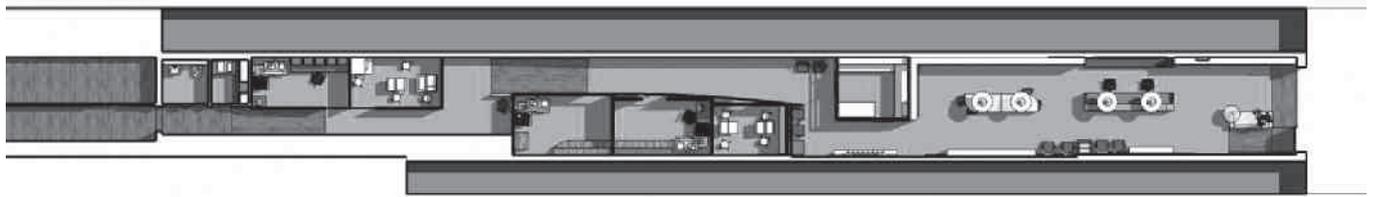


# practice

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## Creative flair

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above low, white two-pac cabinets. As an added feature, the frame displays are back-lit with LED lights which change throughout the day. 'The colours we used in the cabinetry are neutral, so we used the lighting to change the colours and mood,' McQuillan said.

The line of white wall display units is interspersed with timber slat walls and a timber display cabinet, which echoes the warmth of the floor treatment.

Half-way into the display zone is a striking, full-gloss orange reception desk, custom-made by a local joiner and illuminated by a large skylight directly above it. On the wall behind the desk hangs the practice's logo, also in vibrant orange and enlarged to create a dramatic centrepiece. A long, white dispensing cabinet featuring glass-topped, recessed display cavities stands adjacent to the reception desk.

### Consulting rooms

A large poster of a model wearing spectacles separates the reception area from the consulting rooms. The image draws the patient's gaze forward and signifies the pivot from the retail to the clinical area.

To access the consulting rooms, patients must walk past the dispensing laboratory, which is in the centre of the practice. Directly above the laboratory, a skylight runs the width of the building. 'The placement of the second skylight allows light to drop into the central point of the building and gives the laboratory all the light it needs,' McQuillan said.

Eyre Eye Centre has three consulting rooms, each equipped with sliding doors to maximise the allocated space. Two consulting rooms are on the lower ground level; the third and the OCT and visual fields room are up a small ramp. All three consulting rooms are identical in size and equipment. They are white and the joinery has a timber finish.

Elise Clem says that because of the limited

space available, the new design had to consider patient flow. 'When we have three optometrists working, we really do have to keep the patients moving. It's a very busy practice and the entire staff works together to separate the visiting patients so it never gets too crowded. This was something we mapped out when we were working with Damien; it has pretty much worked out to plan,' she said.

### Green wall

One of the most outstanding features of Eyre Eye Centre is its eight-metre long luminous green wall which is sectioned into three panels down the length of the left-hand wall at the rear end of the practice.

The wall has a slight curve and is back-lit by fluorescent lights. It faces a blank white wall. 'There is no more natural light from the skylight until we get to the last skylight at the back of the building,' McQuillan said. 'The green wall gives life to that back corridor.'

Elise and Phil Clem say they placed a lot of trust in McQuillan's design and are proud of the result. 'We employed him to do the job and we let him do his thing. That was a good move because, if I had done it, the whole design would have been more conservative,' Elise Clem said. 'Everybody knows about Eyre Eye Centre now, or the "orange practice" as we're called.' ■





challenge in renovating a converted laneway is keeping it from looking like a converted laneway. The original architect seemed to have no such qualms. One long corridor ran at a gradual incline from front to back along the right side of the building, making the practice look like the inside of an old-fashioned transcontinental railway carriage.

To counter the corridor effect, McQuillan split the building into three sections: a display and reception area in the front, consulting and speciality equipment rooms in the middle, and storage and administrative areas at the back. Three skylights, each measuring four metres by one metre, would be fitted at key points above each section to bring in more natural light.

The original laneway ran between a main street and an alleyway, with a 1.5 metre drop in level from the front to the back of the practice. 'This was something we had to accommodate,' McQuillan said. 'The entry to the consulting rooms had to take into account the mobility difficulties of elderly patients, so we decided to keep the two main consulting rooms and the pretesting room at the front, on the lower level, and the last consulting room was placed at the back at a higher level.'

To ease the gradient between the two

levels, the architect included two ramps, each with a gradual incline that would be easier to use than one long ramp.

Good design would make the practice better lit and more navigable, but to address the structural problems, the building had to be completely gutted and stripped down to the bare concrete of the laneway underneath. 'It was scary to watch,' Elise Clem admitted.

During the 12-week reconstruction, Eyre Eye Centre relocated nearby to rooms formerly used as a doctor's surgery.

## Reception

Eyre Eye Centre underwent a complete transformation. Gone were the drab blues and browns of the darkened corridor. The practice emerged bright and airy with a vibrant show of white and orange.

In the reception area, the cabinets and frame displays are aligned along both walls, which maximises the usable floor area and creates a greater sense of space. The frames are presented on opaque Perspex displays

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# Creative flair brings a difficult site to life

Transforming a 60-metre laneway into a bright and airy clinical and retail space brings its own special challenges, writes **Jeff Megahan**

Measuring four metres wide and 60 metres long, the building that houses the Eyre Eye Centre stands apart from the other shops along the main street of Port Lincoln, South Australia, for a number of reasons but mostly because it is on the site of an old laneway.

‘It’s typical of buildings in a country town,’ **Elise Clem** explained. She and her husband **Phil Clem**, both optometrists, have owned the practice since 1998. ‘All the buildings have their own unique characteristics because they all have a story,’ she said.

The building has housed a series of businesses dating back to the 1930s, when an enterprising businessman converted a small pedestrian laneway between two buildings into a retail space. Since the 1980s, an optometric practice has operated there.

The Clems purchased the building, realising that an optometric practice was probably one of the few businesses that could succeed with such a restrictive floor plan. ‘It would be a terrible restaurant,’ Elise Clem said.

The unique structure came with unique problems.

The only natural light came from the window at the front of the shop, which did little to illuminate a building 60 metres long. ‘Basically, it was dark,’ Elise Clem said. ‘The lighting in the reception area wasn’t very good and it was too dark in the frame display area and the walkways.’

The floor was damp and creaky, the roof leaked and there was not enough room to accommodate the specialised equipment that a 21st century practice requires. ‘We needed room for our OCT and a room for visual

field tests, and we needed to update the look of the practice—it got a bit tired and old,’ Elise Clem said.

Architect Damien McQuillan was commissioned to take on the challenging renovation. ‘It was in a very sorry state,’ he said. Prior to drawing up his plans, McQuillan spent several days getting a measure of what he calls the ‘as is’ status of the building. During this time, he observed how the practice worked and how it managed the patient flow.

‘What stood out for me was that Elise and Phil Clem conducted their business with an enormous amount of professionalism but were making do with the space they had,’ McQuillan said. ‘It was a tidy shop, it’s just that it had problems.’

As McQuillan would learn, the great

