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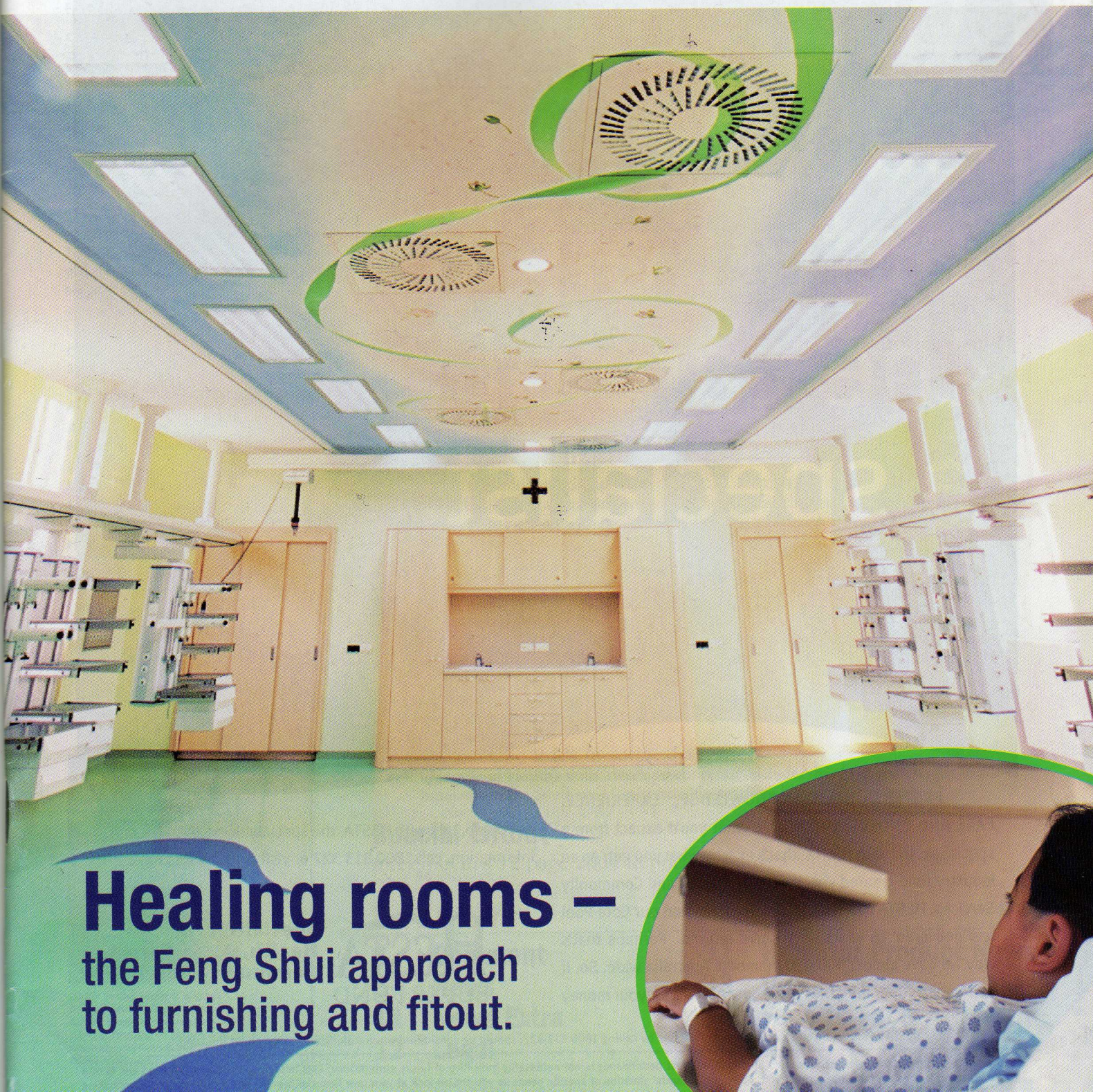
Hospital & healthcare

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Healing rooms – the Feng Shui approach to furnishing and fitout.

Rooms for healing: the interior environment

Hospitals are places where we expect staff to do everything they can to assist the healing of the patient. but how often do we consider the contribution of the environment - walls, ceilings, windows. furnishings? Sue Cartledge reports

THE CONCEPT of interior decoration contributing positively to a patient's healing and wellbeing is discussed in a thought-provoking book from Austria. *Feng Shui im Krankenhaus: Architektur und Heilung*, bears the English subtitle, *Healing Rooms in Hospitals*. Written by Claudia Schumm, the book is in both German and English, with magnificent photographs by Thomas Schauer. It is published by Springer Wien New York.

The theme is the application of the traditional Chinese philosophy of feng shui to hospital design "in places of concentrated anxiety." In her introduction, Schumm says, "I found it logical to apply feng shui in areas where it was needed most, in hospitals. Nowhere is healing needed more, and nowhere are people more open to

change than when they find themselves in crisis situations. In these situations, it is of decisive importance what kind of effect outside influences have on them.

