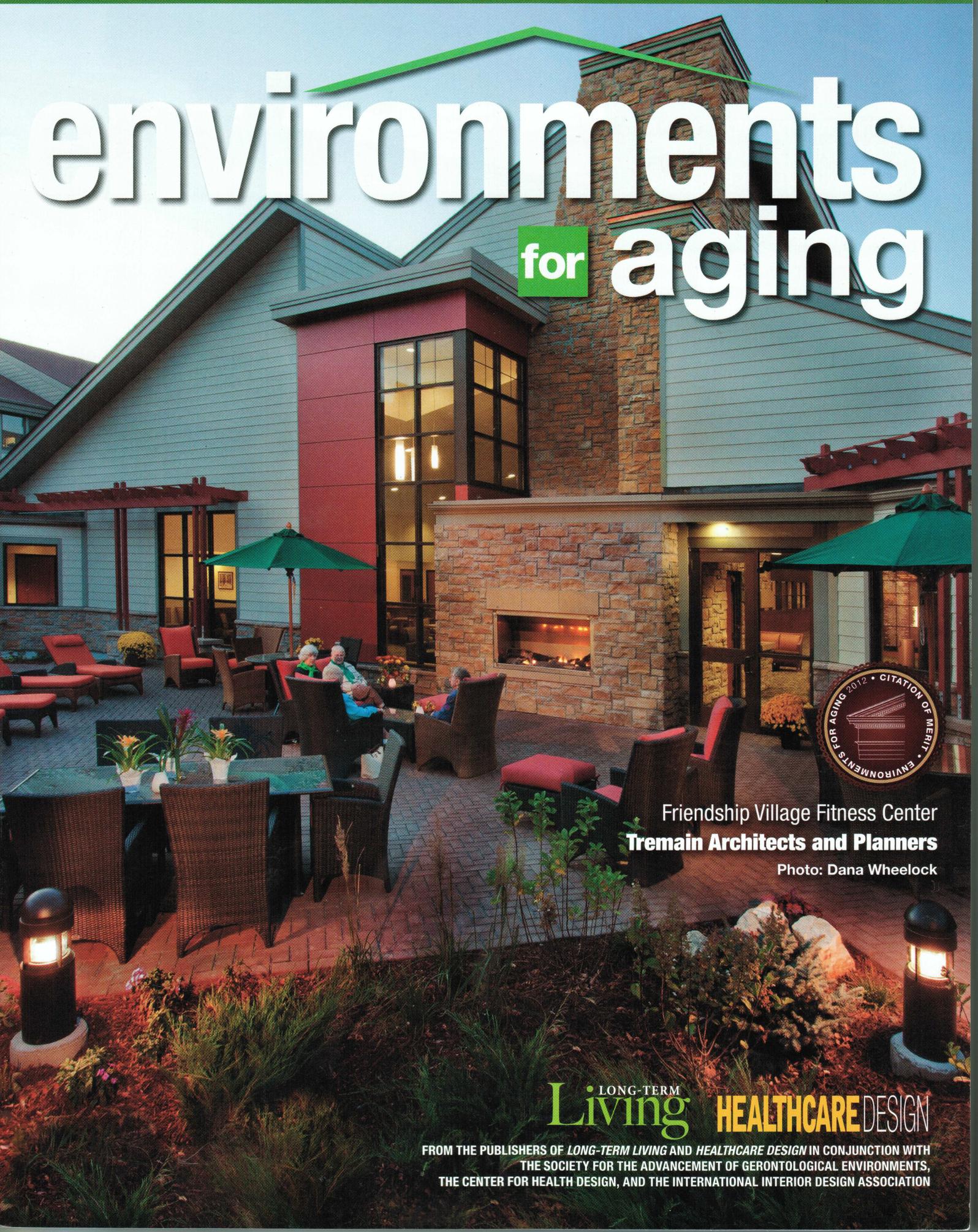


environments for aging



Friendship Village Fitness Center
Tremain Architects and Planners

Photo: Dana Wheelock

LONG-TERM
Living **HEALTHCARE** DESIGN

FROM THE PUBLISHERS OF *LONG-TERM LIVING* AND *HEALTHCARE DESIGN* IN CONJUNCTION WITH
THE SOCIETY FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF GERONTOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENTS,
THE CENTER FOR HEALTH DESIGN, AND THE INTERNATIONAL INTERIOR DESIGN ASSOCIATION

