

■ **Finance**
Construction financing
out of hibernation 17

■ **Investments**
Consolidation spree
still in early innings 20

■ **Operations**
Turnaround strategies
for higher profit 23

■ **The SHB Interview**
Capital Senior Living's
CEO Larry Cohen 25

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■ **Development** 7 design trends to watch

page 12



Good Shepherd Cottage at Santa Teresita, Duarte, California. The assisted living cottage is Craftsman style with an airy interior opening to the outside courtyard. Architecture, design and furnishings by SmithGroupJJR.



Belmont Village Senior Living strives to customize the design of its buildings to match the surroundings. Belmont Village of Sabre Springs in the San Diego area features a mission-style design with resort amenities to reflect the California lifestyle. The property contains 164 units, including independent, assisted living and memory care.

■ Development

Seven design trends to watch

By Jane Adler

The economic downturn had an impact on just about everything — even architecture. The pause created by the lack of new construction gave architects and developers time to rethink building designs. New ideas have emerged that are both more practical and more appealing than the designs of the past.

Another result of the downturn is a renewed focus on assisted living and memory care projects. These need-driven buildings are in demand as the overhang of the housing meltdown continues to keep many younger seniors in their single-family homes. New designs are targeted to appeal to frail seniors as well as their adult children who often figure in the housing decision.

With that backdrop in mind, here are seven major design trends shaping seniors housing today:

1 Flexibility

Buildings are being designed to accommodate quick reconfigurations. Units can be combined or expanded depending on the demand for certain types of apartments. Walls are easy to move. New common areas can be carved from existing spaces when the need arises.

"We are designing our buildings so remodeling is simple," says Tom Daly, senior vice president for architecture at Houston-based Belmont Senior Living. For example, Belmont's assisted living building in Oak Park, Illinois, opened with one floor of memory

From flexibility to efficiency to sustainability, architects adjust to the changing times

care. But now, as residents age, another floor in the building has been designated for memory care.

Twelve memory care units are grouped together around a so-called "homeroom" that serves as a living area and activity space for residents. Belmont creates homerooms in existing buildings by combining several resident units.

New buildings are designed to include homerooms that can be used for something else until they're needed for memory care. "It's easy to convert the space," says Daly.

2 Outside in

Developers and architects are carefully considering how to bring the outdoors inside the community. Courtyards often now function as real outdoor rooms in contrast to the standard patio in the back of a building that never gets used.

Benton House assisted living projects are built in a figure-eight layout around two courtyards. Units have a lot of natural sunlight and every apartment has access to a courtyard, or has a view of the outdoors.

"The interior courtyards are heavily utilized," says project developer Brenner Holland, general manager of residential real estate at Hunt Midwest Real Estate Development headquartered in Kansas City, Missouri. Resi-

dents have raised planters in the courtyards to grow vegetables and herbs.

The San Francisco-based architectural firm SmithGroupJJR designed the assisted living cottages at Good Shepherd Cottage at Santa Teresita in Duarte, California. The light and airy craftsman-style buildings open to the outside with patios and courtyards.

The courtyards will be enclosed for memory care cottages, but will have the same natural light and open spaces as the assisted living buildings.

3 Transitional, not traditional

Interior designs no longer have an old-fashioned look meant to appeal only to elders. Flowery wallpapers and detailed fabrics are being replaced by more modern, tailored accents. Interiors must have an up-to-date look for baby boomers, the adult children who help make the housing decision.

"The architecture shouldn't be stale," says Joyce Polhamus, vice president and studio leader for senior living at SmithgroupJJR. The firm did the interiors for Bayside Park, a contemporary project in Emeryville, California.

Polhamus admits very modern architecture won't work in every market. She is quick to add, however that "senior living design is wide open for change."

4 Efficiency

While there's disagreement whether resident units should be made larger or smaller, building design overall is becoming more

efficient. Today's central kitchens, for example, need fewer big appliances, such as fryers, since diets are changing.

