

Henry Domke's photographs of New England aster flowers are printed on glass and adorn the walls of the ground floor of the Hershey Children's Hospital in Hershey, Pennsylvania.

# THE *Picture* OF HEALTH

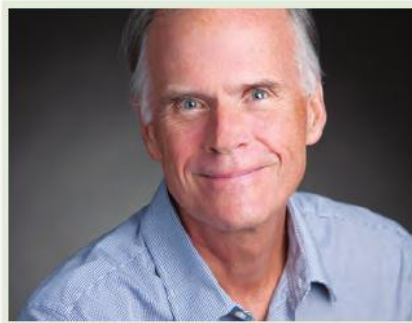
*Henry Domke's nature photography finds a home in hospitals.* BY PORCSHE N. MORAN

**AFTER SPENDING** more than two decades of his life in the medical field, it seems fitting that doctor-turned-artist Henry Domke prefers to display his work in hospitals rather than art galleries. Healthcare facilities in the United States, Puerto Rico, Canada, England, Germany, and Saudi Arabia showcase his nature photography in their patient rooms, hallways, and waiting areas.

Despite his international reach, Henry does most of his work in his own backyard in New Bloomfield. He and his wife, Lorna, live on a six hundred-acre property with many plants, animals, woods, prairies, ponds, streams, and limestone bluffs. Part of the area is the Prairie Garden Trust—a nonprofit the Domkes are developing.

"These days, I rarely leave the property," Henry says. "Home is my favorite place. It is where I take the majority of my photographs."

Nature walks are a daily routine for Henry. He treks through his vast acreage in central Missouri inspecting the wildlife. In addition to his camera, he carries a pair of binoculars to get close-up looks at the native birds and butterflies.



At age sixty-three, Henry Domke's art career has really just begun, as he was a family practitioner for over twenty years.

"I've been interested in nature since I was a kid," he says. "I'll often get lost in what I'm doing in a really positive way. I lose my sense of time, and I'm totally in the moment."

Henry didn't take a traditional path to becoming an artist. After high school, he enrolled in art school but never attended. Instead, he went to the University of Kansas to major in biology, went on to attend medical school at the University of Missouri, and spent twenty-three years as a family doctor in Jefferson City.

"My parents thought I was crazy when I said I wanted to be a doctor because I'd always been interested in art," he says.

Although he put his artistic aspirations on the back burner, they never completely went away. During a yearlong study abroad trip in medical school in 1977, he had the opportunity to

COURTESY OF HENRY DOMKE

As with many of his photos, Henry Domke captured this image of water lilies on his property in New Bloomfield. The photo can be found in a healthcare facility in Rancho Mirage, California.

sharpen his photo skills. He shot rolls of film in Denmark, Papua New Guinea, Kenya, and New Zealand. Decades later, he reduced his hours at his practice to study fine art at MU. Henry's photography finally made its big debut in 2002 at an art show at the Kemper Center for the Arts at William Woods University in Fulton.

"I think that the definition of an artist is someone who can't say no to art," Henry says. "The desire to do art was always there."

In 2003, Henry fully embraced his art career and founded his company, Henry Domke Fine Art. The purpose of his business, which he co-owns with Lorna, is to provide better and more appropriate art for healthcare facilities.

"The problem that I saw was that the people picking the art for hospitals were choosing edgy, conceptual art that would fit in a high-dollar gallery," Henry says. "That's not what people in a hospital want to see. If you're in a hospital, you're likely nervous. You might be in pain. You don't want to be challenged by the artwork. The purpose of art in healthcare should be to reduce stress. There are studies that show that images of nature have a calming effect."

Henry's first major installation was a huge success. In 2003, Blessing Hospital in Quincy, Illinois, ordered forty large prints. The



hospital has even continued to incorporate more of Henry's work with each renovation and expansion.

"I didn't expect any of this," he says. "My art career has been like riding a wild horse. It has been a lot of fun, and the path keeps changing."

Although photography offers Henry freedom and creativity, he still approaches it with the precision of a doctor. He rejects the majority of his photos, and the ones he keeps go through an extensive editing process that includes months

of revisions. He currently has more than five thousand images on his website.

"Some of the things I learned in medicine have been helpful to me as an artist," he says. "I have to be thoughtful, professional, and consistent."

Henry's clients go beyond paper and canvas when displaying his work. Some have put his images on metal, acrylic, and glass. Recently, a national textile company began using his photos for a line of fabrics. He also works with a company in Iowa that backlights his work on LED panels.

"It's so cool to see my work transformed with these various materials," Henry says. "It's an *ah-ha* moment when I see it for the first time."

Henry might not be able to predict where his business will go next, but he has an idea.

"The goal is always to get realistic, attractive images of nature," Henry says. "The way that a great photograph of nature can make you feel is a visceral thing that can't be described in words. If an image makes my heart sing, then I consider it to be a good piece. I've failed if a client doesn't say 'wow' when they look at my art."

Henry's art is on display at health centers throughout the state. For more information, visit [henrydomke.com](http://henrydomke.com) and [prairiegardentrust.org](http://prairiegardentrust.org).

These photos of flowering dogwood trees hang in at the Stewart Cancer Center at Boone Hospital in Columbia. Henry also has other works on display throughout the hospital.



COURTESY OF HENRY DOMKE