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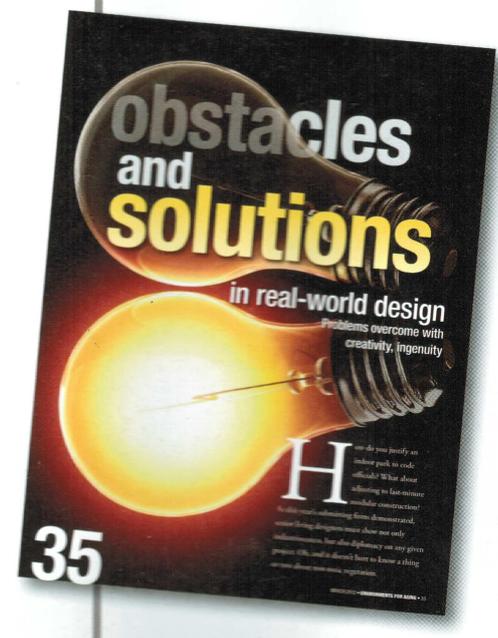
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'Active agers' drive new design model

Seniors choose community integration and engagement

BY GARY KOERNER, AIA, NCARB; AND ROCKY BERG, AIA, NCARB

Often, basic approaches in architecture and interior design develop incrementally in a given sector—with changes barely perceptible over time. But on rare occasions, both disciplines must take a quantum leap to a fundamentally new model—usually in the face of major new market realities.

We face such a watershed moment today in the senior living sector. And, speaking from experience, those who adapt to the new era wisely will enjoy success for several decades to come. It has been the good fortune for both my co-author Rocky Berg and me to arrive at the edge of a new era in design earlier in our careers—and to have the privilege of influencing basic design models.

For me, it was in the hospitality industry. I was the design architect on The Mansion on Turtle Creek in Dallas, whose design was influential in creating the boutique model of hospitality that took root in the '80s—and continues to flourish today. For Rocky, it was in the senior living industry. During the '90s, Rocky led our design effort on a bold new vision for

independent living combined with a continuum of care and stylish living. The result was Edgemere in Dallas—now widely recognized as a prime template for resort-style senior living.

Ironically, the new era we face in senior living design can best be described as a fusion of boutique hospitality and independent-oriented senior living. The result is an “active aging” design model that offers a clean departure from any existing models.

This new model—which we have coined “living architecture”—is predicated on a dramatically shifting new social landscape that demands lifestyle resources that move in sync with active lives in motion—and their exacting expectations.

THE NEW SENIORS

Before I share specifics on how living architecture *looks* and *feels*, let me point out what it must *achieve*. Fundamentally, it must address a number of new design imperatives being driven by a demographic tidal wave that includes both the boomers—who began to hit 65 in 2011—and what we call the “proto boomers”—those Americans now reaching 75, who have largely the same expectations.

Like the boomers, the proto boomers are still mostly fit and active—and intend to stay that way. Collectively, some refer to this segment of the senior population as “active agers.”

Active agers go mainstream. The number of Americans considered by some

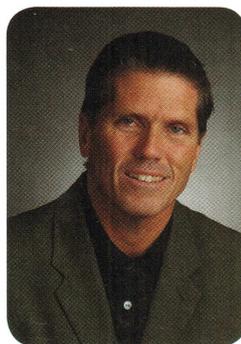
as “seniors” between the ages 60-75 is now one of the largest population blocks in America—with the boomer “bulge” continuing to feed it. This means that aging Americans are no longer the declining demographic on the margins of the mainstream—they *are* the mainstream. They determine their environment—and no one else.

Not surprisingly, active agers insist on services shaped to them rather than shaping their lives to the institution in terms of items such as meal choices, healthcare and engagement with the broader community.

For the first time, aging won't equal exile, however elegant, to the margins of mainstream society. It means an extended active and productive life, lived in the nexus of the larger society. Community integration and engagement is the new design mantra. Communities will become inclusive living environments, instead of islands of exclusivity.

Retirement is obsolete. “Saving our society” is back. A second new reality is that most aging Americans no longer anticipate retiring in the sense of ceasing to be productive and earning money. They simply can't afford to and, in many cases, prefer to pursue the boomer ideal of unending personal growth and relevance. They will need a living platform designed for both ongoing productivity and personal expression.

Healthcare as individual as your thumbprint. Because of advanced new



Gary Koerner, AIA, NCARB



Rocky Berg, AIA, NCARB

A shifting social landscape demands lifestyle resources that move in sync with active lives in motion—and their exacting expectations.