"A large variety of foods can be produced in a small kitchen," says Paul Donaldson, principal at architecture firm Perkins & Will based in Dallas. New convection ovens can replace two or three pieces of old equipment. "Space needs are going down," he says.

Resident apartments use space more effectively, too. Ten-foot ceilings and big windows make a small space seem big. Built-ins provide more storage. Outdoor balconies give a feeling of expansiveness.

"We are using dollars more wisely," says Rockland Berg, principal at three:living architecture based in Dallas. The firm designed Heritage Farms, a new project about to get under way near Dallas. The buildings have a ranch-like look in keeping with the surrounding area.

5 Over the top (not)

Upgraded finishes such as crown molding and coffered ceilings are used in common, high-impact areas, such as entryways and dining venues. The apartment units themselves are much less opulent than they were five or 10 years ago when consumers expected the kind of finishes commonly found in condominiums.

Granite counters, wood flooring and frameless showers are no longer standard in new retirement communities. Today's consumers are wary of overly fancy apartments, says



Hunt Midwest Real Estate Development includes courtyards in its designs to draw residents outside. Benton House at Shoal Creek in Kansas City, Missouri, features a courtyard with seating areas, shade and raised beds for gardening. The property has 59 suites for assisted living and memory care.

Donaldson, at Perkins & Will. "It's a balance of making a product that's appealing, but not so stately that the consumer feels it's a waste of money."

6 The new wow factor

Forget the big, two-story atriums and dramatic staircases found in the seniors housing projects of a decade ago. Today's projects aim

to wow residents with a comfortable feeling. "It's got to look nice," says Daly of Belmont. "But the lobby has to be non-confrontational."

He explains that an 85-year-old resident moving from a longtime home doesn't want to be overwhelmed by an intimidating environment. Belmont lobbies have no high ceilings or vast open spaces. Instead, the lobbies are more homelike, like a living room.

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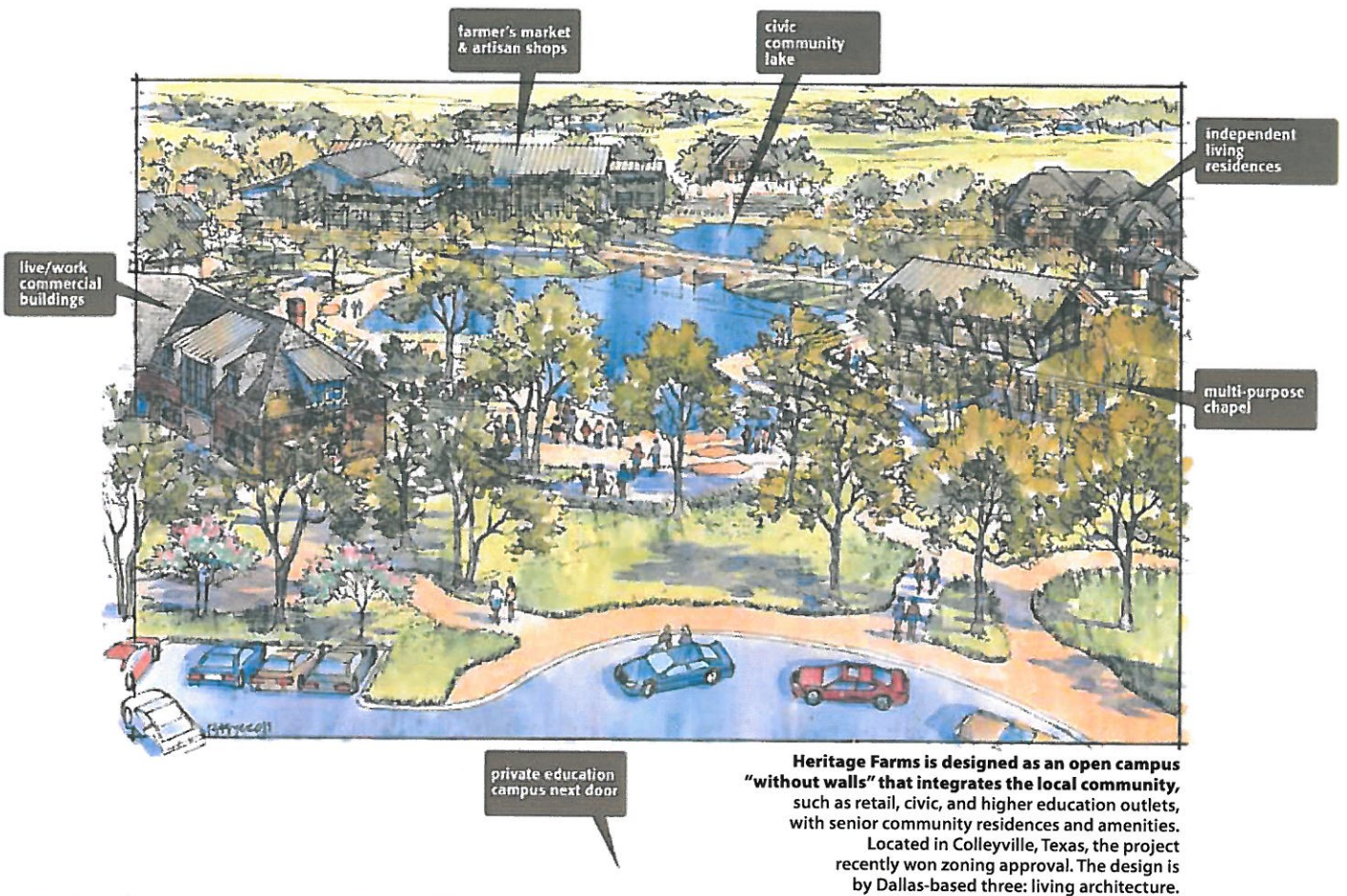
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Heritage Farms is designed as an open campus "without walls" that integrates the local community, such as retail, civic, and higher education outlets, with senior community residences and amenities. Located in Colleyville, Texas, the project recently won zoning approval. The design is by Dallas-based three: living architecture.

