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.

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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.

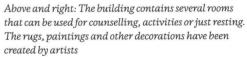
The result is a small jewel box nestling in a landscaped garden on the edge of a sprawling hospital campus. The four glass-fronted volumes fan out from a central kitchen area, angled to catch the sun, and wrapped in that tenderly crafted terracotta, glazed in four shades of red.

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

Below left: The building consists of four interlinked

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

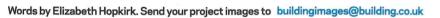








Above: The heart of tibuilding is the kitche where people with caand their families cagather in a domestic rather than a clinica setting. A red balustr rises up the stairs and wraps round the mezzanine level





PROJECTIEAN

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