"If their environment exudes negativity it compounds their fears and aggravates their situation. if their environment is caring, inspires trust and relaxation, the effect will be a calming one.

"Positive feedback from patients and staff have confirmed the therapeutic effect of this new environment on the patients, and even the healing process itself."

Schumm is an architect, and the book begins with an essay on architecture and healing, and the role of feng shui. She says she has always been aware of the principles of feng shui and practiced them in her life and work, without giving them the name.

"Feng shui was developed by observing nature. As rooms and spaces form their own energy fields, feng shui is nothing other than bringing nature inside so that it can continue to have a positive impact."

She outlines the philosophy of feng shui, stressing that it is based on physical laws of matter and energy, not on superstition and faith. "I was extremely sceptical when I read that I should hang this or the other knickknack in the corner to if I wished to be rich and successful, and so I began my search to find out what exactly it was supposed to mean."

After a discussion of the importance of balancing yin and yang - the rational thought represented by yang with the 'irrational' soul, or yin, also known as the masculine and feminine aspects, Schumm

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The ceiling in the recovery room of the Lainz cardiac ICU: the green ribbon on the hazy blue sky provides patients with a meditative focal point that calms and delights them.

declares "feng shui is not about focusing on profits and designing buildings to fit as many people into as few square metres as possible, but rather focusing on interior atmospheres and the quality of life."

Hospitals have invested in high-tech equipment, tools for facilitating the healing of injured or ill people, but "the awareness that something is missing is beginning to rise," she says. Feng shui is the application of the understanding that "we are inseparably linked to our environment."

She lists the beneficial effects of water, sounds, colours, and what she terms 'the sacred geometry' of the spiral, as seen in DNA and snow crystals. Regarding colour, she says, "many rooms and spaces are decorated in grey, white or black, in other words, non-colours. Rooms and spaces such as these quickly cause fatigue, our personal energy field quickly collapses, and our charisma suffers."

"Colours have their greatest impact when many are used together at the same time, not just in pairs, but also as slightly nuanced interflowing shades. Colours are a joy to the soul!"

The book is divided into several sections looking at different hospitals and specialist



The 'Mamma Vital' mammography room: dolphins on the floor represent spiritual consciousness, communication and zest for life, easing anxiety and promoting trust.

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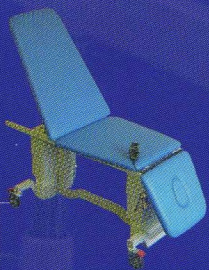
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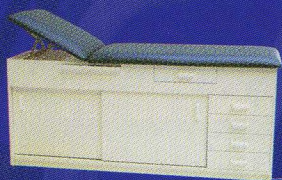
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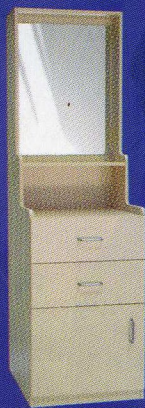
Setting the benchmark.



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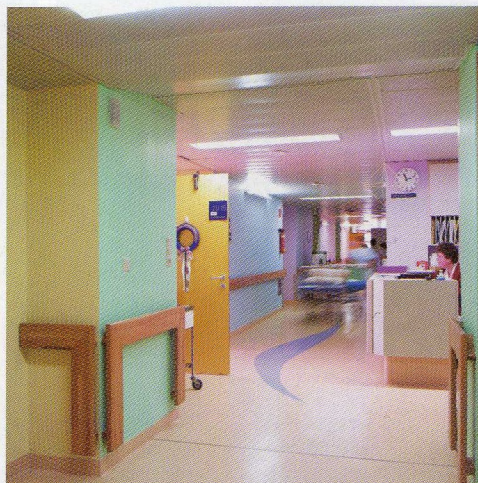


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"I was asked to come up with a series of colours to offset the plain white corridors of a newly completed addition (to Mistelbach Hospital). I chose eight basic colours for different walls."



To avoid pairing contrasting and complementary colours, I opted for colours flowing in harmonious interplay which helped achieve momentum, vitality, variety and a rainbow of colours.

units that have implemented feng shui in their refurbishment. In each section, the architect outlines what her brief was, and then the head of department describes how the changes have affected patients and staff. In the first section, 'The experiment in the Urology Unit in Lainz', Austrian sociologist, Professor Ernst Gehmacher describes "a model for studying the systemic and holistic impact of the hospital setting on patients and staff," probably the first study in Austria to analyse the effects of feng shui design on hospital patients. "This scientific observation is both a diagnosis and therapy."

"The feng shui design of the urology unit is in considerable contrast to traditional hospital interiors, featuring bright colours, ornamental patterns, plant life, an aromatherapy lamp and calming background music in the social areas, helping to lift the mood of those who choose to open themselves to these influences," he says.

