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Kia Pajouhesh

Dental practitioner,
Smile Solutions

Dentistry is about reconstructing things, and for Kia Pajouhesh exercising that skill has given way to his passion for restoring Art Deco buildings. The move gives him a much more public forum in which to show off his talents.

“I thoroughly enjoyed my 15 years in full-time clinical dental practice but it slowly dawned on me that my dental restorations were so microscopic in the scheme of things, that all my hard work was only ever appreciated by one person at a time,” he says. “I’ve often admired and envied architects for this reason. They can build things from scratch and their creations often stand the test of time, sometimes for hundreds of years. I sometimes wonder how my life would have been different if I was an architect or developer.”

For now, he still owns and operates Smile Solutions, consulting with patients in the heritage-listed Manchester Unity building on the corner of Swanston and Collins Streets in the heart of Melbourne. He has been busily renovating his section of the stunning Art Deco skyscraper that was strata-titled in 1996. Pajouhesh bought the first level in 2003 and has been steadily acquiring and restoring other parts of the building since.

“I love the Art Deco period,” he says. “The clean and crisp shapes and the emphasis on form and function. It was an elegant and glamorous time where designers incorporated beautiful raw materials by way of timber veneers, bronze, copper and chrome. The period was a geometric sensation.”

The dentist has also upgraded common property in the building, including lift doors and interiors, roof waterproofing and electrical rewiring. “So I’ve almost reinvented myself as a quasi-architect,” he laughs. “The reason I can fit it all in is my clinical model – I refer so many of my cases to various

specialists within my practice. Over time, I’ve virtually delegated myself out of clinical dentistry altogether. I have also freed myself up to do other wonderful things with my time.”

Pajouhesh says that dilapidated heritage-listed properties tend to be greatly undervalued because of the intrinsic fear most people have of the complications they may face. “By the time I got into the Manchester Unity building, I was well versed in working with Heritage Victoria and the National Trust,” he says. “The true, core motivation for renovating a property should be the building first, and you, second.”

It’s certainly a hobby with the propensity for regular budget blow-outs. “Budget well but plan for a decent contingency,” he advises. “Schedule a finish date but don’t book the removalists. The more emotionally attached you are, the bigger the contingency required. If you’re a perfectionist or just want the best, carry your cheque book on you because you will need it.” ■

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