

The Worcestershire-based team of KKE Architects and Elaine Lewis Designs have recently completed the new in-patient unit at St David's Hospice creating a beautifully calm and serene environment. The project has been awarded an RIBA National Award 2018 and RSAW Client of the Year Award 2018 by The Royal Institute of British Architects.



# Invisible interiors

How do you create an interior that everybody sees, but nobody notices? Interior designer Elaine Lewis explains the concept of an invisible interior and the support it provides to those facing terminal illness

If each of us can work to change a small portion of a person's journey to the end of life, then together we can make bigger changes'; wise words spoken by the late Robert Kennedy and ones that echoed in my mind as, in association with Worcester-based KKE architects, I undertook the creation of an interior that, essentially, had to be invisible due to the sensitivity of its function. When I say invisible, I'm not talking all glass and mirrors, but an interior that provided a calm, caring and incredibly supportive space within a palliative and end-of-life care facility.

When patients and their families are facing the challenging eventuality of long-term or terminal illness, they do not want to be

concerned with a jarring or loud interior. Similarly, they would find a clinical interior austere and dispassionate.

Modern-day hospices are now considered 'healing spaces', helping patients and their support network of caregivers, family and close friends manage the symptoms of significant life-changing conditions along with any related psychological, social and spiritual issues. The soft palettes, the access to natural light and the gentle connection to nature combine to create beautiful spaces that detach those in need from the usual regimented timetable of the everyday.

Patients are cared for within private rooms that engender a sense of homeliness

that cocoons and supports them. This empowers them to retain control over their environment, where they can accommodate those close to them to share all those stories and intimate moments that are increasingly precious. Small touches, such as bookshelves for family photos, create a gentle feeling of a home away from home.

But how is this achieved? It starts, of course, with the building design; the architecture, where unique spaces with windows and doors open out onto beautifully considered private patio areas where patients and their families can enjoy fresh air and views. Moving through areas that are light-filled from rooftop clerestory glass spaces, wide,

open corridors, curved and timber-clad walls, double-storey peace rooms, glass atria and perforated metalwork that lets the dappled light seep through. It is the architecture of support, care and comfort.

The interiors then complement and support this ethos of care with clearer lines, more grey tones in the wood finishes moving away from the more obvious mahogany and cherry that in such a situation would jar and distract.

It's a transitional move to contemporary design using muted colour palettes of nature, feelings of bringing the



environment that is restful, comforting and calming.

Getting that balance is a challenge; get it wrong and everybody will notice; get it right and nobody will.

And this balance fulfils the aspirations of Robert Kennedy and positively changes a small portion of a person's journey to the end of life. ○



Elaine Lewis has been professionally styling residential and commercial interiors for over a decade. She lives in Malvern with her family. See ► [www.elainelewisdesigns.org](http://www.elainelewisdesigns.org) for more information. Follow her on [Instagram.com/elainelewisdesigns](https://www.instagram.com/elainelewisdesigns) and [Facebook.com/elainelewisdesigns](https://www.facebook.com/elainelewisdesigns)

Interior images courtesy of stillviewphotography/Roger Hancock. Exterior images courtesy of Ståle Eriksen.

'outside in', openness, light, minimal but incredibly homely and beautiful.

Shared spaces with fireplaces and comfortable lounge furniture where patients and families can sit together and have a cup of tea mean so much, allowing patients to move around the environment, to have almost a sense of normality and not feel as if they are in a medical facility. Even something as seemingly simple as a small kitchen designed much like the one we have at home provides some normality to the patients and their families.

The interiors have to get out of the way, to become invisible, to hide the unnecessary and the unwanted; here the importance

is given to those in care. The focus is on them, their needs, their comfort.

The interior respects that, not shouting 'look at me' but supporting them, calming them and allowing them to come to terms with their situation.

And when the sad inevitability of end-of-life care occurs, bereavement suites for families to share the most private of moments with a deceased loved one are respectfully designed to be gentle and soothing, thus allowing them to gently grieve and come to terms with personal loss.

An invisible interior is rarely discussed, be that at home, at work, or in a care facility. They are there to support and create an







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