

SOUTH DENVER

Cardiology Associates, P.C.



South Denver Heart Center

Creating a Healing Environment from the Heart



The curved line above traces the planetary movement of the zodiac, a symbol of the pilgrim's progress through the illnesses of the heart. Based on feng shui principles, the South Denver Heart Center is an allegorical interpretation that reflects the subtle energies and vital forces contained in its building.

The South Denver Heart Center is a 68,000 square foot outpatient cardiology facility, designed to provide patient care and to accommodate growth in the Denver metropolitan area. This center offers expert medical providers, "state of the art" equipment, and specialty services focusing on modifying the progression of heart disease, all with a strong emphasis on prevention and wellness.

The entire center was designed with wellness and the customer in mind. It's muted tones, strong use of stone and natural light, along with water and meditation gardens, confers a sense of peace and confidence to patients and their families.

From the double waterfalls that flank the east-facing entry-way to the meditative labyrinth located along the western wall of glass, every inch of this facility is designed to promote total health and wellness in mind, body and soul. In fact, the use of

Feng-Shui principles throughout the building's design has greatly enhanced the overall spirit of healing.

Beginning with the simple premise that clarity, orientation and inspiration are the primary characteristics of a healing environment, the central building corridor unifies and organizes the building departments. The glass ends of the corridor – the eastern end welcomes the morning sun, while the western end opens to a majestic view of the Rocky Mountains – flood the space with natural light, which offers the visitor inspiration as well as harmony and serenity.

The Eastern language of Feng Shui and the Western tradition of sacred architecture were used as a vocabulary to articulate, discuss and develop the ineffable qualities of clarity, orientation and inspiration, and to tune them to support the healing of the heart.

This premise can be seen in the central building corridor, the prima-





ry public zone of the building. This corridor, a striking three story arc, extends east-west the length of the building branching out on two levels to the north and south into the major functional zones of the building. The corridor is a clearly defined path with a distinct identity, with a clear sense of directionality and continuity.

This corridor unifies and organizes the building departments, clarifying them into a single spatial and functional sequence. The glass ends of the corridor and a continuous clerestory flood the space with natural light. The western end of the corridor opens to a majestic view of the Rocky Mountains with woods and a lake. The eastern end welcomes in the morning sun. The intrinsic qualities of day light and view of the corridor are inspiring.

Application of Feng Shui Tools

Many people are overwhelmed by their illness and by the medical profession; in fact, they typically get lost in hospitals. Thomas Barries, an architectural theorist, explains: “disorientation, the feeling of being lost, is for the most part, extremely disturbing to humans;” it detracts significantly from their sense of well being. Creating a space that was conscious of the need for clarity and

orientation was paramount.

From the Feng Shui perspective, the concern was two fold: first, this beautiful corridor space divided the building at its mid-line: Feng Shui associates this type of division with diseases of the thoracic cavity organs.

A second concern was the speed this generated. The corridor’s continuous three story height and open glass ends formed a funnel, whisking vital chi in through the building and out the rear at an alarming rate. The corridor, while being a very good generator of yang chi, offered little yin chi; it offered no point of arrival, no place of comfort for an ill visitor or a toiling practitioner.

A first objective was to heal the mid-line division; the architects opened the corridor into the side spaces. These spatial connections diffuse the sharp edges of the yang channel.

To slow down the energy along the corridor, a sequence of events was orchestrated: it begins with two water features at the entry. Just beyond the entry, the corridor opens out into garden area with a red sandstone wall and a low cozy living room with a hearth. At its center, the corridor opens up into a circular seating area with a series of orange trees. At the western end, the corridor widens to provide a sec-

ond hearth area. The corridor concludes with a labyrinth in the garden just on the other side of the rear glass facade. These spatial extensions with their distinct characters slow the speed of the corridor, providing space for the flow of chi to pool as it flows down the corridor. The zones together form a sequence of experiences which set a strong primary axis for the Feng Shui Bagua of the healing environment. The Feng Shui Bagua, a design tool that divides the space into nine sectors, provides guidance on how to develop this sequence with the intent of nurturing the heart. Feng Shui also provides tools to consider the activation of all five of the sense; it invites us back into the realm of a healthy vital. The goal is the positive engagement of many senses activities.

The Waterfall

According to traditional Black Sect Feng Shui, the sequence of a building starts with a water feature located at the mouth of chi, the front door. Locating a water element at the entry of a building corresponds with the designation of the entry as the mouth of chi, and it activates the flow of chi.

The water feature chosen for the entry of this cardiac center is a pair of waterfalls which frame the entry vesti-





bule. These water features are intended to invoke the image of vital flow. An air lock functions as a compressive valve moderating the intake and preventing back flow. The intention is to activate the flow of the primary building space. A still body of water would not be appropriate Feng Shui for a cardiac unit.

