

## Profile: Barbara Weiss

*Maternity facilities should be designed to make their users feel more at home, believes Barbara Weiss. Interview by Douglas Brown.*



**A**s a new entrant to the healthcare market, Barbara Weiss's fresh approach is apparent from her design for the new birthing unit at the Central Middlesex Hospital, north London.

Currently under construction, it will be the first new-build midwife-led facility in the UK. Off a central corridor are a series of delivery bedrooms on one side and administrative rooms on the other, all curled around a central garden piazza.

"It's a sophisticated but simple design," says Weiss. "The corridor is good for pregnant women to walk up and down and for the ease of organising the rooms just off it. It's on one storey so it doesn't involve lifts or pregnant women going up and down stairs."

The rooms for mothers-to-be and their

partners are spacious, light and comfortably furnished, with double beds, individual colour schemes and, in some, birthing pools. Women give birth in the bedrooms: "It's a big luxury to have one room – you don't have to be carted around."

Weiss has also designed the unit with plenty of storage space in mind: "I keep getting told, 'the thing we need most is storage'. It's important to keep the place free of clutter. I've over-designed storage as you can never have enough. I know that possibly since I have three children."

**W**eiss, who is originally from Italy, formed Barbara Weiss Associates (BWA) in 1987. Her work has, until recently, concentrated on the commercial and residential markets. She says: "I've

done a huge amount of residential work. Women architects are mostly seen as being good in the residential field. Anything to do with women and children, we'd have the edge over the rest. That's how maternity work came up."

Last year BWA began work at the Whittington Hospital, London. "We were going to do a new ante-natal ward but they couldn't raise the funds. Now we're doing a tidy-up of the labour ward. It's really run-down but there's not a huge amount of work we can do because they'll have to pull it down eventually."

BWA bid for a double contract to design units at the CMH and another north London hospital, Northwick Park, alongside YRM. Having won the bid, BWA took on the work at the CMH.



**Work in progress:** Central Middlesex Hospital's birthing unit, designed by Barbara Weiss

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