

STANDING OUT

Outpatient facility makes its presence felt on prominent Texas campus

Article by Amy Eagle · Photography by Aker/Zvonkovic Photography

The Methodist Hospital's new 1.6-million-square-foot outpatient center at the Texas Medical Center in Houston features state-of-the-art equipment and design, but Anthony Haas, AIA, FACHA, senior principal and senior medical planner for Houston-based WHR Architects, would rather not call it the facility of the future. He prefers to think of it as a facility with a future.

The Methodist Hospital System expects more than 310,000 outpatient visits each year at the center, which houses nearly all of The Methodist Hospital's outpatient services, including orthopedic surgery, cardiovascular imaging, radiology, cancer care, weight management and wellness.

Serving all these patients at the main hospital, a collection of buildings that dates to the 1950s, had become complicated, especially for patients trying to find their way around. Sid Sanders, senior vice president, The Methodist Hospital, says the Methodist Outpatient Center gives the hospital a chance to start anew with a building that is big but easy to understand, well-designed and "just a pleasant place to be." »

The Methodist Outpatient Center has changed the skyline of both the Texas Medical Center and the city of Houston.

PROFILE

PROJECT OVERVIEW

PROJECT NAME The Methodist Outpatient Center
LOCATION Houston
TOTAL FLOOR AREA (IN SQUARE FEET) Building (824,000) and garage (776,000)
NUMBER OF FLOORS 26
CONSTRUCTION COST \$248 million
GROUNDBREAKING September 2006
OPENING July 2010

PROJECT TEAM

OWNER The Methodist Hospital System
ARCHITECT AND INTERIOR DESIGNER WHR Architects
PROGRAM MANAGER Broaddus & Associates
GENERAL CONTRACTOR Hensel Phelps Construction Co.
ENVIRONMENTAL GRAPHIC DESIGN fd2s
MEP ENGINEERING Smith Seckman Reid Inc.
STRUCTURAL ENGINEERING Haynes Whaley Associates
CIVIL ENGINEERING, PARKING CONSULTANT AND TRAFFIC ENGINEER Walter P Moore
MEDICAL EQUIPMENT PLANNING Genesis Planning
LANDSCAPING Kudela & Weinheimer
COMMISSIONING AGENT Sebesta Blomberg
MATERIALS MANAGEMENT AND HANDLING Lerch Bates
ELEVATOR CONSULTANT Persohn/Hahn Associates Inc.
FIRE PROTECTION ENGINEERING Rolf Jensen & Associates Inc.
WIND ENGINEERING CONSULTANT RWDI
AIR DISPERSION CONSULTANT Ambient Air Technologies
VIBRATION/ACOUSTIC CONSULTANT Hoover & Keith Inc.

RELAXING IN THE SKY

Alternating light and dark woods combined with carpet insets create intimate waiting areas along the expansive second-level sky lobby.



mount, the reflective quality and blue and green colors of water are provided by inset glass and glass mosaic boxes that are easy to clean.

Dark wood lends a warm, hospitable feel to the interior, with lighter wood mixed in to create texture. Dark-toned carpet insets in the stone flooring add warmth to the entry on level one. On level two, where the main public elevator lobby and a number of public amenities draw foot traffic, darker carpet designed to hide stains also helps control noise.

The neutral backdrop of the flooring allows for greater flexibility in upholstery patterns. Much of the seating is covered in polyurethane or vinyl, with patterned fabric framed in wood on the backs of chairs, where the fabric is less vulnerable to staining. "The goal is always to have the building looking as new

WET WELCOME

As visitors arrive through the first-level valet entrance, they are greeted by a two-story curved limestone wall with a glass mosaic-tile water feature.



Pushing the limits

The facility is connected by pedestrian bridges on the second and third floors to The Methodist Hospital, located across the street, and is covered by the same license as the main hospital.

The outpatient center's most prominent tower rises 26 floors; measuring 512 feet from street level to the top of its highest spire, it is, accord-

ing to WHR spokesman Michael Jones, the tallest building in the densely populated Texas Medical Center.

Most people receiving health care these days expect to get well, so facilities must differentiate themselves through services and good design, Haas says. "That's what this project was really about — trying to push the limits a little bit ... to really

make it soothing."

