

# A LIGHT IN THE MIST

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NOTHING  
IS MORE INTIMATE  
THAN HOME  
AND THEREFORE  
NOTHING  
MORE PROPER  
TO THE SOUL.

*Thomas Moore*

# THE HEALING HOME

*The Healing Home* is a small showcase designed to share our ideas with the public at large. Many visitors to Healing Environments have expressed interest in adapting our ideas to their home settings. Although our mission is to relieve the suffering of those who are seriously ill, all of us, without exception, need healing environments. Whether a patient, a caregiver, or simply a loved one, we can all benefit from home environments which sustain and nourish our deepest needs. *The Healing Home* (both showcase and newsletter) hopes to show you how.

## THE HEALING HOME

In this world of increasing stress and complexity all of us need a haven, a healing environment, a healing home. As the information age hurls us into cyberspace, how can we remain grounded, centered, secure? The answer is not to acquire more, but rather to seek more meaning in what we acquire. To pause and look inward and — as African bearers resting beside the trail once said — “Wait for our souls to catch up with our bodies.”

I first met Traci, my co-director at Healing Environments, when I was furnishing a ski condo I had recently found. At the time, Traci was managing an antique store and I, recently divorced, was trying to create a sense of stability in the midst of chaos. How could I give my children a sense of continuity in their changing world? In a culture which values what is new over what is old, how could I give them both a sense of time and place that would subtly convey transcendence and enduring values?

Surprisingly, with Traci's help, I discovered some things which both grounded me in who I was and soothed the children by the expression of that reality. As a former French teacher and Catholic convert, I was stunned to find a set of antique leatherbound books from a convent in the old French walled city of Carcassonne in her shop on a small California suburban street. As I leafed through the works of St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila, small cards belonging to novitiates over a hundred years ago fell from their pages. I was both transported in time and space to a reality larger than my personal odyssey.

Having lived both on the East Coast and in France, I have often thought how we in America, especially in the West, suffer from a lack of history. There is something soothing about being cradled in a context larger than our own. Sleeping in a two-hundred-year-old house in Massachusetts or a two-hundred-year-old apartment in Paris, one cannot help but feel supported by the experience of generations of predecessors.

The average American moves five times in a lifetime, often thousands of miles away from family and community. How can we create a context for ourselves which will nourish us in times of adversity? The answer is to journey inward on a journey of self-discovery and, at the same time, to place that rediscovered self in a larger supportive framework. The homes which we create for ourselves can become representative of both who we are and what supports us — physical symbols of both the inner self and the outer universe.

When visitors tour our showcase of ideas in Palo Alto, almost without exception they speak of the special energy which they experience — the deep sense of peace which supports and renews them. Let me try to share with you the component parts of this — the healing elements of design.

## THE HEALING ELEMENTS OF DESIGN

Traci and I were brought together by a shared belief that design could speak to more than the eye — it could speak to the soul. How is it possible? Just as we exist on two levels — one physical and one spiritual — so design can address the latter as well as the former.

## INTENTION

The most important element in creating a nourishing environment is to have the clear intention to do so. When we created Healing Environments, we engraved our intention on a marble plaque in the entryway:

### *Healing Environments*

*A sanctuary for those  
who are suffering  
A shrine for those  
who have suffered  
A showcase for ways  
to relieve suffering*

When we asked a priest to bless our space, he replied that it had already been blessed many times by our work. What is the intention of your home? To nurture your loved ones? To offer a place of refuge and renewal to all who enter? To be a place of celebration for friends and family?

## TRANSCENDENCE

How does one express the metaphysical concept of transcendence in the physical concreteness of design? Let us look at the origin of the word. From the Latin *trans*, meaning “across or beyond,” and *scend*, meaning “to climb.” How can design enable us to climb beyond the limitations of our troubled lives? Design can serve as a code for a deeper or larger reality. In order to do so, it must operate on more than one level. It must speak of something larger than itself. How is this possible?

MY HUT:  
EVEN THE ICICLES  
GREET A NEW YEAR.