The urology unit gives patients round the clock access to hospital staff thanks to an open nurses station, a social coffee-house atmosphere in a 'bistro' sitting area, and more opportunities to interact with family and friends during longer visiting hours. "All in all, the new design provides maximum social support and warmth - or at least a favourable environment promoting these characteristics."

Gehmacher says while it is not possible to estimate exactly to what extent the unit's feng shui design contributes to

patient's successful recovery, it was possible to estimate the impact of the unit's particular characteristics by comparing the two-thirds of patients who took advantage of the social opportunities and consciously enjoyed the feng shui setting, to the minority of patients who reported feeling no positive effects. Eleven per cent of the patients regained a feeling of good health and 28 per cent regained a feeling of complete well-being within three days. "The hospital atmosphere, both social and aesthetic, has a direct and indirect effect on the recovery process by increasing patient well-being and reducing patient fear."

Head of the Lainz Urology Unit, Professor Dr Heinz Pfluger, says patients who enter hospitals for tests or procedures, naturally bring



The urology unit, Lainz: mandalas on the flooring serve to break up the long corridor and slow down the unfavourable and rapid flow of energy.

PVC flooring is environmentally OK

PVC FLOORING has become almost the generic choice for healthcare facilities, but, as J.K. Ruthven, Polyflor Technical Services Manager says, there is environmental concern about its use.

"What has clearly emerged over the last 10 years is that there is a far more astute and informed client base who are now demanding that manufacturers' 'marketing speak' about their products be translated into proven in situ performance across a range of performance measures."

These requirements can be defined as:

- Fit for the purpose.
- Whole of life cycle cost effective.
- Value for money.
- Environmental impact.

Polyurethane reinforced homogeneous PVC sheet vinyl flooring has near-generic status in Australian healthcare facilities due to its proven durability/extended life qualities and consistent low operational whole of life cycle costs. Developments in heterogeneous sheet vinyl products have resulted in enhanced slip resistant qualities, and a broad range of smooth options with stunning natural visuals delivering a more homely ambience in appropriate areas. The proven performance success of these PVC-based products has seen alternative resilient floorcoverings such as linoleum and rubber relegated to periphery players. New product development initiatives such as polyolefins (chlorine-free) polymer flooring have failed to gain acceptance by the healthcare industry due to their current inferior technical performance characteristics when compared to standard PVC.

"Over five years ago Polyflor recognised

that environmental sustainability globally was the single biggest challenge to face the company as a manufacturer over the next 10-15 years," Ruthven says. "The vision was to meet the challenge by developing an environmentally sustainable business whilst becoming as carbon neutral as possible."

Polyflor achieved ISO 14001 Environmental Accreditation in 2000, confirming that Polyflor has an ongoing program of continual improvement across all the manufacturing processes through energy and waste reduction, and raw material selection processes that both reduce and control pollution.

As a chlorine-based material, PVC was targeted by Greenpeace in Australia in the early 1990s as an undesirable material environmentally. This saw the proposal that chlorine-based products such as PVC be minimised and ideally avoided. There is now ample scientific and LCA-documented evidence which clearly shows that this discrimination against PVC when compared with its alternatives, can no longer be substantiated scientifically.


Despite PVC-based vinyl floorings' impressive healthcare track record in Australia over many years, discrimination against PVC is still actively promoted on environmental grounds in some quarters. To counter this, Polyflor has developed an 'Environmental Credentials' presentation designed to give a balanced view based on science based facts rather than subjective "marketing speak", which will allow architects and end user client groups to substantiate environmentally their support for PVC based flooring products in their healthcare facilities.

their fears with them. "It was the objective of the urology unit's working group to turn around the generally negative image our field of medicine unfortunately has, being associated with old ages, disease, loss of self-esteem, loss of sexuality, etc, by adding architectural improvements that that communicate well-being, familiarity and comfort.

"Modern hospital architecture...should not emphasise medical technology to the exclusion of everything else, but rather should incorporate shapes, colours and lighting design elements in patient areas more reminiscent of their bedroom or living room or even a hotel room."

Other specialist hospital units to implement feng shui principles in their refurbishments include the Lainz Cardiac intensive care unit; Mistelbach hospital; the Innsbruck University nuclear medicine clinic; the breast examination (mammography room) 'Mamma Vital' at Vienna's Donauespital. There are also ideas for a birthing centre and designs for seniors housing.

As well as the many beautiful photographs, there is a section at the back of book focusing on the artists who created works for these facilities, with more striking illustrations, and discussions on the use of wind chimes and aromatherapy to contribute to a positive energy and a healing atmosphere. A small CD in the back cover provides four tracks of ambient music.

This is a fascinating book; it was not possible to do it justice in this article. 

Claudia Schumm, Feng Shui im Krankenhaus: Architektur und Heilung Raume fur die Seele / Healing Rooms in Hospitals, Mit einer wissenschaftlichen Studie von Ernst Gehmacher,

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