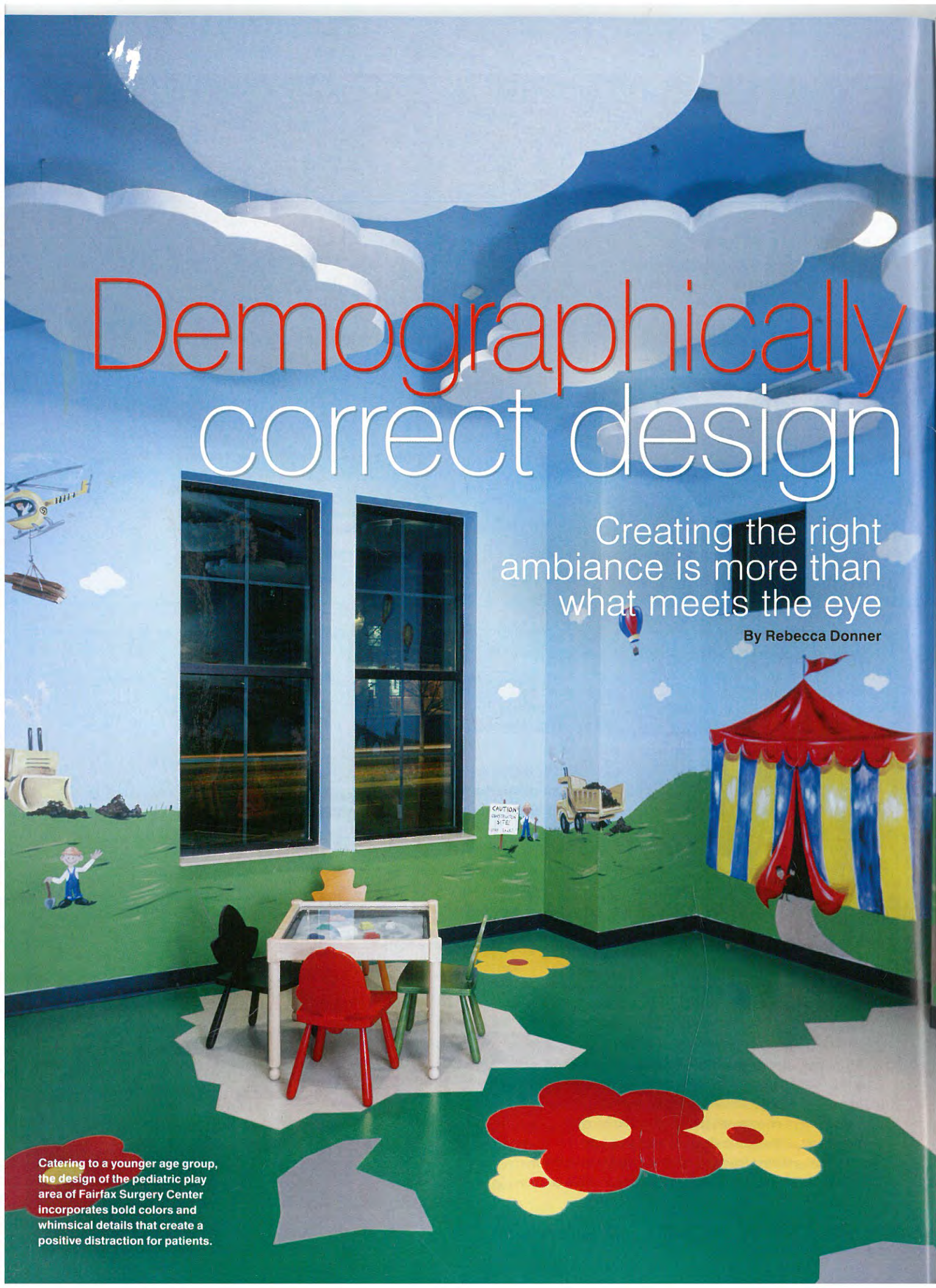


Demographically correct design

Creating the right
ambiance is more than
what meets the eye

By Rebecca Donner



Catering to a younger age group, the design of the pediatric play area of Fairfax Surgery Center incorporates bold colors and whimsical details that create a positive distraction for patients.

a well-executed design scheme will boost staff productivity, provide comfort to existing patients and attract new patients. It requires complete knowledge of the facility, local market and economy, client demographics and the business and clinical goals of the healthcare organization.

When developing an interior design scheme specific to a target audience, designers should first meet with facility administration to: 1) outline current needs of the facility, 2) analyze the competition, 3) highlight specific services a facility will provide and 4) specify a target audience through demographic evaluation.

Designing for a defined target audience does not exclude patients that don't fit within the criteria, but is merely a more effective way of focusing services. Overall, a specified design will be more functional and aesthetically pleasing to patients, ultimately providing more comfort and enhancing the healthcare experience.