*Natsume Soseki*

## AGE

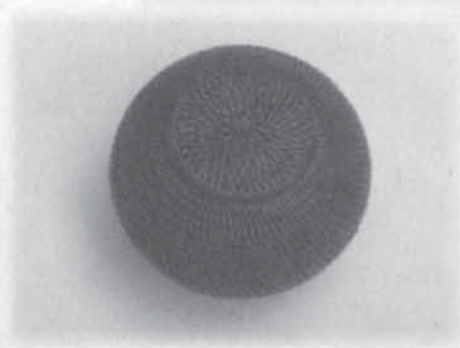
One way that design can place us in a larger context is through the medium of age. I came to a love of antiques late in life. What something with age does for us is to place our concerns in a proper context. The patina of a well-worn piece of wood speaks of crises weathered and survived. Those of us lucky enough to have family heirlooms know of what I speak. Eating holiday meals at a table that has seen decades of



the same gives a sense of security and containment. If we have no such heritage, we may borrow it by filling our lives with things that have brought others comfort in the past. Furniture need not be costly to be reassuring. My daughter's godmother furnished her first home with thrift store finds lovingly refinished. In the past things were built to last. It is this sense of solidity which the old imparts to the new.

## CRAFT

Another source of comfort in design comes from craft. Our Healing Environments showcase is filled with handmade things, as is *The Healing Home*. I recently purchased a miniature basket,



painstakingly woven by hand in an Asian country. What does this tiny object do for me? It speaks of patience and integrity. It was made in a context of tradition, rather than with an eye for profit. It has been made this way for centuries. It is reminiscent of an earlier age when time was not at a premium. When the rhythms of life were tied to the earth. When man was not the measure of all things. It speaks to me and tells me that all my hurrying cannot affect the universe. It tells me to take a deep breath and slow down.

## MEANING

The concept that household items might have a deeper meaning may seem strange to a modern Westerner. In ancient cultures it is the rule. It is for this reason that cultural artifacts are nourishing. They operate on multiple levels. In more coherent societies, the fabric of everyday life is woven from belief. It permeates the home with tradition and ritual. We twentieth-century Westerners must imbue the artifacts of our everyday lives with meaning. How can this be done?

## SYMBOLS

One way to imbue objects with meaning is to think in terms of symbols. The power of sandtray is derived from symbols. When we are drawn to objects that have powerful emotional valences or a charge for us, it is because they represent issues of great significance. Looking at the sandtray which I created for *The*

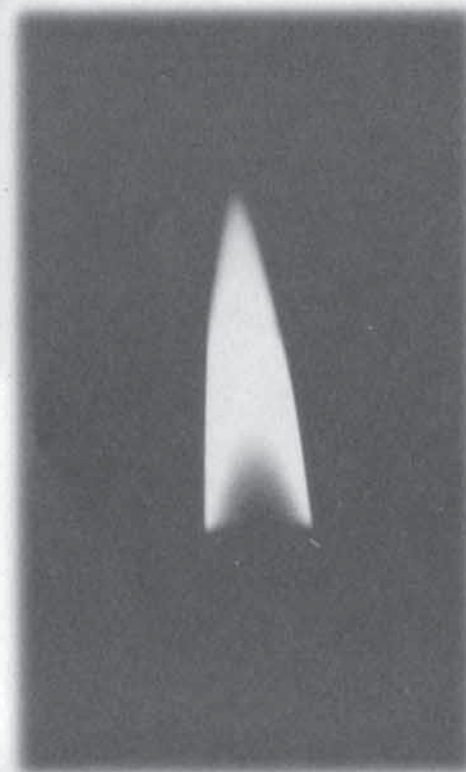


*Healing Home*, I see a very small figure piloting a large boat with a large angel in the stern. In the small figure I see myself. The angel represents a sense of support I feel from above. The menacing alligator in the water stands for the presence of threat in my subconscious. Like the language of dreams, symbols offer a shorthand to the core of complex issues.



## HEALING ART

Our space at Healing Environments is filled with healing art. What do we mean by "healing" art? Healing art is art which enables the viewer to transcend his pain (whether emotional or physical) by connecting him to a sense of the universal. This connection is both grounding and comforting. It presents a larger context in which the viewer feels supported and sustained. **KS**



EVERY LIFE  
NEEDS ITS ALTAR.  
IT MAY BE IN A CHURCH  
OR QUIET NOOK,  
IT MAY BE A MOMENT  
IN THE DAY,  
OR A MOOD OF THE HEART...  
BUT SOMEWHERE  
THE SPIRITUAL LIFE  
MUST HAVE ITS ALTAR.  
FROM THERE,  
LIFE GAINS ITS POISE  
AND DIRECTION.

