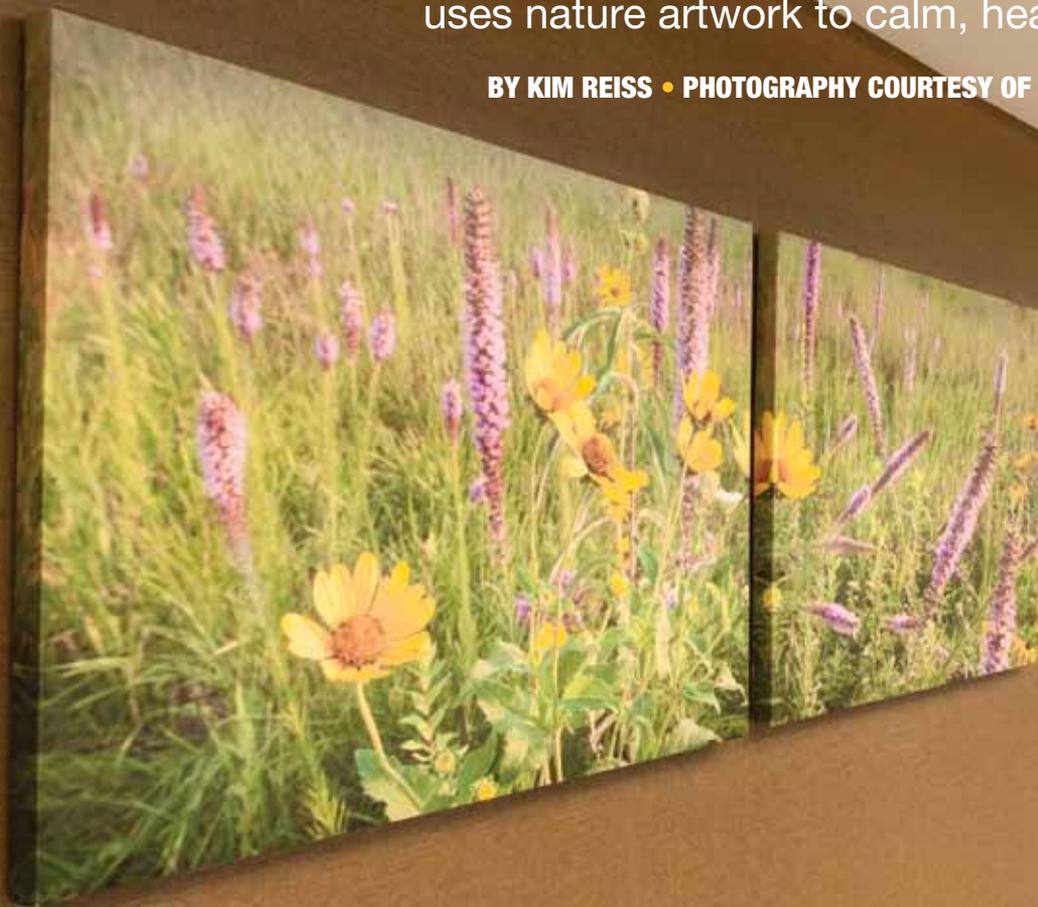


HEALTHCARE DESIGN

Part medical building, **part art gallery**

The new University of Kansas Physicians Medical Office Building uses nature artwork to calm, heal, and engage

BY KIM REISS • PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF HENRY DOMKE FINE ART





It's 8 a.m. on a bright Monday morning in Kansas City, Kansas, and people are starting to arrive at the University of Kansas Physicians Medical Office Building for appointments. From the man who is seeing his orthopedic surgeon about a knee replacement to the woman who just found out she is pregnant—with twins—all patients at this new facility have one thing in common: They're at a very unique medical center that places as much importance on the building's artwork as it does on the doctors' offices.

"The University of Kansas Hospital is fantastic when it comes to art," says Ed Tranin, of Tranin Design Associates Inc. of Leawood, Kansas. "They understand the benefits of art and start every project with an art budget. Other organizations I've worked with form an art budget with whatever money is left at the end."

Tranin worked with Cannon Design as interior architecture and art consultant on the \$85 million medical office building that opened in July 2011. The 214,000-square-foot project required Tranin to select 300 pieces of original artwork for the six-story facility, so he turned to artist and colleague Henry Domke for nature images.

