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Finding a place for sex offenders

PLUS

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explains the
Planetree
model



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analyzes
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drug trends



The aesthetics of healing

The Orchid used the Planetree model to create a substance abuse treatment center for women

BY JULIE QUELER

Women have gender-specific treatment responses that can be successfully enhanced by the environment, both physical and social. At the Orchid Recovery Center for Women in Palm Springs, Florida, a holistic design and the pioneering female-sensitive substance abuse treatment approach of Karen Dodge, PhD, have been used to develop modalities that meet the specific needs of recovering female substance abusers.

Surroundings With the Power to Heal

The Orchid was founded in 2004 and is capable of treating up to 14 women at a time. The Orchid's physical design is based on the Planetree model, which supports the concept that living areas can serve as a catalyst in healing and nurturing the mind, body, and spirit. The Planetree model integrates human caring with the best of scientific medicine and complementary healing traditions.

Angelica Thieriot founded Planetree in 1978. She had been hospitalized for several weeks with a life-threatening medical condition. Although Thieriot received excellent medical care, she was dismayed by the rest of her treatment and stay in the facility. She felt she had been treated as a body in a bed, not as a person.

After recovering from her condition, Thieriot founded the nonprofit Planetree organization, borrowing the name from the plane tree, or sycamore, under which Hippocrates taught his students. The Orchid's implementation of Planetree theory uses concepts of nonlinear, clustered, homelike spaces for both solitude and social activities, enhanced with sound and color—with emphasis on healing women's bodies, minds, and spirits.

Studies have measured the effectiveness of healing spaces and lend scientific credibility to a design that can inspire clients to

