

# Injecting a healthy dose of beauty and tranquility into hospitals



**MIKE BOONE**  
on Art for Healing

*“It’s like deep breathing for the eyes.”*

Art for Healing began five years ago in the lobby of Lords.

Earl Pinchuk and Gary Blair were visiting a friend at the Royal Victoria Hospital. They were struck by the drab, institutional air of their surroundings.

“These are very nice portraits,” Pinchuk was saying the other day, “but imagine a landscape on these walls.”

We were chatting just inside the entrance of the Vic. The oil paintings to which Pinchuk alluded portray the hospital’s dour, full-bearded founders, Donald Smith and George Stephen.

Lords Strathcona and Mount Stephen raised \$1 million to build the Royal Vic in 1893. Pinchuk realizes his taste in art notwithstanding, the Lords aren’t going anywhere.

A different aesthetic prevails upstairs. The Art for Healing Foundation, which Pinchuk and Blair created, has decorated the Cedars Breast Centre and the radiology clinic with original prints and reproductions.

The artworks were installed when the clinics were renovat-



Art for Healing founders Earl Pinchuk and Gary Blair (standing) share a passion for art and a birthday.

PIERRE OBENDRAUF THE GAZETTE

ed. Working with the hospital, Pinchuk and Blair chose pieces that would complement the functions of their surroundings.

Before he devoted himself full-time to the Art for Healing Foundation, Pinchuk worked 22 years in his family’s comforter manufacturing business. Blair still works as vice-president of Télé-Page, a beeper company.

They share a passion for art and a birthday: Pinchuk will be 45 and Blair 51 on Feb. 14. They married last year – on Feb. 14.

When their friend was hospitalized at the Vic, Pinchuk recalls, he and Blair “began to

think of ways we could marry the art world and the medical world together.”

“Here we wanted something geared toward women,” Blair said as we walked into the breast clinic. “Softer images, more female content.”

We were admiring a reproduction of Sunset Breeze, by Alice Dalton Brown. The painting depicts a shaded room and a thin curtain being blown back from a window that looks out on a lake bathed in late-day sunshine. The image is very relaxing. That’s the point.

“The idea of the art in here is

never to agitate,” Blair said. “It should have the opposite effect.”

There are also, he added, very strong images of women on the walls of the clinic.

“They convey a sense of empowerment. That’s important, because women here are under the gun. Being tested, waiting for results – these are stressful situations.”

And there is whimsy. The nurses station is decorated with a vintage 1948 poster for “ski fun in La Province du Québec.” And opposite a photo of Dr. Edward Tabah, who ran the Cedars Breast Clinic from 1966 to 2001, hangs a playful

print called Pink Groovy.

In the mammogram room, on the wall a patient faces while laying on her side, there’s a painting of birch trees beside a lake, with mountains in the distance. It’s like deep breathing for the eyes.

Nurse-clinician Carol Magnan describes the art as “visual therapy.” “Patients like it,” Magnan, said. “and so do the staff, who spend a lot of time here. Art makes the place very ... what’s the word in English? ... accueillant.” Welcoming.

Pinchuk and Blair have hung colourful, therapeutic welcome signs at the Montreal Children’s Hospital, the General, the Douglas, the Neurological Institute, the Jewish General, the Maimonides Geriatric Centre, Villa Médica Rehabilitation Centre, Entraide Grand Brûlés and Yaldei Developmental Centre.

There are projects in the works at Hôpital Maisonneuve-Rosemont, Hôtel Dieu, the Queen Elizabeth Health Complex and the Griffith-McConnell Residence. The Art for Healing Foundation has placed 350 reproductions and 260 original pieces – approximately \$200,000 worth of art and gallery-quality framing.

“You have brought sunshine into our environment,” Louise Miller of the Children’s Hospital audiology department wrote to Pinchuk and Blair. “Thanks to you, the children are walking into a friendly and fun place.”

**On the Web:** [www.artforhealingfoundation.org](http://www.artforhealingfoundation.org)

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