

BOUTIQUE design

HOSPITALITY REINVENTED

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HIT MAKERS

GLENN PUSHELBERG AND GEORGE YABU
YABU PUSHELBERG

NEW AGE CASA DORINDA; MONTECITO, CALIFORNIA

Senior living design is no longer an oxymoron. The fact that there's a new generation of retirees opting for 5-star amenities and some paying entrance fees ranging from \$100,000 to \$1 million, according to the AARP, means the design has to match the price tag. So, owners of these retirement communities are looking to the hospitality industry and designers to amp up their offerings to keep the style-led pace with the spaces this affluent target market prioritized in their family homes and on the road.

That's going to translate to some major business opportunities for hospitality design specialists. And, it might be worth considering diversification into this field given the name-drop-worthy companies looking to develop a new kind of senior living option. Margaritaville has its Latitude brand to bring founder/musician Jimmy Buffet's laid-back vibe to the 55 and older community. Atria Senior Living and luxury real estate firm Related Companies partnered in a \$3 billion joint venture to develop senior living destinations in urban markets across the U.S. Meanwhile, major private equity player Blackstone Group has been acquiring senior living portfolio deals from many firms and made an investment in Longview Senior Housing Advisors. As with many deals in real estate, a new owner requires a new look.

As these facilities look to appeal to a new wave of residents who won't tolerate patronizing design, they also need to keep in mind the functionality of the spaces. Designers who want a share of this business will face down many of the challenges BraytonHughes Design Studios was tasked with during its renovation of public spaces at an 80-room Spanish Revival estate converted in the 1970s into the luxe Casa Dorinda retirement community.

"The main lesson to learn is to always be considerate of people who are hearing impaired or have mobility or visual issues," says Joel Villalon, principal, BraytonHughes. "As an example, this may mean that we include at least some public space seating with arms and consider seat heights and finishes when we specify those items."

Just like in the hotel industry, communal is in—but in a different way. "I believe that the goal in the next five to 10 years will be to focus on health—not necessarily physical health, but mental health, and what makes people happy. What kinds of opportunities we, as designers, can bring to the table to create these moments where community experience is going to be increasingly important," Villalon says. "We need to consider how can we craft places and 'invitations' so that people reinvigorate their minds by keeping them active and social."

The sentiment comes into play in public spaces, such as the dining room the firm renovated at Casa Dorinda. Challenge one: how to mitigate sound concerns. Solution: rid and replace. "We removed the sagging fabric panels that were mounted to the ceiling and installed perforated, acoustically backed wood plank panels that maintained the proper rating required. Plaster was then applied on the walls," says Villalon. The result is an open feel extending down from the refinished wood trusses on the ceiling. That made room for high-voltage visual statements such as the minimalist forged iron chandeliers reminiscent of trayed candles.

Challenge two: how to give residents some personal choices that would make this feel more like their own space without having "too many cooks in the kitchen," so to speak. That's where details really count. Responding to that brief from the client, the designers added liquor cabinets located adjacent to the dining room entry lounge. "Because most communities are



allowed to serve only beer or wine, the recognition that some residents like to have libations before, during or after dinner was included in the program," says Villalon. "The private lockers allow for residents to house their liquor and wine collections." But rather than hide these lockers behind the toilets as was the case pre-renovation (a speakeasy wasn't part of the equation; there's no give three flushes to get in, for instance), the millwork was integrated into the final design, nestled under and behind an entryway arch. And that's where form and function meet. ●

PROJECT PARTICIPANTS

CASA DORINDA	PURCHASING AGENT
CLIENT	Ness Group
Casa Dorinda, owner/ operator	LIGHTING
DESIGN FIRM	Formations
BraytonHughes Design Studios; Joel Villalon, principal; Rachel Fischbach, design principal; Jay Boothe, managing principal; Robel Dimaano, Meryl Stern, lead designers	Roman Thomas
ARCHITECT	CARPET
Cernal Collective	Decorative Carpet Shaw Carpet
CONTRACTOR	CASEGOODS
ProWest Constructors	Formations
LIGHTING CONSULTANT	Shawn Austin Vaughn Benz
Anne Kale & Associates	SEATING
	Artistic Frame Dennis & Leen Formations Gregorius Pineo
	MILLWORK
	Trummueu Stones (fireplace)