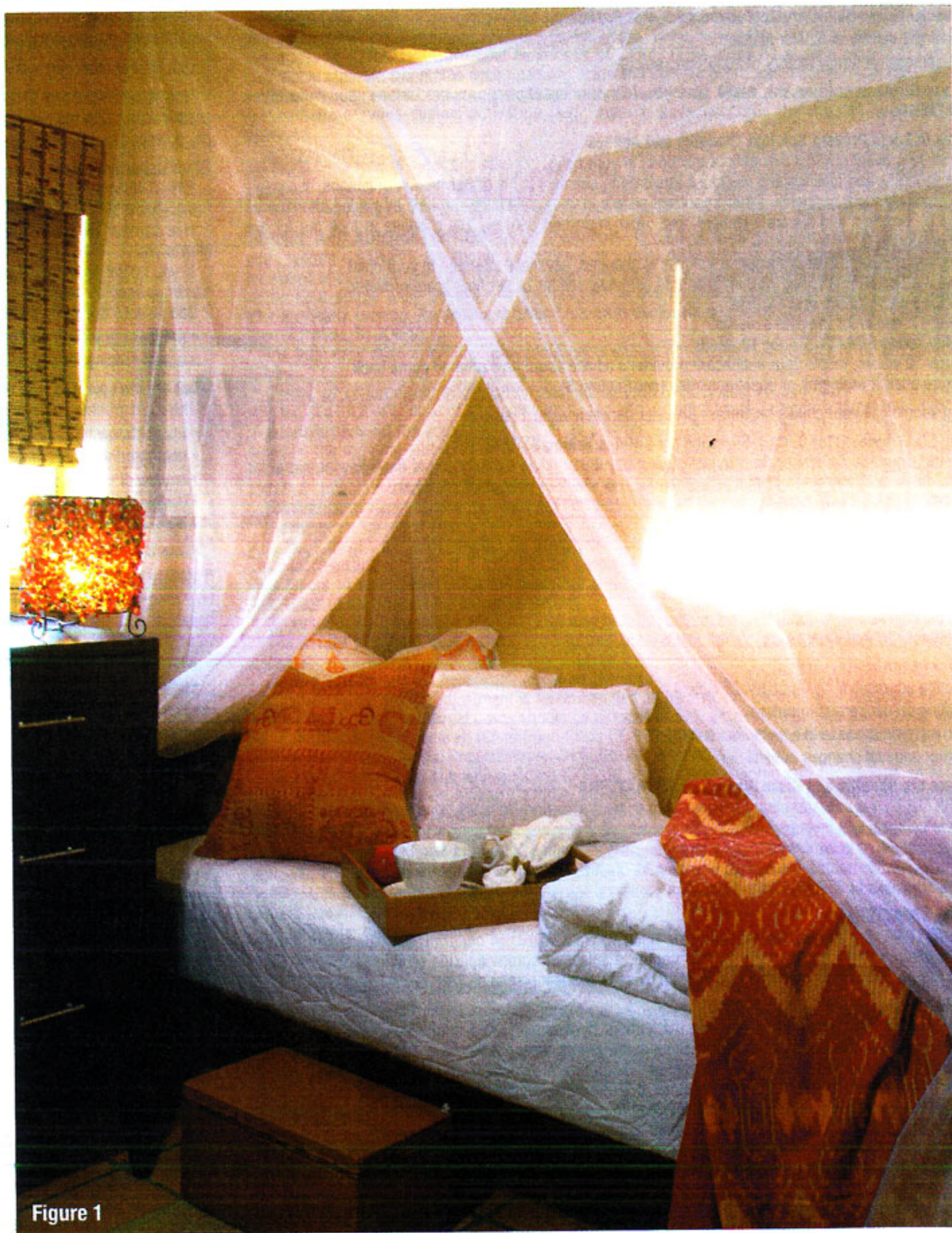


Figure 1

change and to provide hope regarding the possibilities ahead of them. Findings suggest that well-planned environments can reduce depression, restlessness, insomnia, anxiety, blood pressure, and perception of pain; elevate mood; improve immune system response; and enhance cognitive functioning.

The philosophy of designing "healing spaces" integrates a variety of environmental elements to create an ambience that is not only attractive, but also will have a measurable effect upon the health and well-being of those who use the space. In creating the Orchid's new space, the designer's

PHOTOS OF THE ORCHID AND JULIE QUELER BY ROBIN ROSLAND

task was to enhance and support recovery goals within the existing architecture by creating functional space and furnishing it both practically and beautifully. The Orchid incorporates art, color, sound, and scents with powerful elements of interior design in a deliberate attempt to create a living environment that is itself a therapeutic tool.

“Our goal was to create an environment specific to the specialized healing needs of women, in which we seamlessly meld 12-Step philosophies with modalities based on the latest empirical research—but in an environment addressing all five senses—thus amplifying treatment and greatly reducing relapse,” remarks Dr. Dodge. “Central nervous system problems, restlessness, the inability to calm the mind—these are all common side effects of detoxification from any substance. Literally through the use of architecture and design, we have been able to greatly soothe clients while creating an environment that complements our treatment ideology of personal growth through the encouragement of a high degree of interdependence and trust among women during the treatment process.”

Creating Magic With Simplicity

Colors and furnishings throughout the Orchid reflect a feminine touch. In the Orchid’s sleeping quarters, mosquito netting gives a simultaneous sense of privacy and freedom (figure 1). While a canopy bed would offer a sense of security, privacy, and luxury, the soft and airy netting does not promote claustrophobic feelings.

Color is an important element of the Orchid’s design. Some walls are yellow to signify warmth. A Mexican pink evokes joy in an eating area (figure 2). The large common area where women gather during free time is a rich pale blue to inspire calmness; the area is accented with simple, natural fabrics (such as cotton pillows and throws) and rattan furniture (figures 3-5). The floor in the residences is a warm, reddish, earth-colored Mexican tile that is refreshingly cool to touch yet provides a natural anchor for the walls’ rich colors.

Gay Bordal Kanuth, a native of Norway and owner of the design firm IMAGLO, was the lead designer for the Orchid’s transformation. “Simple ideas can be effective on influencing the senses,” says Kanuth. She has incorporated numerous elements that act as portals to nature, including lush greenery, fountains, wind chimes, ethnic sculptures, photographs, and bamboo. “The goal, which I know we have achieved



