



Environmental Health & Design

By Heath Hudson



The architectural design of the Continuum Center for Health and Healing enhances the patients' physical, emotional and spiritual resources through responsive planning, selection of environmentally friendly materials, and the creation of a distinctive, non-traditional healing environment.

In 2001 The Continuum Center for Health and Healing received an architectural design award from the Boston Society of Architects. The Center was selected for its design and the choice and use of interesting materials. The materials were selected and integrated with a feng-shui sensibility that resulted in a

non-institutional atmosphere that captures the idea of a healing environment.

The ancient principles of feng shui were utilized in the initial planning of the Center. The well-known (architecturally trained) Feng Shui master Alex Stark worked closely with the architectural firm of Guenther Petrarca, a leader in green design and the use of eco-sensitive materials. This collaboration ensured that construction and design principles optimized the use of the spaces' potential.

The totality of the Center's interior reflects the principles of Feng Shui, an ancient Chinese art built on the belief that Qi — the vital life force pervasive

throughout the universe and existing in all living things — can be affected by our external environment. A positive arrangement of our environment promotes better health because Qi is allowed to flow freely. Likewise, any environment blocking the flow of Qi negatively impacts both our physical and mental health.

The Center based its interior layout on the "art of placement" specific to ancient Chinese beliefs to improve energy flow through the interior. The consultation, examination and therapy rooms have been placed north to promote patient healing and tranquility while staff areas located south will benefit from



harmonious internal communication. East placement provides the waiting room pleasure and connectivity while OB/GYN rooms situated to the west represent new beginnings. Rooms and areas placed south west and southeast as well as north west and northeast also symbolize and foster inner growth and outer potential.

Feng Shui also suggests that living beings should live harmoniously with each other as well as with elements in nature. Therefore, the elements used in decorating the interior space have been chosen to reflect this idea. Soft, functional lighting with soothing sounds play integral parts in the Center's organic composition. The auditory and visual input also work towards a calming effect on all

those who enter the Center.

The Center's overall space and internal structures have been constructed to be the antithesis of the mainstream waiting room: interactive and relaxing. Unlike traditional waiting rooms the Center's waiting area serves as a multi-functional space for patients to learn and interact with one another. A large meeting table for group-learning, a resource area, individual lounge seats, and web-ready computer stations are among the amenities available to patients to optimize their time before an appointment. In addition, the reception area is clearly separated from the patients' waiting area in a circular room that is easily accessible but out of direct view.

Natural and earth-friendly materials

that are also non-toxic have been used throughout the Center. Building elements, including paints, finishes, floor and wall materials, used in The Center's Design and Construction were carefully chosen with consistent attention to environmental responsibility. Furniture materials, upholstery, and other fabrics also further reflect the Center's commitment to environmentally conscious choices.

The Center's Design and Construction

The architecture team examined prevailing health care planning models with a view toward de-institutionalizing the experience of receiving care. Contrary to conventional planning models, for example, the waiting space is remote and not visible from the elevator lobby arriv-

al zone. It is reached only after travelling through a complex spatial sequence intended to relax and envelop the patient. The Reception function is not located in the Waiting Room, further enhancing patient privacy and reducing the “clinical supervision” aspect of the waiting experience. The Waiting area accommodates a wide range of activities: group education at a large conference table, individual lounge seats with computers providing Internet access to a wide range of health-related sites, and a patient library.

Conceptually, the team sought to define a “healing environment” that is recognizable and distinct from “residential”, “hospital” or “corporate” health care interior design. This distinction is manifested through careful consideration of scale, spatial and sensory experience and the rigorous selection of environmentally sound building materials and construction methodologies.

The selection of building materials and installation methods was made to optimize indoor air quality and environmental responsibility. Material selections (flooring, paint, adhesives, and cabinet substrates) eliminate use of formaldehyde and volatile organic compounds. Carpet is minimized; major flooring materials are cork and linoleum (natural, biodegradable products). Fabric selection focuses on the use of recycled and compostable materials. Materials were selected to be easily maintained with natural cleaning products in order to preserve a high level of indoor air quality.

It is the intent that the Continuum Center for Health and Healing serves as an educational model for the design of healing environments in the future, and informs an important and continuing dialogue about the relationship between man and the physical structures within which we live, learn and heal. ■