The goal is to engage all the senses of the visitor from the first moment they enter the building. Sight is engaged, through the glass of the air lock; pains were taken to maximize the transparency of the air lock. To engage Sound, the waterfalls were placed within the main space of the corridor so the sound would fill the three story atrium. The waterfalls were placed in an acoustical chamber, a slot between the exterior glass wall and the glass of the air lock. The acoustical chamber will assist in carrying the sound of the water further upward into the space and thus further down the corridor. To engage Touch, the waterfalls extend beyond the walls of the air lock into the main entry corridor; a bench rather than a railing divides the water from the main space. A visitor is welcome to sit down next to the water

and offered an opportunity to bathe their hands directly into the water. To engage Scent, the water vapor is ambient in the corridor; the water falls will create a micro climate; a moment of warm moist air as the visitor enters; a rare treat in contrast to the arid Colorado climate.

This water feature is also intended to evoke a secondary level of meaning: the crossing of a river; a multi-cultural archetypal image of renewal and cleansing; in many traditions, evil can not pass over a river. The water is intended as a mechanism of protection as well as cleansing.

The Hearths

Deliberate care was taken not to create a single hearth in the center of the building. The designers included a pair of hearths on either side of the center. One hearth is located at the western end of the corridor and the other near the entry per the request of the doctors of South Denver Cardiology Center. The two hearths frame the sequence of the progression down the corridor. The two fireplaces provide balance to the focus of the central space and create a variety and

offer a choice for the visitor and doctors of where to come together.

The doctors specifically requested a hearth located near the entry of the building in a cozy living room space. The doctor's desire was to be able to seat their patients down by the warm hearth while waiting to go into the conference area. In previous centuries, hearths were the place where the family gathered and a source of comfort: warmth, food, protection and companionship. Doctors envisioned an image of a strong healthy hearth as a symbol of a strong healthy heart: the act of seating one's patient by the hearth is envisioned as a gesture to warm the soul. They were careful to recommend that the fireplaces be filled with a red and yellow floral arrangement in the summer time. An empty fireplace has connotations they did not want to bring into the space.

From a Black Sect Feng Shui perspective, the placement of this hearth created a challenge, as it is essentially a fire element in the realm of water, the entry of the building. The conflict is interesting because according to Chinese medicine, one of the tenants of heart disease is





the imbalance of the fire and water elements. It is not surprising that a disruptive mix of fire and water elements could arise in the design of the building. To separate the fire and water element the designers integrated the water element with the air lock and moved the hearth to the east wall of the living room space. The hearth on the east wall is therefore not seen when one moves through the water element into the space. The hearth placed on the eastern wall becomes part of a symbolic altar; the energy of the fire element it raised to connect with the spiritual tradition of the communal hearth.

The second hearth is located toward the rear of the structure, in the traditional Feng Shui realm of Fire. Thus, it will support and activate the reputation of the center, as the realm of Fire is also the realm of Fame. Designers were careful not to place this hearth at the end of the corridor on the western glass wall. The intent was to punctuate the corridor, but not terminate it. The western end of the corridor is left open to facilitate the flow of chi through the corridor and maintain an openness to the view of the mountains beyond.

The Center

In the center of the corridor, (the realm of earth, the place of the tai chi) the designers opened up a circular living room. This central space allows the chi generated by the corridor to gather, to pool and expand upward in the center of the building. This space is intended as a central garden waiting area, a gentle pause in the sequence through the building. This space is the metaphorical heart of the structure. Its colors are those used in the inner precincts of Chinese temples. The primary plants used here are orange trees, a symbol of prosperity and renewal.

Planetary forms and the transit of the zodiac are inscribed in the patterns of the ceiling and floor. The black granite stripe in the corridor floor marks their path as the move along the arc of the sky east-west. The continuous clerestory running east west allows the sun to shine into the space as it moves along its path during the course of the day. The sunrise is featured in the eastern end of the building at the entry and sunset at the western end of the building. This allegorical allusion to the movement of time is a subtle reminder of the vitality of life.

The Labyrinth

In many cases, the healing of a broken or diseased heart will be the most profound spiritual journey that the modern medical pilgrim will take in their life. To symbolize this, a labyrinth has been placed at the western end of the central corridor in the garden visible through the rear glass facade. According to Black sect Feng Shui this is the realm of Fire and Spirit. In traditional sacred manner, an ambulatory is used at the end of the axis to turn (and return) the chi of the building back around to greet those coming in.

The creation of a labyrinth within this complex anchors the intention of the essential spiritual sanctity of the heart and reminds all who pass through or work within it of the central place the heart plays in connecting each person with their spirit source. The labyrinth is a metaphor for the spiritual journey that each patient as pilgrim takes towards this spiritual divinity in today's modern technological culture within the practice of medicine. This feature within the building serves to remind all who pass through this building on the journey of healing of the heart has a most profound spiritual component. ■

