

Press release

14 January 2010

CircleBath, opening of the first hospital designed by Foster + Partners

CircleBath is Foster + Partners first hospital and the first in a programme of new independent hospitals which offer a radical departure from orthodox approaches to hospital planning. After a period of commissioning, CircleBath is expected to open to patients in February.

The compact design encourages a sense of community and well-being with facilities more comparable to a luxury hotel rather than a traditional hospital. The three-storey hospital is set into the hills on the edge of protected green belt nine kilometres south east of Bath. It is planned around a central light filled atrium, promoting a sense of orientation and intimacy that is commonly lacking in larger hospitals.

Public entry is from the road on the north directly into the atrium on the ground level floor. The northern façade comprises dark panelling at the lower levels, while on the south, extensive glazing opens out to views over the surrounding rolling countryside. Appearing to float above this recessive skirting, the rectangular upper volume and roof, enclosing all twenty-eight bedrooms, is clad in a reflective lattice of aluminium shingles.

The double-height atrium forms the focus for patients, staff and visitors, with private consultation rooms leading from it at ground level and in-patient bedrooms arranged around it above. The main reception point, café and nurses station occupy the atrium where daylight, drawn through the circular sky lights, is softened by a translucent fabric ribbon tracing the shapes. The colour palette is a warm and friendly mix of ochre and rust, with natural wood acoustic panels above, interspersed with glass panels providing a visual connection to the atrium from the bedroom floor.

Throughout the building, there is an emphasis on natural light and views: operating theatres and recovery spaces on the lower level are fully glazed to the south, looking out on to a private garden. The bedrooms on the upper floor look out onto balconies, planted with herbs and shrubs, lining the buildings perimeter and oriented to maximise views across the countryside. Sympathetic landscaping emphasises the therapeutic natural environment to create the opposite of an institutional atmosphere.

Divisions between departments are minimal, easing the stress involved in consultation, treatment and recovery for patients and reducing walking distances for staff.

"There is a wealth of evidence to suggest that a well-designed hospital environment can reduce recovery times and contribute to better outcomes for patients, while providing a

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more attractive workplace for medical staff. This is Foster + Partners first hospital building and its design is democratic, putting the patient at the heart of the system in a space that does not feel institutionalised and instead takes advantage of the rural setting, the light and the views."

Spencer de Grey, Senior Partner and Head of Design

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