

Designing For Seniors

Of the many challenges of the 21st century, one of the most demanding that faces planners and designers will be to rethink housing and communities for healthful and responsive senior living. The aging American population and rising average lifespan are transforming current perspectives on growing older and retirement. Senior living communities are evolving as well, to ensure that they meet the changing needs of older adults.

A major trend in today's senior housing market is a shift away from the traditional assisted-living format toward independent living facilities. Whereas the older model consisted of institutional and often sterile environments, independent living facilities offer seniors the mobility, amenities and freedom to maintain rich and active lifestyles. "Choice" is the dominant theme in senior housing development today. Continuing Care Retirement Communities (CCRC's) have grown in popularity over the past decade and allow people to "age in place" - seamlessly moving from independent living to assisted living and into skilled nursing care as their health and housing needs change over time.

Building Community

From the perspective of the Landscape Architect, the CCRC format presents a variety of challenges and design opportunities. Elements that build community - shared open space, places for gathering, recreation amenities and pedestrian connectivity - help create and support successful design. Integrating open space at different scales is the key. Open space in contemporary CCRC's ranges from large public lawns and park-like spaces, to neighborhood gathering areas and more intimate residential patios. While many CCRC campuses are as much as 50 acres in size, with multiple-storied congregate living and assisted care buildings that are quite large, a sense of smaller neighborhoods and outdoor space can be carved out of the bigger place to achieve a more livable scale.

From large walkways and common areas for socializing and programmed events, to beautifully landscaped dining terraces, courtyards, gazebos, fountains and water features, senior living communities require an outdoor landscape that is functional and that encourages social interaction. Integrating and expanding the notion of lifelong wellness into senior living landscapes goes beyond basic fitness to help people "age in place" vitally and successfully. Active outdoor recreation facilities often include court games, golf, croquet, community vegetable gardens, bird and wildlife sanctuaries, wellness and healing gardens.

Sitting spaces throughout the community also address a range of needs - allowing for conversation in small groups, providing necessary privacy and independence for residents and visiting families, as well as places for staff-organized events. Gardens are a powerful venue that elicit peoples' emotions to the senses of smell, touch, taste, sight and sound. In creating these connections, residents' feelings of familiarity and belonging are strengthened.

The Next Challenge

In coming years the contemporary CCRC will continue to evolve with the impending influx and demands of an aging baby boomer population that represent approximately 76 million Americans. Many will have over 30 years as active retirees and will demand increased

Designing for Seniors

The Cedars Healing Gardens

On the Boards

In the Winter Issue

News

[Robert Pratt is a LEED Accredited Professional](#)

[Zebulon Town Hall Receives Anthemion Award](#)

[Grayson Baur Promoted to Associate](#)

[Pittsboro Town Park Holds Ground-breaking](#)

For more LHPA News visit
<http://www.lhpa-nc.com>

Age-friendly Design Considerations

- Provide lots of shade, as the eyes of the elderly take longer to adjust to bright light.
- Colored concrete and other non-glare pavements make walkways easier to see as well providing adequate traction for the mobility impaired.
- Eliminate steps to make gardens and walks accessible to everyone, including those using assistive devices such as wheelchairs or walkers.
- Make patio and walking surfaces as flat as possible by subdividing pavements into smaller, "mini" drainage areas.
- Minimize use of curbs at building drop-offs and entrance spaces. Provide seating near doorways.
- Use furniture to create a variety of opportunities for seating that provide sturdy, inviting places for small groups and individuals.

opportunities for learning, technology, environmentally-sensitive design, greater opportunities for outdoor recreation, and the ability to foster vibrant intergenerational relationships. As designers we must respond to the cultural and social dynamics that are important to today's senior communities and expand our notions of the aging population to embrace their sustained growth of mind, body and spirit.

The Cedars of Chapel Hill Healing Gardens

The Healing Gardens consist of two enclosed courtyards designed for patients with Alzheimer's disease or other forms of memory loss and dementia. Each garden takes into account the progressive nature of the disease and exhibits specific design objectives depending on the physical limitations and mental challenges of the patients.



The North Garden is designed for residents in the early stages of Alzheimer's, incorporating elements that stimulate memory and evoke a sense of familiarity. As a "stylized backyard" the courtyard is organized around an open lawn area with edge plantings, patio trees, lawn ornaments, furniture, and a white picket fence attached to the building at its outer perimeter. The "working" part of the backyard features a wooden arbor and raised potting planter - adding a therapeutic element in the garden - where residents and staff plant their own seasonal flowers.

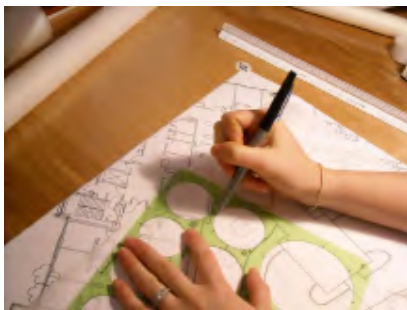
The "working" part of the backyard features a wooden arbor and raised potting planter - adding a therapeutic element in the garden - where residents and staff plant their own seasonal flowers.



The South Garden is designed for residents suffering from more advanced stages of dementia. These patients are more apt to feel confusion if over-stimulated or presented with a number of options while moving. A brick path creates a continuous circuit to facilitate movement and mitigate frustrations over dead-ends or decision-making. Garden elements and bench destinations

are located to assist in orientation and to prompt wayfinding.

On the Boards at LHPA



[UNC Chapel Hill Rizzo Executive Conference Center](#)

[Fayetteville State University Science & Technology Building](#)

[UNC School of the Arts Library](#)

Next: In the Winter Issue of *Traces*

The Well-Integrated Site

The Cedars Great Lawn



The Great Lawn occupies the dominant ridgetop of the site. The Lawn is civic in scale and purpose, creating the functional and symbolic center of The Cedars community. Described

at its edges by a double allée of tulip poplars and a pedestrian walkway, the lawn also provides a social focus including a central fountain space, porte-cochere garden and croquet court. A secondary layer of smaller shade and flowering ornamental trees provide additional scale for the vehicular drive, four-story villa and clubhouse entries.

Cascades at Verdae Walkway System

A network of campus sidewalks, garden paths and woodland trails helps to unify this 40-acre CCRC, making it a truly "walkable community." Campus sidewalks encourage outdoor physical and social activity by connecting various neighborhoods and community facilities. A continuous walkway located along the interior of the main drive minimizes vehicular-pedestrian crossings and is used as an exercise loop approximately three-fourths miles in length. Residents seeking a different pedestrian experience may choose an illuminated garden path that links independent cottages, congregate apartments and central commons walkways or a mulched woodland trail that connects gazebo rest areas, Clubhouse waterfall / pond patios and an informal amphitheater where local musicians and reparatory groups perform.

Croasdaile Village Pavilion Courtyard



One of four gathering spaces conceived in the LHPA Landscape Master Plan, the Pavilion Courtyard provides a place for social gathering in a warm and inviting garden environment. The gardens are enjoyed from a walk-

way circuit capable of accommodating wheelchairs and those needing assistance in walking. An open-air pavilion provides an architectural anchor to the gardens, provides shade for sun-sensitive visitors and is widely used for playing cards, chess and checkers. Each garden - the Butterfly Garden, the Rock Garden and the Bog Garden - provides an opportunity for residents to enjoy a different horticultural experience, birds and insects, and a variety of color throughout the seasons.