Figure 2



Figure 3

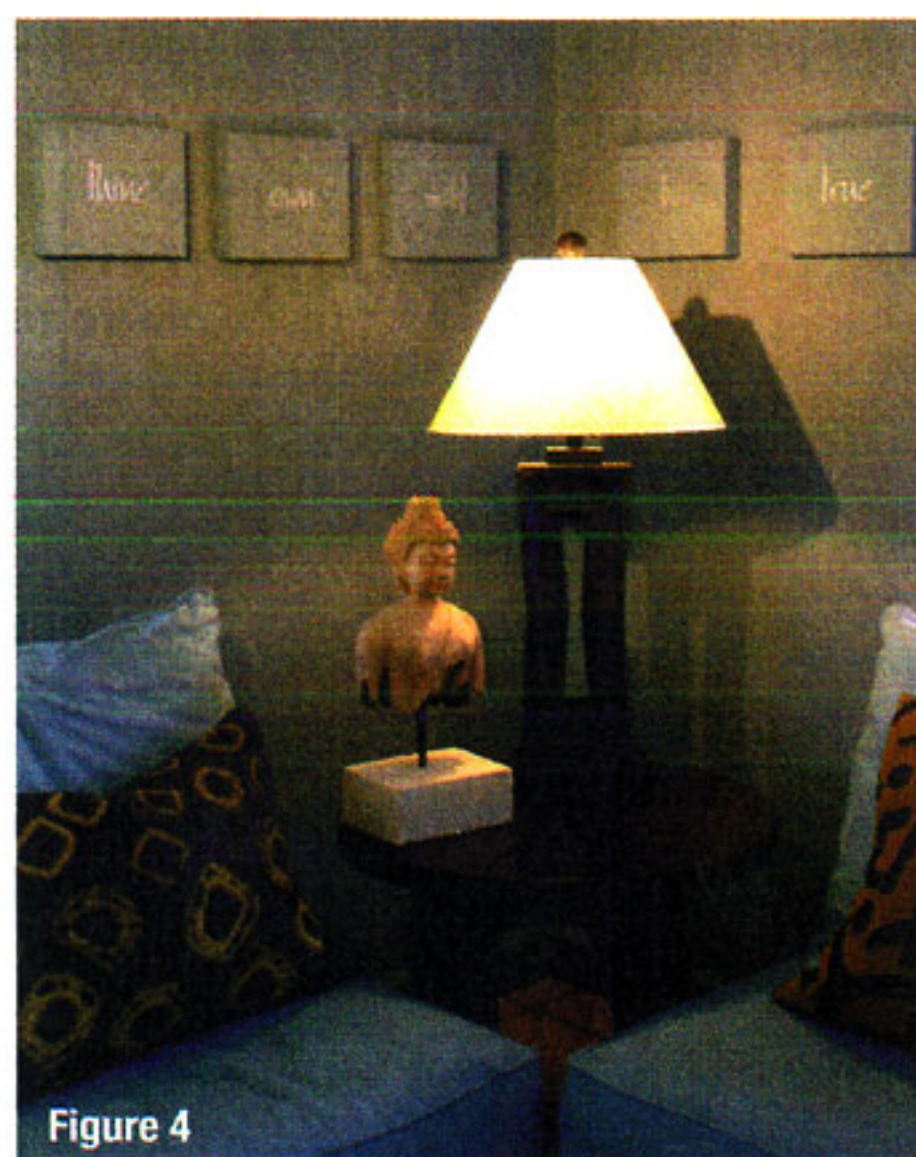


Figure 4



Figure 5

based on the clients' feedback, was for those in treatment to enjoy their experience at the Orchid so much that they would be inclined to re-create healing spaces in their own homes once they left," says Kanuth. "We have created spaces for people to find the peace they need to nurture their soul."

Marrying clinical concepts to aesthetics, the Orchid specializes in a variety of complementary and alternative therapies (as well as traditional 12-Step philosophies) to enhance serenity and balance, including meditation, massage, acupuncture, water therapy, and yoga. The Orchid's practitioners find that alternative therapies experienced in a healing space enhance and maximize their benefits and effectiveness. For example, careful attention has been paid to the acoustic qualities in the areas where sound therapy is performed.

The Importance of Choosing a Designer

It's important to work with a designer

who can put aside his/her own need to "put a stamp" on the design. "Sometimes designers get caught up in fashionable, hip designs," Kanuth admits. "The result can be a cool-looking place, but it does not feed the soul as it should. Working with the Orchid made me confront the why and how of my approach," she says. "I realize that all types of women from all walks of life will come here. They are at a place of surrender in their lives, and in pain."

Kanuth needed to create restful and peaceful environments, surrounding clients with a secure place to heal. In preparation, she not only studied the Planetree model, but she listened to and observed people already in sobriety and families who

visit AA meetings and treatment facilities. She extensively interviewed staff and management to develop a better understanding of the clients' needs and the purposes of the therapeutic modalities.

Making spaces therapeutic requires more than a fresh coat of paint or a change of furniture. It takes a solid commitment to a partnership between both treatment center management and the designer to evaluate a space, be it existing space or new construction, with an eye to its ability to hurt or heal. ■

For more information, call (561) 433-2336 or visit www.orchidrecoverycenter.com. To send comments to the author and editors, e-mail queler0906@behavioral.net.



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