Esther B. York

## A SENSE OF PLACE

With a healing environment you have the opportunity to transcend both time and place. My favorite true story of a healing environment was told to me by a massage therapist in Arizona. A former homecare nurse, she shared this story of her favorite patient: a quadriplegic, paralyzed from the neck down, who had lived for fifteen years in a small room. His nurse brought him the world.

He loved eagles, and she found an artist who painted a soaring eagle on the wall opposite his bed. Next, she fashioned an inexpensive arbor made of string over his bed and trained fresh green vines to climb them and surround him with living, green growth. Finally, she set up a mirror so that, for the first time in fifteen years, he could see the moon from his bed. After a year in her care, he regained enough movement so that he no longer required a night nurse.

Transport yourself into a transcendent world within your home. In the master bedroom of our *healing home*, we have created a corner of Asia, virginal in its tranquility. An ancient shrine houses a statue of Kuan Yin, the Buddhist bodhisattva of com-



passion. A set of age-old doors stand as a symbol of transformation. A delicately carved armoire guards personal possessions. Jasmine and snow white orchids hint of exotic climes with their transcendent beauty. An embroidered pillow on a pristine embossed coverlet cradles us to dream of infinite possibility. A beautiful photograph by Stephen Johnson astounds us with its painting-like nature. A map drawn by an eighteenth-century French courtesan outlines the rocky course of love.

IF THE SACRED  
IS TO BE DISCOVERED  
OR REAFFIRMED  
IN THIS CULTURE,  
IT IS TO BE FOUND  
UNDER THE BED.

Linda Sexson

## A SENSE OF TIME

Not only can one be transported in space but also in time by interiors. In our grandmother's bedroom, we catch a glimpse of treasures of the past. On her desk we see her father's photograph, and spread out across her journal are precious letters from the past. She has been writing in her journal of her early fascination with film, capturing for her loved ones a sense of who she has been and will always be. Time is suspended as we relive the past and transmit it into the future. When one is drawn to things by love, enchantment happens. After finding our grandmother's quilt we were delighted to discover magical words stitched in the quilting: "Your children will never be alone while playing in the fields or walking in the streets of your cities...the spirits of my people who loved this land will be among them. You will never be alone."



THE VALUE OF  
A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP  
TO THINGS IS THAT  
IT CREATES INTIMACY,  
AND INTIMACY  
CREATES UNDERSTANDING,  
AND UNDERSTANDING  
CREATES LOVE.

Anais Nin



## A SENSE OF MEANING

In our humble bungalow we have encountered a wealth of meaning. As we enter the front door, the first thing that greets our eye is a welcoming tableau. Framed by an arching orchid and strong bronze candlesticks is a small yet important shrine to the centrality of the heart, speaking of timeless transcendent values.



Warmed by the fire and vibrant earth colors, the living room speaks of simplicity and of taking our place in nature. The beautiful large photo of Yosemite's Half Dome serves as a window to the world outside. In the corner is an enormous clay pot (so large it would only fit through the room's french doors). The birch branches in it bring the forest indoors. Beneath the overarching branches is a large hand-hewn Jungian sandtray. Its symbolic tableau speaks the language of the unconscious, echoing life's deepest issues.

Moving into the dining room we are offered another vista in nature. A second large black and white photograph by Stephen Johnson invites us into a grove of bare trees. Old English antiques and mission style bookshelves ground us with a sense of history. Ostrich eggs speak of life's cycles and nature's bounty.



## HEALING ENERGY

While we were "shooting" *The Healing Home* magic happened. The small, warm bungalow glowed with fellowship and shared purpose. One by one the rooms came alive as we worked to imbue them with meaning. A shared lunch around the dining-room table, the beauty of candlelight and a fire, reminded us that nothing creates a healing environment more than healing energy — energy created by mutual respect, admiration and a shared mission. So remember, one can enhance one's home with beauty, but ultimately, intention and kindness will bless your efforts and carry the day. **KS**



THE HOUSE IS MORE THAN A BOX  
WITHIN WHICH TO LIVE;  
IT IS A SOUL ACTIVITY TO BE RETRIEVED  
FROM THE NUMBNESS OF THE WORLD  
OF MODERN OBJECTS.

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*Robert Sardello*

## MAITRI REVISITED

*Bless the soul that lives herein...*

*Go confidently in the direction of your dreams. Act as though it were impossible to fail.*

Dorothea Brandt

**A**s I sit down to write an update about our design work in San Francisco, I am reminded of this quotation. As co-directors of Healing Environments, Kate and I have encountered many people and situations that have affected our work — as we continue to grow, our priorities must adjust to our needs — it is in trying to meet our mission statement that I feel most humble. The work that we seek to create at Healing Environments might puzzle some, inspire others and, hopefully, at its most powerful and sincere effort, comfort many.

