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An Artful Office

By Amy Selby

The walls of many chiropractic offices display a variety of items, from framed posters, practice logos and doctor credentials to patient education messages, a good number of spines and even outdated family photos. When it comes to office style and design, fine art is largely missing from our walls.

The chiropractic profession has two schools of thought when it comes to fine art. Many chiropractors feel wall space is another medium for patient education. If you cover the space in artful prints, you're misusing prime real estate and you've lost an opportunity to teach the chiropractic lifestyle. DCs in favor of fine artwork, feel that art can create a dialogue between doctor and patients and create a sense of welcome.

Art has adorned the reception areas of corporate offices, spas and medical centers for some time. Over the past few years, many chiropractors are catching on to the power of fine art and the message it can bring to chiropractic patients. While your practice may not be able to finance a large art installation, there are a variety of ways to incorporate meaningful pieces that can create a healing atmosphere for you, your staff and patients.

"I feel strongly that art has a power, and particularly it has a healing power. It is important to have art in a care-giving situation. I think this goes back to ancient times—the origins focused on the human spirit. Art is the window

to that spirit, and that's where healing takes place," says Irene Mahler, of Mahler Fine Arts Consulting in Seattle.

ART AND ITS ROLE IN YOUR OFFICE

The presence of tasteful artwork in your office, or the lack of it, contributes to the overall patient experience. "Art can communicate a sense of welcome, reassurance and optimism. It also cultivates a sense of the world beyond the health care environment," says Mahler. "Patients are focused on their issues and they may be in pain. Focusing on art fosters connection to the world beyond and helps transport you beyond the anxiety or stress of the moment."

In addition to creating a mood of calm and comfort, carefully chosen artwork can add a sense of professionalism and contribute to a patient's first impression of your office. If patients walk in to find vinyl floors, white walls and posters in plastic frames, they may feel like they're waiting to renew their driver's license rather than waiting to get their spines checked. And, if those same patients are shopping for a chiropractor, they may choose the office style that makes them feel more relaxed.

WHEN BAD ART HAPPENS TO GOOD DOCTORS

A checkup at her personal dentist ushered in a sad discovery for Mahler. Her dentist had

invested in an office renovation with new finishes, stylish furniture, but unfortunately, poor work choices. "My own dental office was never remodeled with good furniture and good art," says Mahler. "It was something that looked like art, but it was really a cheap reproduction of a print in an expensive frame. My dentist didn't know. Someone bought it for him and he got a great markup."

Poor art choices happen in many office environments. You're more likely to avoid overpriced prints or uninspired pieces when you work with a professional. The trained eye of an interior designer or art consultant can guide you to make smart selections within your budget. Plus, these professionals have access to many more resources than the public and many have cultivated relationships with artists and galleries. "You may be an excellent chiropractor. You may have the best taste when it comes to art design, but you may not know how to put together the whole package," says Kenneth Olsen of ASID (American Society of Interior Designers) of Olsen and Associates in Winter Park, Florida. "Designers have vision. We're educated on style and how things work together. We also offer turnkey service from start to finish. You don't want your office to be down for a long time."

When searching for an interior designer, art advisor or consultant, view their portfolio

ask for references and check their credentials. There are designers or consultants who work specifically for art galleries and may only recommend artwork from their employer. The artwork that appears in an art gallery may not work in your office space or environment. Also, many galleries display an artist's most expensive



pieces of artwork. A good designer will understand your budget, balance, color, scale, lighting and even the best framing options. "A lot of people think you can just place art on the wall," says Judi Kieffer, ASID, of Kieffer Design Group in Boise, Idaho. "There are different elements of design that come into play—lighting, balance, focus, texture and reflection—and you need to pay attention to all of these things. It can be overwhelming."

BE THE DESIGNER

If you have a creative side and would like to strike out on your own when choosing, arranging and displaying art for your office, designers recommend seeing the artwork in its space. The lighting in a gallery or home goods store can be quite different from the lighting of your office. Pamela Hastings, ASID, an interior designer in Sarasota, Fla., suggests hunting for good art finds at local museum or arboretum gift shops and estate sales. "If you have the patience, shopping estate sales and flea markets can offer some good finds with groups already put together effectively," says Hastings.

One of the first resources many chiropractors turn to is their own home. Most designers are going to steer you in a different direction. "One of my big no-nos is bringing leftover and castoff art pieces from your home. It's a big mistake," says Hastings. "Sometimes, smaller offices or practices tend to bring in old items rather than recycle them to Goodwill. This destroys the look and feel of your office." This advice is a good reminder that your office is not an extension of your home—art decisions and selections should be based on different criteria, says Hastings. "Chiropractic care honors the structure of the body. It brings order to something that is out of order. Your office should reflect that sense of

order and organization; however, it can be softened by the artwork you select."

Artwork that features nature is an easy way to communicate a soothing, healing atmosphere. "Groupings of natural objects and materials, such as ferns, shells, trees, leaves, clouds and botanicals, always work well," says Hastings. "Nature is healing. Don't make your artwork choices too traditional or too mentally challenging."

Be sure your artwork is properly lit. Carol DeBear, ASID, an interior designer in Scarsdale, N.Y., says artwork should not be in a dark space. "It should be a focal point and you don't want it in a dark space."

When displaying a group of prints, images, patient education documents or your credentials, use the same style of frame. You can use different sizes of the same frame, as well. DeBear suggests using frames in wood—painted or natural—instead of metal or aluminum.

Photography is an affordable way to add art and impact to your practice. "I like photography that's different, that challenges you to look outside the box," says Kieffer. "Many doctors want to go with landscape images, but they are so overdone—they're accepted by everyone. Yet, there are so many amazing photos that are serene. Nature scenes and grounding one's self in earth tones—clay, bark, greens and blues—those are all healing colors. There's a healing quality, but it's not so obvious."

CREATIVE RESOURCES

Beyond art galleries and commissioning a piece of fine art, there are a few clever resources that can bring artwork to your practice. Many master's of fine art programs and art schools offer an artwork lending program that allows you to promote student work. For example, the Columbia College Artwork Lending Program in

Chicago lends artwork from its permanent collection. The only downside is the college's staff chooses the artwork and your office décor is not considered. Fortunately, the staff does match the artwork to your space's aesthetic. Other lending programs may offer more flexibility during the selection process.

Another option is having artwork on consignment, says Olsen. Many artists are willing to display their artwork in various places of business as a tool of exposure and potential sales. What you get is a gallery of original artwork, with pieces rotating as they sell or as the artist sees fit.

YOUR OFFICE IS YOUR CANVAS

Fine art is another way to reflect the ideals of your practice to your patient. Think of it as an abstract form of patient education—artwork that expresses vitalistic scenes sends positive messages. Don't fret, there's still room for your favorite subluxation posters in your adjusting area.

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Seek Professional Help

If you'd like to use the expertise of a professional art consultant or interior designer, try contacting our trusted sources:

- Carol DeBear, (914) 725-2385; debeardesigns@gmail.com
- Pamela Hastings, (941) 953-9703; interiordesignerhastings@yahoo.com
- Judi Kieffer, (208) 344-2680; judi@kiefferdesigngroup.com
- Irene Mahler, (206) 624-7363; irene@mahlerfinearts.com
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