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HEALTHCARE DESIGN

SHOWCASES

A Pediatric Pavilion A Birthing Place

Plus...
After the Universal Room, What's Next?
Meet the Mid-Patient

MEDQUEST COMMUNICATIONS IN CONJUNCTION WITH


THE CENTER FOR
HEALTH DESIGN

Views of a prairie garden



BASED ON AN INTERVIEW WITH **HENRY DOMKE, MD**

When I was in high school, I enrolled in an art school but, at the last minute decided I wanted to go into medicine instead. Today, as a family practice physician and fine artist, I've been lucky enough to combine both of my life's passions into two careers. I like to say I divide my time two-thirds to medicine and two-thirds to art.

I've always had an interest in art but didn't have time during my medical training to do much about it. In the 1980s, however, I saw a demonstration of Adobe Photoshop and began creating digital art on my Macintosh. I was getting a little frustrated with the computer techie stuff, though, and decided to pursue more formal training in the fundamentals of art. I worked with Annette Weintraub, art professor at the City College of New York, through a distance-learning independent study program, and with William Hawk, a painting professor at the University of Missouri-Columbia. He convinced me to enter a graduate art program at the university, which meant declining to take new patients in my practice and reducing my office hours. Although I painted a lot, I eventually went back to digital imaging, using a Canon 1Ds Mark II, a single lens reflex camera with lenses ranging from 16 to 600 mm. And I had the perfect subject for it—literally in my own backyard.

Back in 1970—the year of the first Earth Day and growing interest in environmentalism—my parents bought a beat-up old 180-acre farm near Jefferson City, Missouri. My father had taken a strong interest in the destruction

of the North American prairie that was going on all around him and wondered if he could create a patch of prairie that would be enlivened by swamps, glades, savannas, and all kinds of woodland flowers that you don't normally see on a prairie. He spent decades plowing, bulldozing, burning off grasses, and trying to attract unusual bird species to a living prairie habitat. It worked: Last year, for example, a visiting ornithologist heard six Henslow's sparrows—a rare species—singing on our prairie. More to the point, the Prairie Garden Trust, as it's called, gave me the subject for my photography.

I had done a lot of digital printing, spending hours to get each print just right in framing and color, using an Epson 9600 printer and a fine-art mat paper combined with pigmented ink called archival ink. A healthcare designer named Carrie Heckstetter saw a print hanging in my sister's office four years ago and contacted me. I sent her a portfolio, and the interest in my work took off from there.

The prints I create are blown up quite large—2' x 3', 4' x 6', 4' x 9'—and occupy waiting rooms, offices, and corridors in hospitals such as the Cancer Center at Blessing Hospital in Quincy, Illinois; the Northwest HealthCare Center in St. Louis; and the St. Louis Women's Surgery Center. These are fine prints of archival quality that won't fade, and now I offer large, archival canvas prints.

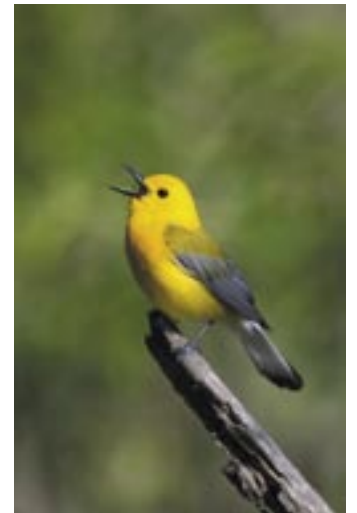
Going to a healthcare facility can be a frightening and disorienting experience for many patients. My goal is to provide a visual escape to the natural world,



where people can find comfort and healing.

Now that my digital imaging is starting to gain attention, my patients are concerned that I might retire from medical practice. But I love medicine. I have patients and generations of patients' families I've taken care of for 20 years, and this is of real value to me.

I've heard that these images tend to make people stop and look and sometimes show a real response. I've seen it firsthand. I've had patients look at an image of a prairie creek hanging on my wall and ask, "Were you at my grandfather's farm when you took that? That looks just like it and brings back a lot of childhood memories." I like to hear that. **HD**



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