MAITRI: RESIDENTIAL CARE FOR PEOPLE  
LIVING WITH AIDS  
SAN FRANCISCO, CA

Maitri is completely occupied. Fifteen bedrooms are now microcosms to their inhabitants. At press time, six residents will have passed away since opening their doors in November. I drop by weekly to check on things and to stay connected to them.

I believe we breathe life into our work by maintaining a relationship with it. Almost every time I visit, I am bewildered by the amount of work that can still be done. More art. More elements of funky, handmade accoutrements. New “this” and different “that”. I have to remind myself that no project is ever completely finished. Life as process. Design as process.

I think one of the most troublesome aspects of renovation and expansion projects is the realization that what

has taken years to create will be lost. It came in different stages at Maitri — first with the staff move to the new address, secondly when the residents moved in. The “flow” was different. Walking through the halls and living rooms felt unfamiliar. There was a despair at times that the “soul” was lost. What had they sacrificed to move from a home to a home-like facility?

I consulted with a friend whom I have known for years — who has often lent wisdom and kind words during hard times — I explained the sense of sadness and abandonment I felt inhabiting the hospice and she passed on these words: “...let them know it is okay to feel grief and loss over the move. The people that are making the transition were initially drawn there for a reason. There is a sense of loss — the love and work they have put into the original will be missed. More importantly, the people at the core (the executive director and core staff) need to create a new vision and fan the flames of that vision. The group wants to be on board — They just don’t have a new vision to hold on to yet.”

I have become more involved in the transition of moving into a new space. We all know it is difficult and exciting, but we try to settle in as if it were routine. Consider this as an opportunity: What if we consider moving as an opportunity to refuel our intentions — to name what is important to us and place that knowledge on every doorway, every window, every room? In Japan my husband Rick and I witnessed a new taxi being blessed at a temple for wealth and prosperity. At the time we thought it was unusual and a bit funny, but it makes a lot of sense to me now. Be deliberate about your intentions — make it happen.

A special thanks to the people that live and work at Maitri for allowing me to continue to learn from their home. It is the most heartfelt education that I have ever received. **TT**



Interior Photographs by Lance W. Keimig

## HOW TO BLESS YOUR HOME

**S**ome suggestions for how to bless your home: Know what is important to you before you begin. What are the values you want to instill in your home?

Invite friends or people who support your vision. Ask them to contribute their own creative offering.

Consider using music, poetry, candlelighting. We all participate in a blessing ceremony every birthday. Let us consider extending this to our everyday lives.

Light a candle or burn sage to begin the ceremony that you are about to create.

Walk through the space, blessing each room or area that is especially important to you.

In conclusion, hold hands in a circle to commemorate your intention. **TT**

PEACE BE WITH THIS HOUSE  
AND WITH ALL WHO LIVE HERE.



## TREE OF LIFE

**N**o home should be without the healing power of music. On a recent stressful morning at Healing Environments, we put on Lauren Pomerantz’s CD *Tree of Life*, a new year’s gift from a good friend. The soothing strains of “Angels Within” filled us with peace. Inspired by the Jewish mysticism of the Kaballah, an ancient oral tradition of Medieval Spain, this original music is based on the sacred geometry of the Kaballah’s ten spheres.

One need not understand, nor ascribe to, the underlying philosophy in order to benefit from the meditative, calming effect of this intentional sound healing. On hearing it for the first time, I resolved to make it a part of my daily life. **KS**

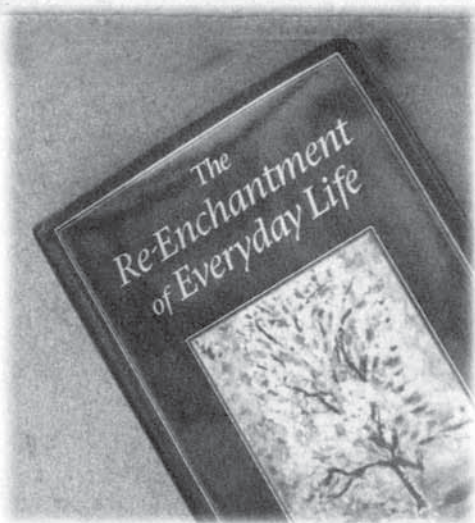
For further information, call Songbird Music: (510) 938-4003

# BOOKS OF LIGHT

## RESIDENT SPIRITS

I grew up believing in the beauty of old things. As the daughter of an antique dealer, I learned at an early age that some pieces of furniture tell a story and that the grain of a wooden table or the contours of a desk hold meanings that far exceed their utility. A cabinet hinge, an odd-sized drawer, the finely-etched glaze of a teacup — these details are all traces of a private history, or so it seemed to me.