Domke also brings the added perspective of a retired family physician. "I've

spent a lot of time in hospitals, so I know the effect that out-of-date interiors and faded poster art can have on patients, families, and even the staff," he says. "I admit, when I built my practice building, I was unusual as a doctor in wanting appealing art images on the walls. But evidence-based design has since shown the value of nature imagery in a medical setting, so it's very gratifying to see that others are finally giving art budgets the respect they deserve. And, most important, it's great to see patients getting the kind of healing





the exterior gleaming horizontal bands of metal and glass. “I wanted to take advantage of the horizontal lines in the interior to reinforce the horizontal lines on the exterior,” Tranin says.

This was especially important because all the patient waiting areas are on the outer edge of the building, near the windows. “There is so much glass that we even had to take into consideration how the artwork would look from the outside, especially at night, with all those windows lit up,” Tranin says.

His solution was to use multiple large canvas prints of a single subject matter, but to vary the perspective on each image, from extreme close-ups to natural landscapes. “I’d place six to eight images in a row and change it up a little by playing with scale. For example, having an image of rows of a cornfield and next to it a picture of a giant ear of corn. I think mixing faraway views and close-ups is unexpected and makes it interesting.”

The importance of the nature-health connection

Because Tranin specializes in specifying artwork for healthcare facilities, he pays close attention to the latest research that proves there’s a link between nature—or pictures of nature—and healthier, happier patients.

“Studies show that looking at nature has calming, healing properties, and you can enhance that by having a nature image with a

environments they need.”

Domke gives full credit to Tranin for making the medical office building (MOB) vision a reality. “Ed was as much of an artist on this as I was,” Domke says. “He did a lot of work up front with my images before even contacting me. He had all the images cropped to scale, and he spent countless hours poring over pictures on my website, thinking about color, shape, and emotional possibilities.”

The challenge: meshing nature with steel and glass

Teresa Neely, chief operations officer at University of Kansas Physicians, worked closely with the designers and Tranin to oversee the selection of furniture, interior fixtures—and artwork. “It’s a very contemporary building, with lots of glass and metal,” Neely says. “On the inside, we wanted it to be as environmentally friendly as possible with a lot of nature images.” In fact, the building received LEED Silver certification.

One way Tranin harmonized the placement of artwork was to echo



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horizon line,” Tranin says. “The horizon allows you to place yourself in that image and escape—leave the stress you’re feeling and transport yourself into the art. And what better place to find that kind of transformative power than in a medical building?”

Tranin went a step further and developed a theme of nature images for each floor. “I like to use art to reinforce wayfinding. So we had a different theme for each floor. I looked at all of the work on the Henry Domke Fine Art website and came up with a palette to use, involving different landscapes, colors, and subject matter on each floor.

“For example, the first floor features autumn woods and lots of rich fall colors—yellow and red tones—through images of leaves and trees. On another floor, the color palette was very neutral, with browns and golds. We went more masculine on that floor, with images of plowed fields and rows of crops but featured lots of botanical and floral images on the OB/GYN floor.”

The university also gets bonus points for creating gallery space at every elevator lobby. The hospital acquired pieces from local artists, and each floor showcases their work. “It also acts as a wayfinding tool,” Tranin says. “It hits you at different levels. Art can help you get to where you’re going, or you can stop and study it in-depth if your doctor isn’t ready to see you yet.”

The stress-free life of an art consultant

To be a really successful art consultant, it helps if you can look into the future. “We had to deal with TV sets in the middle of a solid wall. That’s where my art goes!” Tranin says. Although in that instance, a compromise was reached when the medical center agreed to have the TVs run pictures of nature when not in use.

But what about thermostats? And fire alarm strobes? “You almost have to stake your turf on the walls so you don’t run into things like that on a perfectly clean, solid wall,” Tranin says. “Almost before the drywall goes up—look for obstacles and see if you can work around them early. We were lucky on this project, because out of 300 pieces of art, we only ran into two or three places where there was something in the way.”

However, the amount of art alone presented its own unique obstacle. “I’m not going to lie—a major challenge of this project was simply organizing the art and not losing track of individual pieces. And there was more than one midnight call to Henry because we realized at the last minute that a picture wasn’t lining up like planned. But Henry worked with me every step of the way to make it as smooth as possible.”

You know it pays off when ...

Teresa Neely, the client, hears good things in the hallway of the MOB. “We’ve had wonderful feedback from physicians, staff, and patients. I think the art transcends all ages—nature is something that everyone can relate to,” she says.

“On the second floor, we have artwork of rolling farmland with hay bales and cattle, and we’ve had people say, ‘That’s just like looking out at my backyard,’ or, ‘That reminds me of a trip to the foothills.’ On the first floor, we have artwork with vibrant fall colors, and people have said it reminds them of a scene from their childhood,” she says. **HCD**

For more information on the University of Kansas Hospital, please visit www.kumed.com. More information on Henry Domke Fine Art is available at www.henrydomke.com.



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