

Canadian Interiors

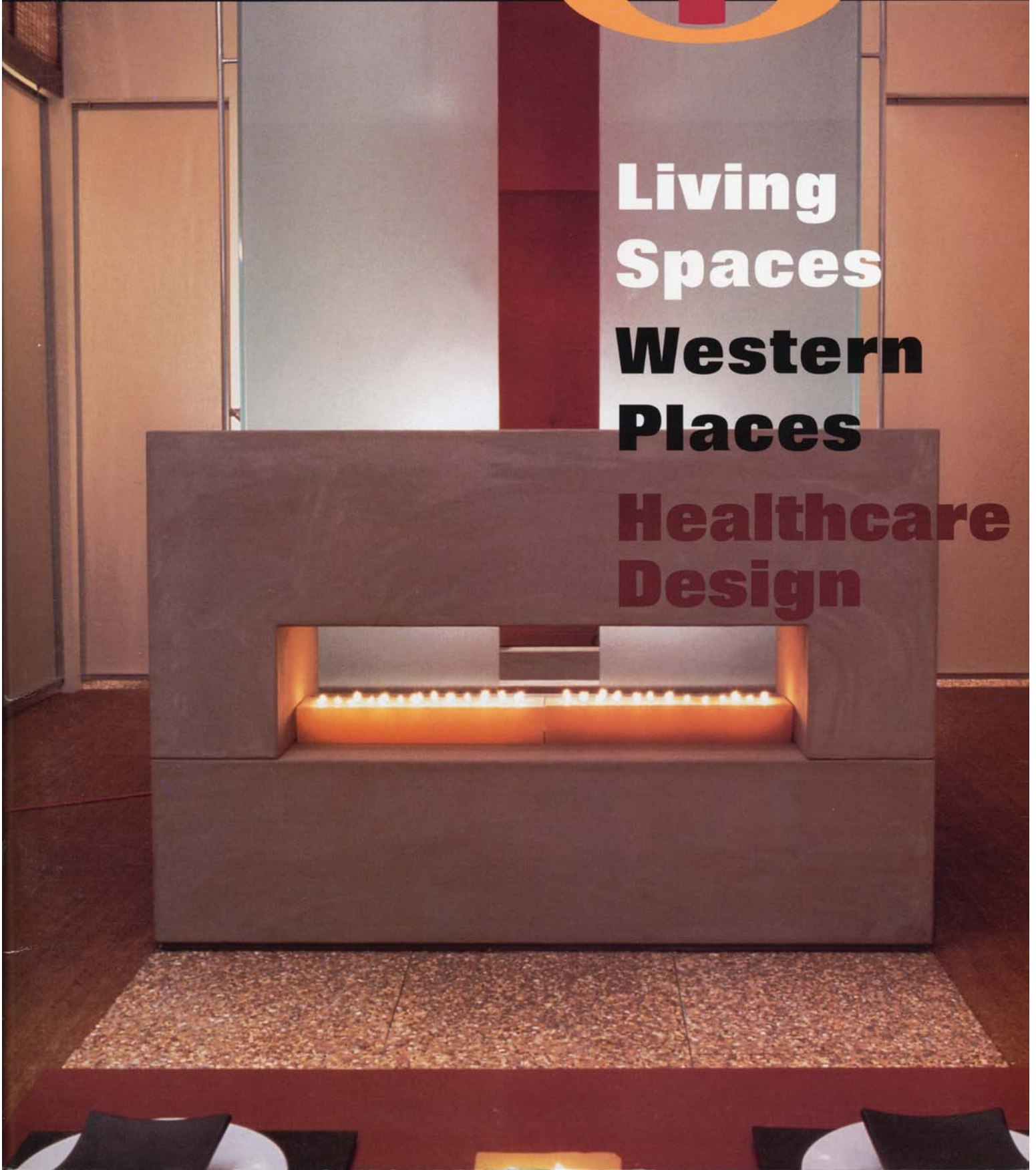


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**Living
Spaces**

**Western
Places**

**Healthcare
Design**



Cubbies and Cubicles:

Childcare for the Next Millennium What would you do to make institutionalized childcare feel, well, less institutional? What if, instead of Formica and fluorescent lights, visitors were greeted by a sun filled lobby, hand-carved burl wood counters, and tapestries on the wall? What if that "lobby" was really no lobby at all, but an inviting living room with a kiva fireplace in the corner, a warm tile floor, and richly-upholstered throw pillows on the couch? What if this place truly felt like home?



BY ALFREDO BOTELLO

Imagine that in this setting there would be enough space for parents to set down their bags, catch their breath, and chat with the staff. This would be a place where children wouldn't want to leave at the end of the day. They would be too busy wreaking havoc in the little woodworking shop, or splashing paint on the walls of the wet play bay, or perhaps reading quietly on broad, carpeted risers in a cozy corner.

This place actually exists. Located next to a restored wetlands in Bolton, Ont., the Copper House, nicknamed for its sweeping, curved copper roof, is a revolution in childcare, designed by Anita Rui Olds, Ph.D., Jacobson Silverstein Winslow/Degenhardt Architects, Woodacre, Cal., and Carla Mathis, a colour and interiors specialist. Olds is the founder and director of the Childcare Design Institute at Harvard, a week-long training program sponsored by Harvard and Tufts universities. Several years ago, Husky Injection Molding Systems asked her to design a state-of-the-art childcare centre for its employees. For Olds, this was a chance to put three decades of research and thinking into practice.

"We need to transform the way we conceive of childcare today," says Olds. "Childcare settings need to meet the unlimited potential of children's talents and spirits. They need to nourish children's souls, not just their bodies."

If the sentiments seem lofty, consider the stakes. It is estimated that by the year 2000, 40 million square feet of new child care space will be needed to accommodate our children. With both parents often working full time, children are spending 10 hours a day in daycare, five days a week.

Childcare is raising our children. Anita Olds wants to make sure we're doing it right.

To that end, she developed her innovative "residential core" model. She found the conventional "school" building type — essentially identical rooms off a long, dark corridor — sorely lacking not only in basic space requirements, but in daylight, spatial variety, and in a sense of community. She believes childcare settings should feel as intimate and warm as home. She found a sympathetic voice in *A Pattern Language*, the groundbreaking critique of modernist design theory which, like an actual pattern book, presents hundreds of common-sense elements which can be combined to create good buildings.

So when it came time to design the Copper House, Olds looked up two of the *Pattern Language* co-authors, Murray Silverstein and Max Jacobson, and began work. The result is a gently-curved, undulating crescent of a building which creates sheltered outdoor spaces and playful rooms with bay windows, octagonal pop-outs, and plenty of natural light.

