

# Extending Hospitality

## *Consumer-Focused Healthcare Environments Go Beyond Hotel-Like Facilities*

by **T. Scott Rawlings**, AIA, ACHA, LEED AP

**F**rom concierge services to gourmet meals, hospitals are becoming more like hotels. The healthcare industry increasingly is employing successful hospitality industry strategies in order to attract a well-insured, empowered clientele. But it's not quite that simple, since a hospital stay is certainly not a vacation. How can we, as healthcare designers, transform lessons learned from hospitality design into appropriate applications for healthcare facilities?

### **What Does Hospitality Mean to Healthcare?**

In our current zeal to make hospitals more hotel-like, healthcare designers often make the

mistake of simply mimicking hospitality environments. While it's true that high-end hotels are beautiful and give us a feeling of comfort and relaxation, the factors that define the specific environment have been carefully researched and tailored to enhance a precise and desired effect.

What then does hospitality mean to healthcare? It's an important question to consider when your healthcare client asks for a hotel-like environment for a new facility. The designer should initiate a conceptual-level discussion to consider what the client feels provides comfort to patients and their families. Hospitality-style amenities are part of the answer but, under the circumstances of a hospital stay, much more is



DESIGNED WITH HOSPITALITY IN MIND, CENTENNIAL MEDICAL CENTER IN FRISCO, TEXAS, LOOKS MORE LIKE A TEXAS HILL COUNTRY LODGE THAN LIKE A TYPICAL HOSPITAL. PHOTO CREDIT: © 2005 GARY KNIGHT + ASSOCIATES



THE CONSUMER-FOCUSED INTERIORS AT CENTENNIAL MEDICAL CENTER ARE COMFORTABLE, ATTRACTIVE, AND TAILORED TO A SPECIFIC MARKET. PHOTO CREDIT: © 2005 GARY KNIGHT + ASSOCIATES

required. Informed consumers are more comfortable when they are secure in the knowledge that they will receive high-quality medical care in a technologically advanced facility.

### Hospitality for Different Populations

Since truly successful hospitality design centers on the emotional effect generated for the user, it must be understood that hospitals—unlike hotels—are dealing with a customer population whose emotional state varies greatly from one person to the next. Consider the fact that the same facility may accept the grieving family of a patient in the intensive care unit as well as the joyous family of a newborn baby. Today's hotel lobbies and waiting spaces are more appealing to everyone than the typically sterile environments of past hospitals. Soft waiting areas, natural materials, and fireplaces are now a given, and we as designers should be looking deeper to

improve the patient experience. In other words: How can the facility comfort the grieving family while enhancing the celebration of a new life?

### Hospitality for Different Markets

Just as boutique hotels understand the difference between clients in Los Angeles and those in Atlanta, healthcare systems must define what hospitality means to their target population.

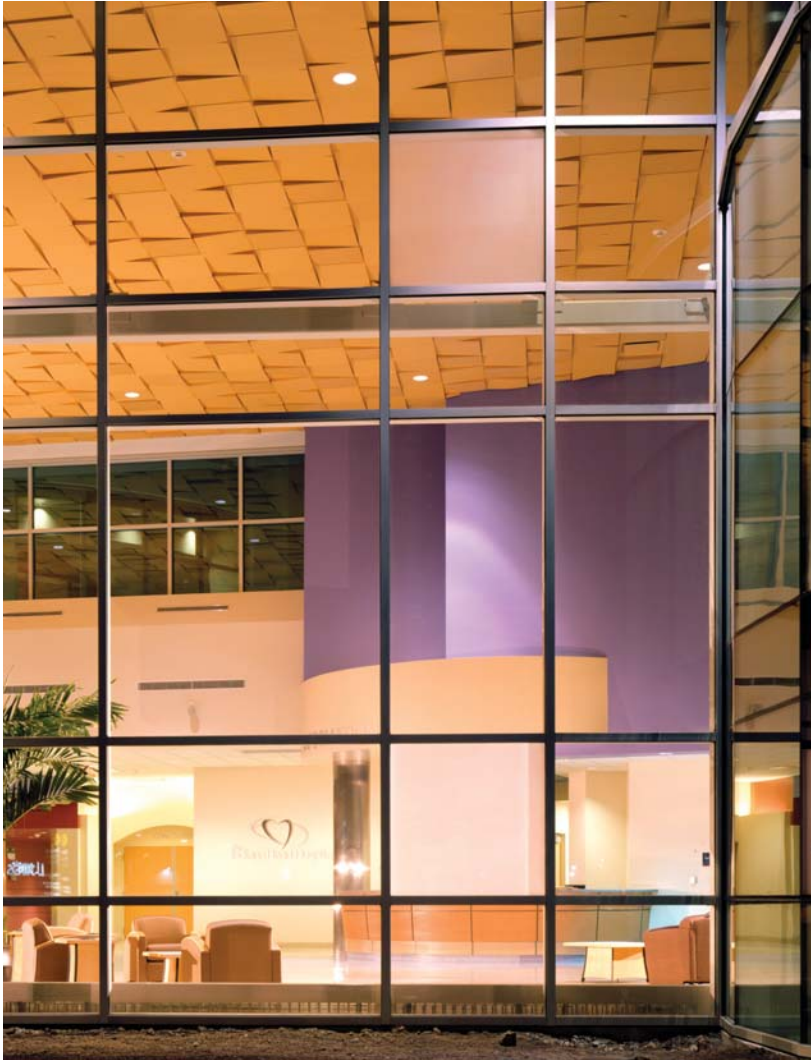
RTKL's design for Tenet HealthSystem's new hospital in Frisco, Texas, is a good example. Tenet wanted Centennial Medical Center to attract new-market consumers in the affluent community north of Dallas. Many upscale shops and restaurants in the area are designed to honor the Texas vernacular, and the new hospital does the same. It looks much like a hill country lodge. The art collection focuses clearly on local scenes and activities, and both the interior and exterior architecture is well considered. For Texans, this is the look and feel of hospitality.