The interior design has a calming seascape theme that is expressed throughout the building in artwork, including many pieces by hospital staff members. The inclusion of staff artwork gives employees a sense of ownership in the building and helps patients connect with caregivers, says Lori Foux, RID, IIDA, LEED AP, associate and senior interi-

or designer, WHR.

The seascape theme is reinforced through many other aspects of the design. The focal point of the two-story lobby is a large water feature that extends from the first to the second level. The second-floor café includes translucent panels decorated with a bubble pattern. On the diagnostic and treatment floors, where infection control is para-

When the "tiara" is lit at night, the unique triangular shape of the tower can be seen from all over Houston.



THE CROWNING TOUCH

Driving home from a baseball tournament one night during the design of The Methodist Hospital's new outpatient center, architect Anthony Haas realized his then 10-year-old son was commenting on buildings 20 miles in the distance, due to the way they were lighted. Call it a light-bulb moment.

"It changed my view" on lighting the Methodist Outpatient Center, says Haas, AIA, FACHA, senior principal and senior medical planner, WHR Architects, Houston. Rather than considering just how the building would be seen at street level, he broadened his thinking to include the perspective from one mile away, five miles away and even from an airplane.

Given the expense and landmark nature of such a major architectural undertaking, it made sense to use every opportunity to give the building a clear identity.

Thus, the center's 26-floor tower is topped by a metal frame structure "we affectionately call the tiara," says Sid Sanders, senior vice president, The Methodist Hospital.

At night, a computer-controlled LED lighting system bathes the tiara and the prow of the triangular tower with The Methodist Hospital System's signature blue, giving the building a strong branding message.

In October, pink light was used to recognize national breast cancer awareness month. The lighting color palette is nearly endless, says Haas, who recalls standing a mile or so from the building just prior to its opening, running through some of the options in theatrical fashion. "We were on walkie-talkies saying, 'OK, show us red, show us pink, show us white,'" he says.

"This is a quite dramatic piece of architecture. It's become an icon on the Texas Medical Center skyline," says Sanders. ■

INFUSED WITH LIGHT

Light cascades into the infusion area "patio," which features a wooden canopy and wall sconces inspired by an outdoor beach atmosphere.



as possible for as long as possible," Foux explains.

Let the light shine in

Exterior glass walls allow light to penetrate the building and provide views that help with wayfinding. On all floors, the primary visitor circulation paths are located on the perimeter, with views and daylight. "The building's main floor plate is 68,000 square feet — that's an acre and a half," says Sanders, noting that natural light makes the large space easier to navigate and more enjoyable to be in.

In the infusion treatment area on level 21, private treat-

ment rooms are aligned along the exterior corridor. Each of these has sliding glass doors that open onto a porch-like seating area where patients can enjoy the view and visit with family, friends and other patients. Whitewashed wood-look flooring, lighting sconces at each doorway and a slatted wood pattern in the ceiling that is reminiscent of a beach house canopy add to the patio atmosphere. A patient who wants privacy can retreat into his or her treatment room and draw a curtain across the sliding doors. Those who wish to socialize more may choose group treatment rooms that

can support up to four patients at once.

On the surgery floor, more than 50 private preoperative/recovery rooms are oriented perpendicular to the exterior wall to give patients window access. "If you tried to put five or 10 of those along the glass, it means the other 40 wouldn't have it," says Haas. This layout lets anyone step into the corridor and look outside.

The 14 operating suites are all more than 650 square feet and are same-handed, to be used by any specialty. These are arranged in two pods with a racetrack configuration and a central sterile core.

A second, shelled surgery floor will allow the center to add 14 more ORs as necessary.

Sanders describes the interweave of patient comfort and technologically advanced, efficient workflow on the surgical floor as "stunning in its scale." Large, open floor plates allow health care planners to "model your ideal flow without ever making the patients feel like they're in a machine," he says.

Flexible future

The facility's shelled space and flexible design has allowed the hospital to consider installing advanced modalities like interventional radiology suites.

While outpatient design generally is less complex than that for inpatient care, "we put in as much sophistication as we could to give them the ability to plug and play and change," Haas says.

As the hospital contemplates future services, the building "gives [them] the flexibility to say, 'If we want to or need to, we can.'" **HFM**



Amy Eagle is a freelance writer based in Homewood, Ill., who specializes in health care-related topics.