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Architect Steve Ruiz agrees. "We create a series of rooms in the lobby," says Ruiz, vice president and sector leader for senior living at Moseley Architects based in Springfield, Virginia.

The rooms are open, separated by columns to create several comfortable seating and activity areas. Visitors can see through the spaces to the outside.

The same holds true for the dining room. Instead of one big room, the space is broken into different areas to accommodate resident preferences.

"Some people may want to sit near a window, others may not," says Ruiz.

At Atria's assisted living buildings, spaces are defined. The Louisville-based operator has 130 communities in 28 states. Instead of a large room with a big television at one end and a library at the other, a separate theater room is available for movies and television.

Atria recently created a new bistro at its building in Irvine, California. The bistro is located just off the lobby in order to add some excitement and activity to the front of the building. The design is meant to appeal to

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Do consumers care about green design?

"We think it does sell," says Mark Alexander at Atria, which has four LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design)-certified projects and another one under development. LEED is a program that provides third-party verification of green buildings.

residents and their adult children.

"We are trying to merge the two tastes," says Mark Alexander, senior vice president of redevelopment at Atria.

New nursing facilities also divide space to create a more comfortable feeling. Victorian Village in Home Glen, Illinois, is about to start construction. Based on the so-called Green House model, the property will include a group of small buildings or houses.

Ten elders will reside in a house. Each building has a shared kitchen and living room to encourage interaction among the residents, says project architect Jim Moyer, partner at SAS Architects & Planners based in Northbrook, Illinois.

7 Green

Sustainable design continues to grow in popularity, especially if it's practical.

Solana at Deer Park, in Illinois, will feature 102 independent and 88 assisted living units. The project, by Formation-Shelbourne Senior Living Services, currently in the zoning process, will include a covered parking lot with a green roof. It will serve as a park for residents, who can also use the area to walk their dogs.

