

Hallways as havens: Community-driven corridors

Designers for senior living spaces often think about how their designs can help residents transition seamlessly to new communities. Unfortunately, moving from an independent dwelling or single-family home to a senior living community can be anything but seamless. It can feel as though you've stepped out of your home and into a cold, bleak corridor where every door looks the same.

Indeed, the deep-seated stigmas of senior living communities as institutional are difficult to shake. Buildings with bleak bare walls and dead-end hallways lack warmth and personalization and can make residents feel isolated and forgotten.

Our senior living practice seeks to overcome these stigmas by prioritizing the concept of continuity, striving to make that transition more seamless by developing solutions to make passage as easy, comfortable and familiar as possible. A natural place to focus is the corridor.

Perhaps one of the most overlooked areas of a living space, senior living corridors are typically nothing special. Dated carpet, blank walls and institutional accessories like nurse call lights and wall protection can easily strip a place of inspiration and warmth. To combat this, we encourage creative ways to overcome common hallway hurdles with tips for designing spaces that emphasize warmth, customization and community.

Be creative with hallway footprints. The corridor's shape is known as its footprint. A hallway may be straight, curved or even looped, which all



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affect the overall design and living experience.

Curved corridors introduce elements of intrigue, flow and even additional privacy from neighbors down the hall. Looped corridors are used in memory care settings to encourage continuous circulation and avoid dead ends, which can lead to

frustration and confusion. They also promote exercise and positive wandering experiences.

When dealing with an existing footprint that is unable to be modified, dynamic flooring materials and designs are an especially cost-effective way to affect a hallway's footprint with subtle colors or patterns to indicate entryways or directional changes.

It's also important to avoid blank walls at the end of a corridor. Make use of natural light, if possible, by playing up windows with built-in benches. Accented wall panels, eye-catching art and seasonal displays offer a nice alternative if windows aren't an option. Alcoves along a corridor also can offer touch-down points for resting or mobility assistance, recreating miniature living rooms to reiterate a cozy, homey feel.

Don't forget to look up. Ceiling design and lighting can impact an entire walkway. Surface-mounted fixtures such as accent sconces can add texture and warmth along a

hallway. Likewise, indirect LED lighting can create a more ethereal feel, with the ability to change light levels and color temperatures to create different moods or settings.

When it comes to ceiling design, designers often prefer to minimize acoustical ceiling tile to avoid an institutional feel. Gypsum board is a common alternative, which maintains a clean, simple look. Gyp soffits help create added depth and dimension, great for achieving a suspended ceiling or porch-like entryway, or simply breaking up a typical corridor.

Make hallways accessible. Unlike traditional residences or hospitality designs, senior living spaces require certain standards of accessibility such as width clearances, handrails and mobility storage. While designers must incorporate these elements into their designs, there are ways to creatively improve the results. Painted handrails can take on the elegant look of residential chair rails. Wall protection can be designed to emulate decorative wallcovering instead of solid, stippled wainscoting. Mobility parking, storage and charging stations provide dedicated space off the corridor to keep mobility scooters and power chairs out of the way. And when it comes to support spaces like mechanical and utility rooms, painting frames and doors to match the adjacent wall color can make them less visible and distracting to residents and visitors.

Create welcoming entryways. There's nothing like a friendly, well-lit front porch. Tapping into that familiar, welcoming feeling of home and community connections can

be challenging without the right entryway design. To achieve these results on a smaller scale, designers can include touches as simple as paint color to accent doors and walls, while structural elements like recessed entries, transoms and glazed sidelights can establish more of a "front door" façade. Residents may even feel encouraged to add their own plants, doormats or seasonal décor.

Another opportunity resides in entryway personalization. Built-in, backlit memory boxes not only light up the vestibule but highlight residents' meaningful photos or keepsakes. Digital memory boxes can display photos, videos or other digital content about the resident's life to trigger memory or engage reactions. Simple purse ledges can also do the trick – but lack the same gallery-like feel and security. Some spaces use shared memory boxes between doors, which can create connections with immediate neighbors.

As it stands, hallways and entryways often lack the warm, personalized qualities so integral to comfortable senior living spaces. Budget is often a concern, and existing infrastructure or health and safety requirements can make it difficult to make dramatic changes. However, even subtle changes like carpet color and lighting can make an impact on how residents perceive the space.

When designing for senior living, consider how something as seemingly straightforward as a corridor can help residents transition to a new space, improve their quality of life and foster greater connections to their new community.▲



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