SPA-LIKE EXPERIENCE

An exam room outfitted with a multi-use table for massage services features lighter woods, accents and wall coverings reminiscent of a spa.



The imaging floor's female gowned waiting room provides chaise lounges and seating with ottomans for patients to rest while waiting for their procedures.

RETHINKING RESPITE SPACE

In designing the Methodist Outpatient Center, WHR Architects, Houston, strove to break the mold of the traditional waiting area.

The center's private exam rooms include wardrobes for clothing storage and space for family members to wait with patients in each room. Benches are located just outside the rooms so visitors can step out for a moment and wait comfortably during a quick procedure or exam. The building also has gowned waiting areas with chaise lounges and ottomans, where people who are not feeling well can lie down or put their feet up.

Sub-waiting areas are positioned between groupings of exam rooms on the cancer and surgery floors so family members can remain close by. Lounge seating is available next to windows in the corridors to allow people to sit and enjoy daylight and pleasant views.

For those who would like to get away for a bit, the building includes a light-filled lobby with the center's popular café and espresso bar. "They've had such a success with the café they've already called about adding a lot more seating," says Lori Foux, RID, IIDA, LEED AP, associate and senior interior designer, WHR. Massage services and a meditation room are also available.

For staff, the team designed decompression areas that have windows and comfortable lounge seating. Casters enable the seats to be moved easily into groupings or individual arrangements. "If you need to go cry, you need to take a break or go have lunch or meet with someone, there are little areas of comfort," explains Anthony Haas, AIA, FACHA, senior principal and senior medical planner, WHR.

Staff members have 24-hour access to a gym on the 23rd floor that has two glass walls that meet in front; these are reflected in mirrors on the other walls, creating essentially a 360-degree vista. "It's an amazing view," says Foux, "just a really nice feature for the staff." ■



SPEC SHEET

PRINCIPAL DESIGN MATERIALS

Carpet and carpet tile: Lees Carpets **Ceiling:** Ceilings Plus, Clunn Acoustical Systems, Decoustics and Lindner Group **Door hardware:** ASSA ABLOY **Flooring:** Amtico International, Mannington Mills Inc. and CBC (America) Corp. **Glass:** Bendheim and Skyline Design **Interior lighting:** 3form Inc. (light art), Cooper Lighting, Hèmèra, Kurt Versen, Nessen Lighting, Portfolio and Tech Lighting **Exterior LED lighting:** Philips Color Kinetics **Paint:** Benjamin Moore & Co. and Sherwin-Williams Co. **Plumbing accessories:** Chicago Faucets **Plumbing fixtures:** American Standard **Roofing:** Firestone Building Products **Signage:** Intex United **Tile:** Daltile and Walker Zanger Inc. **Wall coverings:** Colour & Design Inc. and Patty Madden Inc. **Window treatments:** Carnegie and L&D Upholstery Inc. **PRINCIPAL FURNISHINGS** **Cafeteria seating:** Andreu World America **Cafeteria tables:** Sandler Seating **Casework:** Herman Miller Inc. and Nucraft **Conference tables:** Versteel **Files and shelving, office desks and seating:** Haworth Inc. **Lounge seating:** David Edward, HBF and Nemschoff Inc. **Patient beds:** Midmark Corp. and Stryker **Patient over-bed tables:** Stryker **Patient room seating:** Gunlocke **Woodworking:** Beaubois **MAJOR MEDICAL EQUIPMENT** **Computed tomography, digital radiography and fluoroscopy, patient monitoring, portable X-ray and C-arm and positron emission tomography:** GE Healthcare **Medication dispensing units:** CareFusion Corp. **Magnetic resonance imaging:** GE Healthcare and Siemens **Nuclear medicine camera:** Siemens **Operating room integration:** Image Stream Medical **Patient lifts:** Barton Medical Corp. **Sterile processing equipment (sterilizers and washers), surgical lights and booms:** Steris Corp. **Stretchers:** Stryker **Ultrasound:** GE Healthcare, Philips Healthcare and Siemens **INFRASTRUCTURE** **Boilers:** Sellers Engineering Co. **Chillers:** York by Johnson Controls **Electrical equipment:** Schneider Electric **Generator:** Cummins Inc. **Security:** Schneider Electric (formally TAC)

Information provided by Genesis Planning and WHR Architects