



THERE IS A SENSE OF CALM, OF INCUBATION AND ISOLATION FROM THE HECTIC WORLD OF ACCIDENTS AND DRAMA.

NORTH EASTERN REHABILITATION CENTRE

BILLARD LEECE PARTNERSHIP HAS DESIGNED A SPACE FOR PEOPLE TO RECOVER FROM THEIR PRIVATE TRAUMAS THROUGH THE PERFORMANCE OF PERSONAL ROUTINES.

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It is one thing to be commissioned to design a space that is a family home, or a country hideaway or a place to shop, but it is a whole other challenge to design a place to heal.

Designed by Billard Leece, the North Eastern Rehabilitation Centre is not by any means a flashy or glamorous spa, nor a private aquatic leisure dome. Rather, it is a very pragmatic and humble place that people visit to confront their serious injuries. Here they come to terms with the changed state of their bodies after a wide range of physical traumas such as workplace accidents, operations, strokes, pregnancy and car accidents, or debilitating conditions such as cerebral palsy and Parkinson's disease.

Two to seven times a week, patients visit the centre to undergo aquatic physiotherapy. Each group spends around forty-five minutes in the pool where they silently repeat their tailored personal exercises, holding tightly to a stainless steel railing and using the warmth and buoyancy of the water to relax and strengthen

their tense, troubled muscles. A therapist assists the group, in turn taking each member out from their introverted recovery trance, and floats them on their back (assisted by foam tubes and floaties) to participate in what they call "seaweeding." For most patients, this is the highlight of the session. The therapist gently guides them by their shoulders, snaking them this way and that through the middle of the pool, their inert body swaying like seaweed. Whether exercising at the railing or gently eddying on their back, each patient stares with glazed eyes, as if their mind is in a faraway place.

The pool area itself is largely dictated by fairly clinical design limitations and parameters. For instance, the promenade on either side of the pool is wide enough for wheelchairs, while there are no steps, except for those in the pool itself, which are edged with a dark warning strip. The pool has a medical grade hydraulic seat installed to assist patients who are unable to walk into the water. All of these things contribute to a

distinctively austere aesthetic and a sense of pragmatism with one goal – to heal. Besides the stainless steel railing and non-slip practicality of the pool, however, there are features of the architecture that recognize the emotional side of healing.

Directly above the square pool, the slanted ceiling is mostly made of a large polycarbonate skylight. Warm Alaskan yellow cedar beams and suspended internal piping bring a sense of ease and honesty. Nothing is hidden and everything is safe. The natural sunlight helps warm the space so that whether in or out of the water, there is little chance of muscles seizing up in the cold. There is a sense of calm, of incubation and isolation from the hectic world of accidents and drama. There is a feeling of pause and release – as the therapist reminds the patients each session, this place is all about "letting go." ¹

¹⁺² / BY SELECTING POLYCARBONATE FOR THE ROOF, THE ARCHITECT HAS OFFERED LIGHT AND OPENNESS TO A SMALL AREA THAT HAS LITTLE OPPORTUNITY FOR EXTERNAL VIEWS.

³ / THE POOL IS EQUIPPED WITH THE NECESSARY FACILITIES TO ASSIST PATIENTS WITH THEIR PERSONALIZED REHABILITATION PROGRAMS.