Perhaps this is why I read Thomas Moore's *The Re-Enchantment of Everyday Life* with such a pleasurable sense of recognition, for in Moore's world it is in life's details, however seemingly ordinary or insignificant, that soul resides. Here, in the framing of a favorite family photograph, the uneven blue wash of a handmade jelly cabinet, the texture of a blouse, he finds the possibility of enchantment, enjoining us to seek with him "the magic that lies just beneath the surface of familiar things."



In response to a "culture of extreme ambition," Moore offers his vision of enchantment as a means of restoring a sense of the sacred to a world distracted by technological complexities and attached to "excessive rationality." An enchanted world, in all of its manifestations, is one that "speaks to the soul, to the mysterious depths of the heart and imagination where we find value, love, and union with the world around us." Moore encourages us to take a lingering second look at our surroundings, noticing the ways that even the most quotidian objects give image to interior experience. These are the "acts of attention," he tells us, "that bring spirit into daily life" and reveal for us the "hidden power of persons and places."

Understandably, the question of home and habitat figure centrally in Moore's reflections. Home, for him, is nothing less than "one of the great mys-

nothing is

teries that motivates every day of our lives." And, as such, he speaks eloquently of the experience of home, carefully examining the multiplicity of meanings that inhere in the very concept itself. In recognizing that materials and crafts "house spirit," he also honors the often trivialized elements of design and decoration, inviting us to bring art to our design of life and to embrace the enchantment of even the most utilitarian spaces. "Nothing is more intimate than home," he discerns, "and therefore nothing more proper to the soul":

*Whatever it takes to call forth the spirits of home, our own lares and penates — ancient Roman household spirits — is worth our effort and expense. It is always time to trim a plant, glaze a window, clean a rug, or write a poem about home, talk to relatives about the old days and the old homestead, and remember the failures and painful memories that took place at home. All of these go into the making of the soul's home.*

Moore is careful, though, to protect his recommendations from misinterpretation and simplification. As a psychologist who has seen the suffering and emotional paralysis caused by our collective homesickness, he knows well that enchanted living, far from being incompatible with "practical, productive activity," is essential to it. To those, then, who might dismiss his perspective as precious or quaint, he convincingly points out that rather than being in conflict, enchantment and worldly effectiveness ineluctably serve each other, "one delighting the spirit of ambition, the other comforting the heart."

In *The Re-Enchantment of Everyday Life*, Moore asks us to think about the rooms and gardens we inhabit—their light and shadow, their borders and thresholds—not with an eye to perfection or opulence, but with a heightened sensitivity and reverence for what he calls the "resident spirits," the unpretentious dweller who sustains the dialogue between experience and imagination and thus "holds life together." **DA**

*For my father, Jack Allen, owner of Potpourri Antiques (1953-1976), 1640 Union St., San Francisco*



## BARRIER FREE

Today, I am visiting with my friend Arlene who was stricken with polio when she was an athletic twenty-year-old.

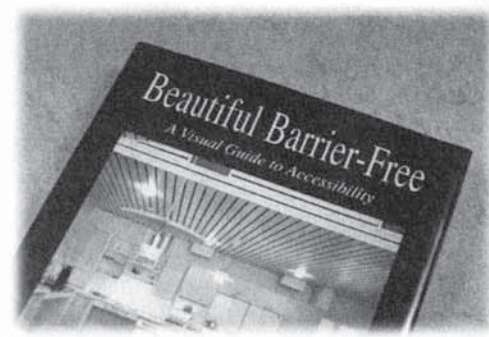
It happened in 1950, and she has been confined to a wheelchair ever since. She shares a commonality with one out of every five Americans who are disabled in some way.

Arlene recalls, "When I was very young, my mother took me downtown and I'd see people with disabilities like blind men selling pencils. I was disturbed and I would question her for a kind of reassurance that even if it happened to them it could not happen to me. I thought I was invincible."

