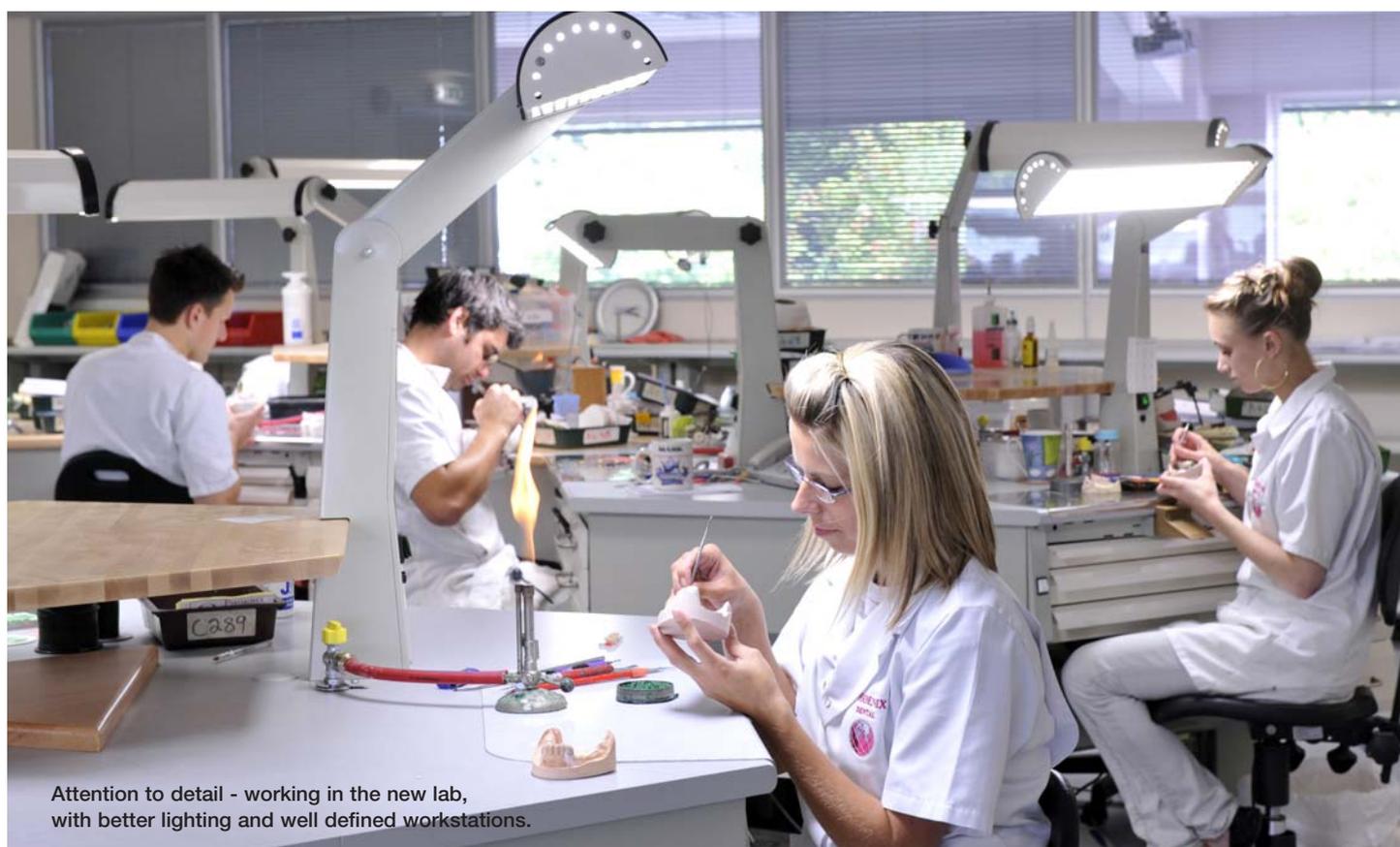
Almost immediately, in mid 1994, we moved here to this industrial site just outside Exeter, to what was then a bare shell of a newly built warehouse. We were free of all leases and able to make a fresh start, but we had no money. We bought second hand benching and came in at weekends to install everything and paint it all ourselves.

The years since then have seen us successfully become one of the UK's leading full-service laboratories.

Dentistry has changed in that time.

In 1994 denture work was mostly NHS and all about volume – getting as many sets out of the door each day as possible. Now patients have much greater expectations, and increasingly prosthetic dentistry is about restoring function and improving aesthetics with complex devices that people care about. We wanted to create an environment conducive to producing this kind of high quality work. It was time to invest.

Our building is about 40 feet high and had a suspended ceiling - all these years we'd been working just on the ground floor. First thing was to remove the ceiling and put in an upper floor, almost doubling our floor space. Then we started moving



Attention to detail - working in the new lab, with better lighting and well defined workstations.

some operations upstairs.

Crown and Bridge was our first project, but in retrospect this was quite easy compared to prosthetics, where so many processes are involved. So for our new laboratory, I looked at lots of different companies, designs and quotes.

I'd met Andy George at Ceroplast a while back and he'd told me he had Schottlander's Erio benching and that he was really pleased with everything about it. Andy is one of those rare breeds in dental technology, he tells it as it is and I respect his opinion. He'd said it was excellent value, and that if I ever wanted to take a look I'd be welcome. So before making the final choice I gave Andy a call and went to check things out.