### Technology as a Comfort Driver

Informed healthcare consumers understand that technology is a key component of high-level care. They want to know that their hospital has the best medical equipment and technology available. Hospitality for healthcare should present an environment of technological sophistication without feeling cold. What elements define this environment will depend on the population. Urban clients may feel comfortable with a sleek, shiny approach to technology, while community-based facilities will do well to stick with the local language and a strong tie to nature. In either case, technology must be presented but not forced.

### Wayfinding

Easy wayfinding is key to reducing stress when people arrive at a hospital. Whether there for a life-saving procedure, a routine cardiac exam, or the birth of a child, customers are under a significant amount of stress in a hospital. The comfort generated from knowing where they are, where they are



TRANSPARENCY AND COLOR MAKE WAYFINDING EASY AT THE INDIANA HEART HOSPITAL IN INDIANAPOLIS. PHOTO CREDIT: HEDRICK BLESSING

going, and how to move through the facility without getting lost cannot be underestimated.

The patient journey starts at the main entrance, which should be clearly marked and easily identifiable. Visual cues are a powerful tool. At Florida Hospital Waterman in Tavares, Fla. a yellow wedge wall identifies the main entry; a large red cone marks the emergency department entrance; and a green oval structure identifies the cancer center entrance. Destination landmarks make it easier to identify key points on the medical center campus. As the design moves inward, the same language can be carried throughout the facility to identify departments, information centers, and patient floors.

Transparency can also help people find their way. At the Indiana Heart Hospital in Indianapolis, a visit begins at the approach to the Promenade, where a glass wall allows visitors to perceive all functions before entering. From another significant destination, the Rotunda, visitors can see where they've been (the Promenade and public parking) as well as where they're going (the patient care unit). The ability to connect with natural light, exterior landmarks, and the space directly beyond are powerful facilitators in maintaining a sense of direction and personal bearing.

### Patient-Focused Rooms

Patient rooms are another area where hospitality amenities are being incorporated to make patients feel more comfortable. The most significant advancement in this regard is the trend toward private rooms—a much more acceptable situation to most people than sharing a room with a stranger. And, because research shows that

patients are less stressed and heal faster when family members are nearby, more and more patient rooms include rooming-in accommodations and hotel-like amenities for visiting family members. A new benchmark for family-friendly patient rooms is being set by the patient tower currently under construction at Community Hospital North in Indianapolis. Large family spaces in the Labor, Delivery, Recovery, and Postpartum (LDRP) rooms will include seating and sleeping accommodations, a TV and DVD player, a workspace with internet availability, a microwave, and a small refrigerator. Even the window is similar to those in hotel rooms—near wall-size, offering abundant natural light and views to the outside.



OUTDOOR DINING IS A HOSPITALITY-STYLE AMENITY AT FLORIDA HOSPITAL WATERMAN IN TAVARES, FLA. THE LARGE RED CONE IN THE BACKGROUND IS A WAYFINDING ICON THAT CLEARLY IDENTIFIES THE EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT ENTRANCE. PHOTO CREDIT: © 2005 GARY KNIGHT + ASSOCIATES

Hotel-like amenities are not enough, however. Patients are concerned about their medical condition and cannot be truly comfortable unless they have confidence they are being well cared for. To help engender this confidence, new patient-unit designs must provide for continuous sightlines between caregivers and patients. An argument is now raging over custom-designed patient-care environments. Although specialty or custom-shaped units can provide for a more powerful visual connection between caregiver and patient, they can sometimes lose a certain degree of efficiency or flexibility. There is no one right answer. The correct solution lies in the complete understanding of the patient type and

nursing model, among other matters, that allow the designer to satisfy the needs of this particular hospital.

### **On-Stage/Off-Stage Approach**

Separating materials traffic and spaces from public traffic is another way healthcare designers are emulating the hospitality industry and improving the patient/family experience. The concept, made famous by Disney, is a well-understood and commonly practiced approach. Separate staff entrances and corridors help keep noises, smells, and congestion away from guests. The challenges surface with the planning

of large medical centers with multiple patient types and consolidated support-service locations. Inevitably, paths will cross and staging areas will have to be located in or near relatively public locations. As long as the designers are sensitive to these areas, most educated consumers will understand the need to move supplies in a medical environment.

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### Interior-Design Options for Healthcare Are Improving

Handsome furnishings, subtle lighting, and sophisticated artwork, both in public spaces and patient rooms, help patients feel like valued guests. The growing trend toward hospitality in healthcare has affected a number of different provider industries, including the interiors furnishings and finishes sector. Companies are developing hospital-grade finish options that are more hotel-like and less sterile. Examples include sheet vinyl that looks like wood, crypton fabrics that have a rich tapestry appearance, and vinyl base that is molded and colored to look like wood base. Great improvements in porcelain tile,

plastic laminate, and solid surface materials now provide selections that look very much like natural stone or textural surfaces. Also, many acrylic products have the look of frosted or textured glass. These products are all helping blur the line between healthcare and hospitality. Designers must be vigilant though about considering durability, safety, and sustainability when specifying these new materials.

### Responding to a Growing Trend

The transformation in healthcare facilities from stark, sterile environments to luxurious surroundings is a trend that will likely escalate as providers continue to compete for educated and empowered consumers. Even now, those providers who do not offer a high level of comfort are at a competitive disadvantage. In healthcare, comfort means more than hotel-like amenities; it means surroundings that improve therapeutic outcomes and help assure patients they are receiving high-quality care.



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