Any one of us, in a minute, can join the ranks of the forty-three million Americans that need help to see, hear, speak, walk, or lift. A well-designed space plan can mean the difference between an independent, home-based lifestyle or a severely hampered one. Fortunately, new licensing and code standards are increasingly pressuring designers to find innovative answers to accessibility problems.

*Beautiful Barrier-Free* by Cynthia Leibrock is a sensitively photographed visual guide that shows the way to a future of independence and good living.

To succeed in the future takes planning in the present. In addition to the treatment of doors, windows, appliances, cabinets, bathrooms and kitchens, there are even suggestions for the use of satin sheets and satin pajamas for people who have trouble turning over in bed, or for installing a bathtub remote control which specifies water temperature and water level.



Leibrock is highly regarded for her insightful work and is the founder of Easy Access Barrier Free Design in Aurora, Colorado, an organization that proves that good design is a perfect balance of form and function.

Remodeling a bathroom or kitchen is a small price to pay for lengthening one's stay in the comfort of one's own home and is a preferable alternative to having to move to an assisted-care facility. **SS**

## HOW TO CREATE A HAVEN

*Start with intention.* What are you seeking to accomplish? Do you hope to express your innermost self, honor a significant relationship, accommodate children, comfort one who is suffering? All of the above?

*Eliminate clutter.* To create a sense of tranquility, limit the sensory input to a comfortable level. Visitors to Healing Environments are always struck by its sense of peace, but how to accommodate the chaos of life? Hide it as much as possible. Place it in closets or aesthetic containers: baskets, armoires, etc.

*Surround yourself with things you love.* When I moved into a small house after my divorce, my former husband said: "So this is what you wanted for twenty-three years!" A friend said that the rooms were so infused with who I was that it looked like a giant sandtray. If you surround yourself with things you love, your home will have a natural beauty and coherence. Consider including things with age, cultural artifacts, objects crafted by hand and heart, symbols with significance. Celebrate life and your own sense of identity.

*Honor your past.* Sift through old letters and photographs to document your life. Frame a love letter. Surround a missing loved one's photo with flowers. Ancient cultures have always integrated the spiritual into the home; create a shrine to honor your past and frame your future.

*Revere your dreams.* Consider creating an "altar" on which to place a symbolic representation of what you wish in your life. At Healing Environments we keep a current issue of our newsletter on the tatami mat in the meditation room. At home I keep a card with each child's name on my tiny chapel's altar.

*Create a ritual.* Frame your day. I check into my tiny closet chapel morning and evening. Monks in monasteries bless each time of day with prayer. Ritual can be used to transcend both time and distance. When my co-worker David and I were separated during my vacation, we maintained a sense of connection by meditating at the same time each day: nine a.m. in California, six p.m. in Greece. In pre-industrial times, man was grounded by his connection to the earth. In this age of computers and cell phones we must consciously struggle to maintain a sense of eternity amidst the pace of technology.

*Strive for transcendence.* With whatever means possible, try to imbue your home with a physical representation of a higher or deeper level of reality. It is this which will sustain you through difficult times and ground you and your loved ones.

*Include music.* Find the music which best speaks to you and make it the background of your life. Use it, as Shakespeare once said, "to knit up the unravelled sleeve of care."

*Incorporate nature.* Nothing speaks to one's place in the universe more than nature. Whether the serenity of a beautiful orchid, the joy of a canary's song, the lush growth of a fern, or the purring of a cat — nature, plant or animal, soothes us by placing us in the larger context of the natural world.

*Make your art healing art.* Select art which speaks to you and affirms your deepest longings. Art which reflects who you are. Art with meaning.

*Bless your home.* Bless yourself. You are a child of the universe. You deserve comfort, honor, reverence. Your life is sacred and deserves to be framed lovingly and with intention. You deserve a healing environment, a healing home, a haven. *Give thanks.* **KS**

TOGETHER  
WE  
WILL  
COMFORT  
THE  
SUFFERING.

### OUR MISSION

Our mission is to aid the current movement toward holistic medicine—toward treating the whole patient (mind, body, spirit) and encouraging hospitals, hospices and individuals to nourish patients, families and caregivers with healing environments. What is a healing environment? We believe a healing environment is one that offers sustenance to the soul and gives meaning to experience. It is one that enables those who are suffering to transcend their pain by connecting to the universal through the transformative power of beauty and art, and that gives comfort through this connection.

HEALING ENVIRONMENTS  
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