

Health: ECO-FRIENDLY DESIGN: HEALING PATIENTS AND THE PLANET

Introducing the green hospital room

Recycled flooring, high-efficiency lighting and modular cabinets are among the features of this recovery space

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It's being touted as the first full-scale concept room of its kind, and one that its creators hope will offer those in the health-care field insight into how to inject a dose of green into a patient's space.

The Green Patient Room is the brainchild of U.S. architectural practice Anshen and Allen, which wanted to create a space that would have a minimum of impact on the natural environment while fulfilling the patient's need for a safe and comfortable sanctuary.

Incorporating eco-friendly materials into the design was the key to greening the 37-square-metre patient room, on display at the recent IIDEX/NeoCon Canada expo and conference in Toronto.

Several products contain recycled materials, including the porcelain flooring in the bathroom, the polyester chair and ottoman, and paper items. In addition, the room has energy-efficient LED lighting and faucets geared toward promoting water conservation.

Print Edition - Section Front



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The room even incorporates a zone for families, designed to encourage frequent and longer visits, including a sofa bed made of lumber from responsibly managed forests and without chlorofluorocarbons.

But lead designer Suzanne Drake of the San Francisco-based operation said the project wasn't solely focused on green finishes, but also on creating sustainable design.

She pointed to the addition of modular cabinets composed of standard units that are easily put together and rearranged. "There's nothing particularly green about the material itself, but the concept of the modular cabinet is what's green about it," Ms. Drake said after her presentation at the conference.

"You have the material efficiency at the factory, you have the cleaner installation, you don't have lots of scrap pieces that are being cut inside. When they renovate, (when) they move it around, they're not throwing it away and starting from scratch each time. ... It's flexible, so the lifetime of it is extended."

Ms. Drake said that while the room wasn't designed as a prototype, the architects wanted the space to be one individuals could use to visualize components they could apply to greening their health-care facilities.

"It's an idea room. We want to inspire people," she said.

"We get a lot of the hospital people, especially ones who are kind of experiencing green design for the first time or they're trying to learn about it. They don't know what it means, they don't know what it looks like because they don't have it at their facility. That's one of the nice things about it as an exhibit. They can walk in and go, 'Oh!' "

While she wouldn't offer a price tag on what the Green Patient Room would cost, Ms. Drake said the firm found that green materials are at most 2 to 3 per cent more expensive than their conventional counterparts, and that falls within the margin of error when doing construction estimation.

Milton Gardner, principal with Kasian Architecture Interior Design and Planning, has been focusing his efforts on the health-care arena for a number of years, and is the principal in charge of the Calgary South Health Campus, a health-care facility with a sustainability focus slated to open in 2011.

He said in the past few years, clients have become increasingly attuned to sustainability, but there is still a lack of knowledge and understanding of what that would mean in one's life.

Part of the fundamental philosophy of his current project is working toward making the building robust, he said.

"If you're assuming a structure is going to last for 100 years, then you need a structure that is sufficiently robust that it can deal with major renovations," Mr. Gardner said.

"If you can develop a mechanical system that will last 25 years, that is good ... you need a mechanical system that you can upgrade with minimal disruption to the operation of the hospital because that's what will help it be sustainable long-term."

Mr. Gardner said he hopes a Green Guide for Health Care that is in development will go beyond serving as a mere checklist for health-care facilities seeking to green their spaces, and act as a stimulus for more creative thinking.

"Ultimately, the goal should be to develop a building that gives back to the environment rather than takes from the environment, and that's a challenge."

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