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SENIOR LIVING

ISSUE 6 2017

# EXECUTIVE

## THE INNOVATION ISSUE

Identifying design  
trends and emerging  
technologies



# CONTEMPORARY DESIGNS TAKE SENIOR LIVING TO THE NEXT LEVEL

BY JANE ALDER

Forget the stereotypes of what a retirement community should look like. This year's Argentum Senior Living by Design winners showcase best-in-class contemporary architecture, featuring open layouts, large windows, light-filled interiors, natural finishes, clean lines, and comfortable spaces.

The designs take their cues from the surrounding neighborhoods and landscapes. Views connect the inside to the outside, whether it's a busy streetscape or vast desert. Interior color themes are drawn from the local topography. Muted backgrounds and materials are often interspersed with pops of bright color to create focal points of interest.

Each winning design leverages the unique qualities of the property. Belmont Village Albany in California is situated on land owned by University of California, Berkeley (UC Berkeley). The university's blue and gold colors are prominent throughout. Merrill Gardens at Ballard is located in a Seattle neighborhood with Scandinavian roots, the inspiration for a design with blonde woods and blue accents. At The Ridge in Salt Lake City, the views of foothills and mesas take center stage.

Wellness is a theme that runs throughout the winning designs. Fitness centers are prominent project elements. Spring Lake Village in California crated a new fitness center and auditorium and placed it at the property entrance – a signal that wellness is a way of life at the community.

The designs are partly driven by residents and local stakeholders. Belmont Village Albany involved input

from groups at UC Berkeley. Residents of Spring Lake Village wanted its new building to be environmentally sound.

The results are resident friendly with a focus on inclusion. Common areas are bright and open, often connecting a variety of spaces. Special attention is given to hip dining venues, with display kitchens and pizza ovens.

Look up. Even the light fixtures are bold, in a variety of shapes and colors. One ceiling is covered with a veritable garden of lighted glass.

Design challenges are met in unique ways. Creative configurations fit buildings onto small parcels. Dated structures get smart overhauls.

Special thought is given to outdoor spaces. Club Sole at the Colonnade in Arizona has a large desert garden with indigenous plants, walkways, a waterfall, and a creek. Merrill Gardens at Ballard features a rooftop deck where residents can sit by the fireplace and enjoy the view of the Puget Sound and the active streetscape below. Belmont Village Albany and Club Sole have interior courtyards where residents can socialize in a comfortable outdoor setting.

The 26 other Senior Living by Design nominees repeat many of these trends, highlighting flexible designs with a local flavor in mind.

But all the designs share something in common. They increase resident engagement in environments that offer a new approach to aging, leaving many of the old stereotypes behind.



Belmont Village Albany



## BELMONT VILLAGE ALBANY

Albany, California

**Provider:** Belmont Village Senior Living

**Architect:** HKIT Architects



Context informs the design of Belmont Village Albany, a senior living community near the campus of UC Berkeley. The 175-residence project draws its inspiration from the university, the local community, and the exceptional surrounding natural environment. “We wanted to capture the feeling of the Berkeley community,” said Patricia Will, founder and chief executive officer of Belmont Senior Living.

The project was conceived and designed in affiliation with the university as a retirement community for faculty and staff, as well as the residents of the adjoining cities of Berkeley and Albany. The community is the product of a broad collaboration with university, city, civic, and advocacy groups over a period of six years.

Situated on land owned by the university about three miles from campus, the building connects to the neighborhood with views of the area including an adjacent creek, a Little League baseball park, a school, the hills to the east, and the San Francisco Bay and Golden Gate Bridge to the west. Oversized windows flood the building with natural light, and five terraces allow residents to enjoy the outdoors.

The interior design takes its inspiration from the environment. Each level of the building has its own color palette and artwork inspired by the elements: earth, wind, fire, and water. “It’s a very relaxing atmosphere,” said Will.

Another goal was to create a project that was ecologically exceptional, said Will. Belmont Village Albany is



built to LEED Gold standards using environmentally-friendly materials and systems throughout. Sustainable features include solar power capacity, the use of low-emitting materials, high efficiency plumbing and light fixtures, and drought tolerant landscaping.

Part of the design challenge was to fit the building into a larger six-acre master planned development that includes retail and grocery while maintaining accessibility to the surrounding neighborhood. Civic engagement was part of the design process from the outset. The Albany Strollers and Rollers, an area advocate for people-powered transportation, guided Belmont in the development of bicycle lanes that were incorporated into the design, along with walking and biking paths.

“The connection to the academic, civic, and general community surrounding Albany is impressive and a highly strategic



approach to the next phase of senior living,” said Senior Living by Design judge Kelly Lindstrom, vice president of engagement and innovation, Vitality Senior Living.

The design breaks from convention in an important respect. Rather than separating residences by floors and wings, independent living, assisted living, and memory care are integrated under one roof. All community members, with the exception of those in secured memory care, share elevators, common areas, and dine together. The design helps encourage socialization and curbs ageism, and allows

couples with differing care needs to live together.

Emblematic of the overall designs in a monumental 22-foot burnished stainless steel sculpture situated at the exterior gateway to the property. “The community wanted a piece of extraordinary artwork,” said Will. The Belmont-commissioned piece, named Torqueri VIII, was created by renowned artists, and UC Berkeley grad, Bruce Beasley. He said: “The city had articulated a desire to have a sculpture that would act as a beacon and a sort of way-maker for the border between Albany and Berkeley.”

## “Cal” – Themed Library Belmont Village Albany

Designers may sometimes struggle for inspiration, but that wasn't the case with the library at Belmont Village Albany. Inspiration was right at hand since the community is located on land owned by nearby UC Berkeley.

The project's library takes its design cues from the university. The room is decorated in blue and gold “Cal” colors. Gold tone chairs and blue couches provide comfortable seating for residents.

The centerpiece of the library is handcrafted wall-sized “Cal” quilt created by UC Berkeley retiree Patti Owen, who also worked on the planning committee for the building, which was the result of a community-wide collaboration. The quilt is

composed of throwback “Cal” team jerseys, serving as a living piece of memorabilia for the alums, staffers, professors, and local residents who worked at the university or lived nearby and now live in the building. “It's a great piece of art,” said Patricia Will, founder and chief executive officer of Belmont Village Senior Living.

Senior Living by Design judge Amy Fouts, regional director of operations at Capri Senior Communities, said, “The project aligns in all design areas with meeting the needs of the retiring university staff.”

The library contains a robust book selection, but, as Will points out, many of the books are authored by the residents who are retired professors and researchers. “This is a very intellectual building,” said Will. “Our book club is more like an author's club.”

