

# Maggie's Centre, Sutton

When are those terracotta cladding panels coming from Italy, Ernesto? It was a question that the contractor who built the newest Maggie's cancer care centre asked the architect almost daily for months.

Like everything else on the £4m counselling and support centre, which has just opened in the grounds of the Royal Marsden Hospital in Sutton, south London, they were handmade by craftsmen whose priority was quality not speed.

It would be fair to say this caused some jitters in Sir Robert McAlpine's team. You're crazy to try and make the whole thing bespoke, was another refrain, recalls Ernesto Bartolini, the architect and director at Ab Rogers Design.

He chose the quarry because it was near his native Florence, because he had used it before and, not a small consideration, because

factory visits to inspect the red glazed panels would involve great food.

When the Italian terracotta finally turned up, it was with days rather than the planned months to spare. Yet it wasn't that which caused the 12-month build programme to slip to 16. It was the fact that Pilkington suddenly closed its UK factories, massively delaying the arrival of the glazing and thus the water-tightness of the building.

But four months is a blip when you consider the project – the practice's first completed building – was seven years on the drawing board while funding and planning issues were resolved.

The result is a small jewel box nestling in a landscaped garden on the edge of a sprawling hospital campus. The four glass-fronted volumes fan out from a central kitchen area, angled to catch the sun, and wrapped in that tenderly crafted terracotta, glazed in four shades of red.



Left: The terracotta on each part of the building is a different shade of red

Below left: The building consists of four interlinked boxes set in a garden created by Dutch landscape designer Piet Oudolf. Each volume is wrapped in glazed terracotta and angled to draw natural light through glazed elevations



Above and right: The building contains several rooms that can be used for counselling, activities or just resting. The rugs, paintings and other decorations have been created by artists



Above: The heart of the building is the kitchen where people with cancer and their families can gather in a domestic rather than a clinical setting. A red balustrade rises up the stairs and wraps round the mezzanine level



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## PROJECT TEAM

**Architecture and interior design** Ab Rogers Design  
**Landscape design** Piet Oudolf  
**Structural engineering** Milk Architecture & Design  
**Quantity surveyor** Gardiner & Theobald  
**Civil engineering** Wareham & Associates  
**Contractor** Sir Robert McAlpine Special Projects  
**Terracotta cladding** Palagio Engineering  
**Facade and curtain walling** Prism Architectural