Determining demographics

Interior design schemes are created to appeal to the "average patient" from the region served by the facility. To determine what the average patient looks like, design-

ers assess demographic characteristics, such as the geographic location of the facility, lifestyle, ethnicity and age of typical patients.

The geographic location of a facility determines the state healthcare codes and regulations that must be followed, and sets the standard for design elements and products that may be used. All states have different healthcare design codes designed to provide the utmost safety to patients and protect healthcare structures from area-

specific weather patterns.

For example, in the South, where temperatures and humidity are usually high, wall-coverings cannot be added to the interior of exterior-facing walls because of perspiration during hot weather, which can lead to mold growth between the walls. The most commonly used design material for these walls is a latex paint that allows walls to breathe.

In the Northern U.S., where ice and snow are common during winter months, designers tend to use slip-resistant

flooring, such as Pedimats or vestibule walk-off carpet, in lobby entryways to avoid falls from water and ice tracked in on snow-covered shoes.

Lifestyle distinction

To understand a facility's social setting and what design style is most appropriate, designers focus on the lifestyle, most often classified as rural or urban, of a typical patient.

For example, interior designs for Orthopedic and Spine Specialists, located in the farming community



Designers used neutral tones and installed a non-pattern vinyl flooring to keep the design of Connerton Long Term Acute Care Hospital comfortable for elderly patients.

of York, Pa., reflected and interpreted the community's natural resources through simple design elements. The consistent use of wheat grass — the area's main farm crop — was used throughout the facility as an accent on the reception and nurses' station desks and was sculpted into the cafeteria's wood paneling and metal railings. Simple, affordable design elements usually appeal to a countryside audience, and reference to the local farming crop ties the facility to the community.



Top: Appealing to a more urban population, designers created a sleek, state-of-the-art design that conveys Sarah Cannon Research Institute as an advanced cancer research facility.

Center: The clean, modern lines, multi-tonal woods and soft blue color palette at the nurses' station of Sarah Cannon Research Institute further the contemporary appeal to an urban audience.

Right: The cutting-edge lobby at the Sarah Cannon Research Institute features a soft blue color palette and walls covered with stacked maple and Russian birch core veneer plywood to create a warm, relaxing environment for an urban clientele.



Likewise, in order to reach a more urban audience at the Sarah Cannon Research Institute of Nashville, Tenn., one of the nation's largest oncology, cardiology and gastroenterology clinical research programs, designers used high-end furnishings and finishes to create a sleek, state-of-the-art environment. It offers patients a high level of comfort and confidence during extended stays. These design-forward elements reflect the more fast-paced nature of an urban environment and would likely look out of place in a rural setting.

Cultural design competence

Because we live in a diverse nation, a facility's interior designs should align with patients' varied perspectives, values and behaviors toward healthcare. Poorly designed healthcare facilities that do not meet the needs of diverse populations could alienate patients and disrupt the system of care.

At Del Sol Medical Center in El Paso, Texas, the average patient is Hispanic, and a common cultural practice within the Hispanic community is to invite all extended family members to wait at the hospital during any family member's medical procedure. To accommodate the cultural needs of community members, designers increased

the waiting room capacity to make it more comfortable for family members.

Age

The demand for healthcare interior designers is at an all-time high due to the need to accommodate the elderly population. Between now and the year 2050, the U.S. Census Bureau estimates the aging population will more than double, meaning that nearly one out of five U.S. adults will be over the age of 65.

To accommodate this population, designers should use specific color schemes and place furnishings in a way to aid movement and functionality of the elderly and disabled. Depth perception problems, such as glazed or blurred vision, among this age group can be exacerbated by bright colors and elaborate floor patterns. Elder design needs to incorporate warm and neutral color schemes. For this reason, the design of Connerton Long Term Acute Care Hospital in Land O' Lakes, Fla., where there is a large elderly population, avoided bright colors and busy floor patterns. The design scheme was kept neutral, which creates a calming environment.

On the opposite end of the age spectrum, pediatric design should be colorful and whimsical to provide positive distraction for young patients. In the play area of the pediatric

care waiting area at Fairfax Surgical Center in Fairfax, Va., designers used a bright green and blue color scheme, and transformed acoustical ceiling tiles into clouds to buffer noise.

Enhancing the healthcare experience

Designers consider the demographic needs of a facility by using different color schemes, textures, furniture, lighting, wallcoverings and finishes to meet the needs of its patients. Specifying who the patients

are helps designers select elements, materials and products that fit into a client's lifestyle and enhance the overall healthcare experience.

At the end of the day, an interior design catered to the right demographic should encourage pride and a sense of commitment from staff, patients and the community.

Rebecca Donner is the founder and principal of Inner Design Studio of Nashville, Tenn. The firm has designed interiors of more than 500 healthcare facilities throughout the nation.

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