"We tried to figure out the greatest amenity for the least amount of cost," says project architect Ruiz at Moseley Architects. The project requires covered parking because of unpredictable weather.

Ruiz estimates the construction cost of an underground parking lot at about \$30,000 per parking space. The covered parking with the green roof costs about \$10,000 per space.

Do consumers care about green design? "We think it does sell," says Mark Alexander at Atria, which has four LEED (Leadership

Consumers voice strong opinions on building design

Well-designed buildings sell themselves. Take 66-year-old Pauline Bukantz, for example, who recently toured retirement communities in the Las Vegas area in search of a new home. "I saw a lot of places," says Bukantz, a transplanted New Yorker. "The look of the building is important to me."

The buildings Bukantz toured were generally in good condition, but most were dated. They didn't feel fresh or new to her. "The buildings looked like they were from 20 years ago," she says.

Community tours reveal inadequacies

The apartments were too small. Many units had inadequate kitchens. One building had units with no kitchen at all. Another community had assigned seating for meals. Most buildings had one large lobby, and, in some, residents were asleep.

Bukantz eventually found a community she liked, Merrill Gardens at Green Valley Ranch, which offers independent and assisted living apartments. "This is a beautiful place," she says.

The lobby is divided into intimate seating areas that invite conversation. A small kitchen sits at the back of the lobby for cooking demonstrations.

A patio wraps around the first floor overlooking well-landscaped gardens. Residents can eat on the patio or inside a charming dining room. Bukantz feels good when she enters the building with its two-story foyer and skylights. "It's classy," she says. "It's like a resort."

Bukantz rents a one-bedroom apartment for \$3,275 a month. The rent includes meals, activities and transportation. The apartment has a regular



Common spaces are divided into small seating areas to encourage conversation at Merrill Gardens at Green Valley Ranch in Henderson, Nevada.

kitchen with full-size appliances. No dorm-style refrigerators. Big windows provide lots of sunlight. Her unit also has a walk-in closet. "I don't think of this place as the last stop, or as a place I have to be," says Bukantz, a poet and artist, who displays her work in the building's lobby. "This is truly a home."

Potential residents know what they want

Consumers know what they're looking for in a retirement community, according to recent research by Varsity, a marketing firm based in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, that specializes in the mature market. The company conducted a series of focus groups with people in their 60s and 70s who toured a variety of retirement communities. Varsity researchers also lived in retirement communities for a month at a time.

In general, consumers thought the living spaces were too small, especially the kitchens. They also complained about the lack of storage space, and computer work stations. Apartments were favored over detached houses or cottages. Seniors

also wanted a place that could accommodate pets.

Covered parking was a plus. But participants were generally skeptical about fancy finishes and a lot of expensive amenities such as swimming pools that might be costly to maintain.

"Practicality is the key," says Shane Swisher, senior public relations strategist at Varsity. Another finding is that consumers wanted to stay in their independent living apartments as long as possible, says Swisher. "They understand aging in place."

— Jane Adler

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Top, before and after photos of Atria Tamalpais Creek, Novato, Calif. The award-winning redesign of the project reflects the style of the surrounding wine country.

Designers are gradually moving away from very traditional designs, right. Contemporary furnishings provide an up-to-date look at the AgeSong at Bayside Park project in Emeryville, California. The Architect was Kava Massih Architects. SmithGroupJJR made the furnishing selection and specifications.



in Energy and Environmental Design)-certified projects and another one under development. LEED is a program that provides third-party verification of green buildings.

Atria Tamalpais Creek, located in Novato, California, won a 2011 design award, and has a LEED-Silver certification. The property was extensively redeveloped, including an exterior makeover to reflect the architectural look of the surrounding wine country.

Outdoor patios include pergolas and attractive furniture. Each of the five buildings has an amenity, such as a fitness center, movie theater, or bistro. New walkways connect the buildings, points out Atria's Alexander. "It's a better experience for the residents." ■

About the writer

Jane Adler is a freelance reporter who has covered seniors housing for more than 10 years. She reports on the industry as well as consumer trends.



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