

# THE ROOM THAT HOPE BUILT



When you step through a set of glass doors and into the lounge on the 14<sup>th</sup> floor of Princess Margaret Hospital (PMH) in Toronto, you completely forget your inside one of Canada's most venerable cancer centres. The splashes of vibrant wall colour, cool red leather sofa, flat screen TV and electric fireplace are more reflective of a trendy and relaxed family room than an institutional lounge. It is no wonder passersby-doctor, nurses, patients, support staff and visitors- gaze in admiringly through hallway windows.

The lounge, which opened in January, is much more than a cozy place for patients to hang out with visitors. Research shows that a comfortable environment, along with the support of friends and family, actually plays a vital role in wellness and recovery. "This room was a dream of hospital staff for many years because it's so important for patients to know they have a place to go and feel comfortable" says Theo Marie Borg.

Theo knows of this need firsthand. Her daughter, Rebecca, was admitted to the hospital with acute myelogenous leukemia (AML) in 2002 and spent a large part of the year there before she passed away at age 21. She spent months on the very floor where the lounge is located. "There are many young adults in the hospital who need a place to go with their friends and family," says Theo. Being with her loved ones was always most important to Rebecca. She would be happy to know that now there is an intimate space for patients to spend time laughing and talking with friends and family about their world outside the hospital. "The room is simply amazing," adds Dr. Mark Minden, Orsino chair in leukemia and head of the leukemia ward at PMH and University Health Network in Toronto. "It will allow patients to feel like they are on the way to recovery. In

addition to giving patients and families a comfortable place to meet, the room gives us the opportunity of running group sessions for patients.”

The airy, open-concept lounge is very much a home away from home and has a distinctive youth vibe. The modern kitchenette allows visitors to bring in food and share a meal with a loved one, while entertainment area, complete with cable TV, encourages patients and their families to relax and enjoy a show or movie. The solarium offers stunning views of the CN Tower and Lake Ontario. In all, it is a great space to listen to music, play computer games, read, chat and most importantly, forget your cares.

Theo, who now works as a volunteer at PMH, and her family played a significant role in creating the lounge. After her daughter died, Theo started Rebecca’s Hope, a charity that to date has raised more than \$650,000 for leukemia research at PMH, a portion of which helped to finance the project. “I know Rebecca would be thrilled with the lounge,” she adds.

Karen Kirk, Theo’s sister and décor editor for *Canadian Living* Magazine, has been working on the room, which was once a drab institutional space, for two years with the help of designers Steven Howard and Mario Coté of Flick and Company in Toronto. When Karen put a call out to friends and contact in the décor industry, she was overwhelmed by the response. “People immediately recognized the importance of the project and were excited and eager to help out. They would call me and ask, ‘Is there anything else that your need?’ It was so inspiring,” says Karen. “It’s been the most rewarding project I have ever worked on.”

With a major renovation and an injection of reflective, vibrant colours on the walls and in the furnishings and accessories, the once dreary grey space is transformed into a bright cheery refuge. “we wanted the new patient’s lounge to instantly lift the spirits of patients and their families the minute they stepped inside, says Karen.

➤ **AYA Kitchens Baths project designer Margaret Macdonald created a stylish kitchenette with sleek Ice White cabinets accented with an oak unit to coordinate with the family room cabinetry. For quick meals and snacks the kitchen is equipped with essential kitchenware, a Van Houtte Café Suprema beverage service, stainless-steel refrigerator, dishwasher and microwave. Corian sink, countertops, and backsplash provide seamless, bacteria-resistant surfaces. Hard-wearing marmoleum in sunny yellow provides comfort under foot.** Corian, Willis Group of Companies. Large appliances , May Tag Faucet, Blanco. Microwave, KitchenAid. Kitchenware, Home Outfitters. Coat rack, Ikea. Flooring, Forbo Marmoleum Inc. Field of Poppies photograph by Nancy Gosset, Vue Unique

**SPECIAL THANKS TO:**  
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