This was going to be a huge investment for us and it's much better to see things in operation rather than just viewing them in a showroom. What's more, some lab fits look shabby after just a year or two, and I needed to ensure that what I bought did everything needed and would stand the test of time.

Andy George had said his Schottlander Erio laboratory was stylish, well-designed, and functional, and at Ceroplast I found it all exactly as he had described.

Other companies do excellent benching, but with little innovation or development; many offer the same very basic layout and design today that they did 15 years ago. Also the carcass of cabinetry manufactured by most competitors is basically MDF or laminated chipboard, whereas Erio cabinetry is thin sheets of solid steel, offering significantly increased storage space.

Impressed by what I'd seen at



Working in the old lab.

Ceroplast, I arranged for my Prosthetics Manager, Andy Taylor, to go off to the Erio factory in Italy with Schottlander UK Sales Manager, John Spicer, and Schottlander Erio Engineer, Kevin Furness. I sent him with a great many questions.

Top of the list was to check out Erio's latest central suction system. The concept offered many possible advantages, but systems of this kind by other suppliers that I'd seen before were expensive and didn't work well. Also important was to see Erio's modular design for benching.



Working in the new chrome room.



The new lab.

Initially Andy and I had favoured using another company, but after going to Italy that all changed. He was hugely impressed by everything he saw there – but what struck him most of all was how everyone at Erio was absolutely committed to their products being the best. They lived, spoke, breathed, loved benching, and such dedication to excellence demanded respect.

So when Andy came back to me he reported: “I think we should go with Schottlander and Erio – they’re brilliant!”

Once we’d placed our order we planned carefully. We left out the final panel of our new first floor construction so that when the Erio delivery arrived at Phoenix we just got a forklift truck and lifted everything straight into the building

through that. Only then did the final window go in.

Schottlander, of course, made sure that everything came together perfectly. When making a big investment like this it’s essential to be with someone you trust, and Schottlander is a wonderful company. Everyone you talk to there – whether it’s Brian at the top or whoever answers the phone when you call - all have the same high ideals. They bend over backwards to get things right for you.

Our new Schottlander Erio prosthetics lab has transformed our operation. It’s a new concept layout, and unlike most prosthetic labs it looks spacious, light, stylish and uncluttered. The benching is in three hexagonal islands giving well-defined workstations, which balance



Erio central suction system.



individuality with teamwork.

The Erio central suction system is a triumph. It's newly updated and has many excellent features. For example the valves on the suction, rather than just being mechanical solenoid valves, are now electro pneumatic, working on compressed air. The beauty of them is there are no moving parts so not only do they work more efficiently, they will last for ever. After initial capital costs it will be more economical to run and it has made things so much more comfortable. In our old lab, with individual extractor motors blasting out on every bench, it was hot and noisy - in the heat of summer it felt like a sauna. Now that's all changed. With the new system it's cool and quiet - everybody loves it.

In the old noisy lab most technicians worked in an isolated fashion, listening to music on headphones. Now nobody does. As it's so much quieter they can talk to each other, so there's increased co-operation and a great dynamic between the benches.

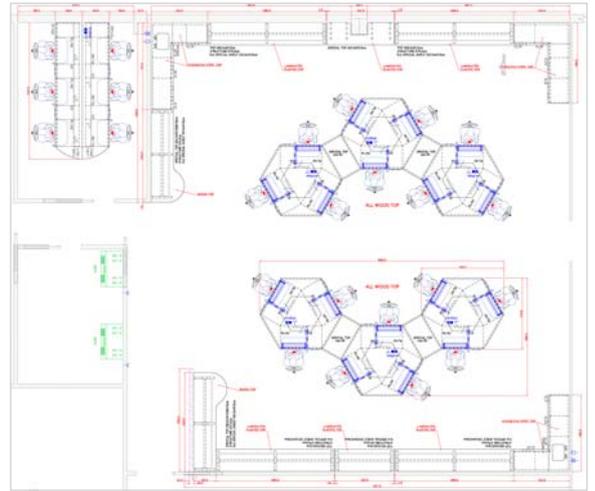
Prosthetics is a very busy, very messy, dirty, grimy business - all

wax, dust and plaster. But Schottlander and Erio have shown it doesn't have to be that way. Another great thing about our new Erio lab is that it's easy to maintain and keep clean.

My cleaner hates the standard benching because it goes right to the ground and gets a grime edge everywhere. But she loves Erio. The Erio benching has slight legs - looking almost as if it's hovering, floating off the ground - so everything's kept up in the air off the floor and it's easy to get right under it when cleaning.

There are some dirty operations like plasterwork you can't get rid of, so we've organised an enlarged and refitted plaster area downstairs. Then right through to the front we are developing as a clinical environment.

At Phoenix we have two qualified clinical dental technicians and it makes sense for us to specialise in offering a full denture service. As well as doing referral work, with Exeter



airport just five minutes up the road we are well placed for anybody wanting a dental holiday in Devon. And if speed is of the essence, we have everything on site and can offer a complete service in less than a day.

At Phoenix we set out to bring our operations right into the 21st century, and with Schottlander and Erio that's exactly what we've done.



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