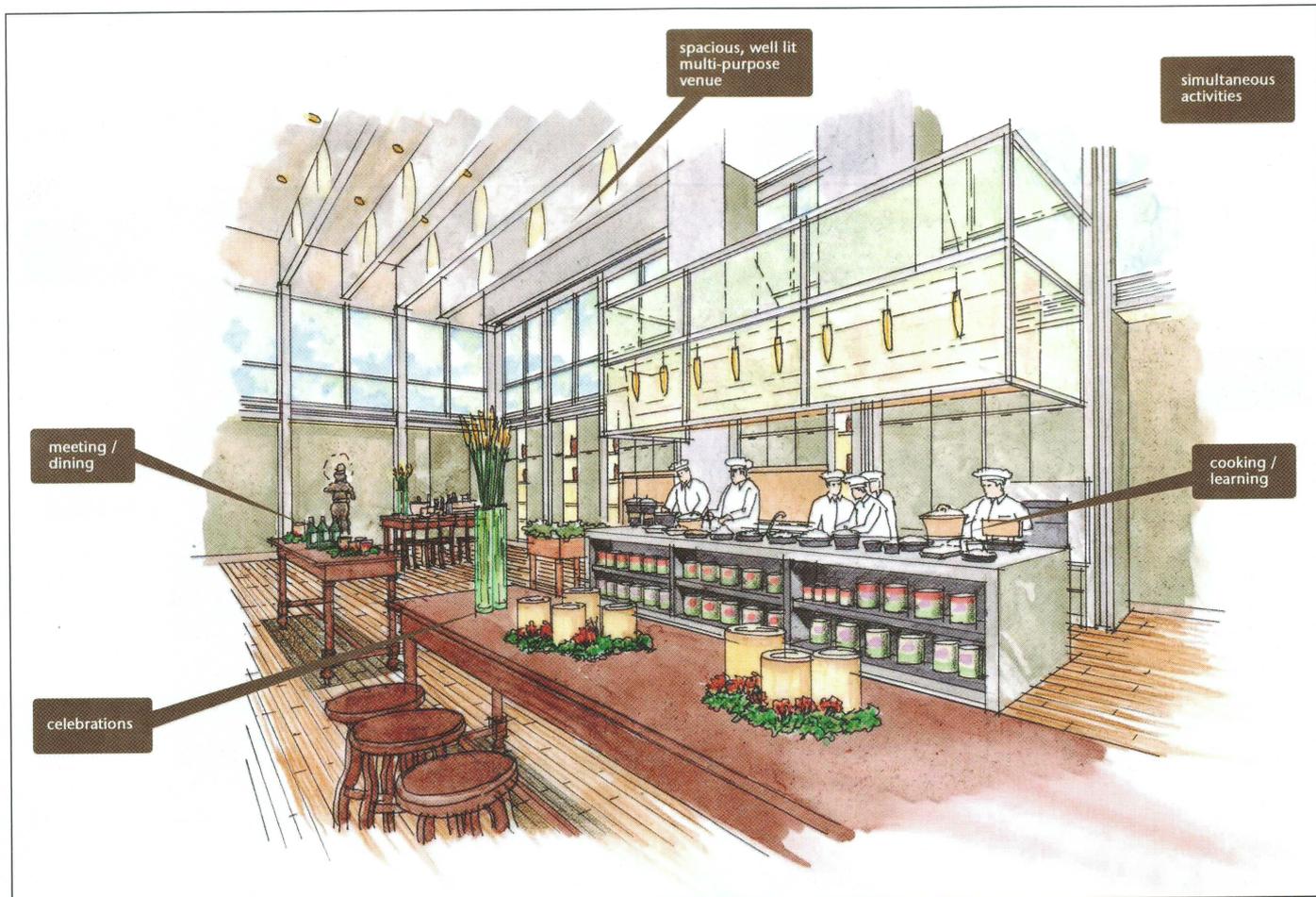


Figure 2. A creative use of functional space to incorporate multipurpose and multisensory experiences. *Rendering by three: living architecture*

Within the community itself, design choices will create much more efficient use of space while enhancing the guest experience. Rather than spaces being defined by function, such as a meeting room being only and always a meeting room, the architecture itself will transform that space into multifunction spaces—merging multisensory

experiences into a single space.

For example, a space might have an open desk or table surfaces for group meetings but also include a kitchen or bar station in the same area. This “mash up” of activities allows more active use of functional space and injects a higher level of energy and mental engagement (figure 2).

Hospitality-driven design innovation will permeate every inch of the living community. In guest rooms, furniture and closets will have built-ins to make maximum use of available space, rather than having to retrofit furniture from a previous house that claims an extra foot or two of clearance and is completely unnecessary.

The kitchen will be more compact—functional, but wonderfully styled and integrated into the living space. Bathrooms will be spacious, tailored and stylish with a feel associated with luxury hotels as

opposed to the institutional offerings of today’s properties.

While a bold fresh vision, the good news is that this new model will allow developers to remain—or become—viable despite a down economy because it is shaped for the future, starting today. The really good news is that some of its elements can—and are—being retrofitted into existing communities, making them attractive to boomers and thereby extending the life of the community for the next 25 years, as active agers reshape the “second half” of how Americans live. **EFA**

Gary Koerner is founder and principal of three: living architecture, based in Dallas. He has been involved in design solutions for the hospitality industry and works with the senior living design group at three: living architecture, which is headed by Rockland (Rocky) Berg, also a principal at three: living architecture. For more information, visit www.threearch.com.

Within the community itself, design choices will create much more efficient use of space while enhancing the guest experience.