

ideal living



what boomers are looking for in retirement living

Written by **KATIE MARKEY MCLAUGHLIN**
Photos courtesy of **LANDIS HOMES**

IF YOU'RE IN THE MARKET FOR A retirement community, you've probably already noticed that your options are greater—and more modern—than ever before.

With the baby boomer generation reaching retirement age, they now represent one of the largest demographics in the housing market. In turn, one-size-fits-all institutions are quickly being replaced by communities offering residents maximum choice.

This theme of “choice” dominates almost every aspect of today’s retirement living, from housing options and community spaces to meal plans and fitness facilities. The result? Baby boomers are able to find retirement living that suits them just right.

Housing Options & Home Features

Recent research by Ecumen¹, which develops and operates senior housing in 37 U.S. cities, shows that institutional senior living is declining in this country—with just 7.4 percent of Americans aged 75 and older living in a nursing home, compared to 10.2 percent in 1990.

Patio-size balconies on hybrid homes provide space for outdoor living.



Great rooms with large windows offer an open floor plan with abundant daylight.

These traditional nursing homes are being replaced by a plethora of housing options that run the gamut from independent to assisted living.

Active adult communities—which are often age-restricted but do not offer direct medical care or staff—are becoming increasingly popular due to their extensive amenities and resort-like settings.

Continuing care retirement communities (CCRCs) are also thriving, as they offer an independent-living lifestyle but greater levels of healthcare

services as needed.

Various styles of housing are also available. While some baby boomers might be interested in a single-family home, others might prefer a townhome or apartment-style living.

Still others might prefer a little bit of both, such as the new hybrid homes offered by Landis Homes near Lititz, Pa.

“The hybrids are an attempt to cross some of the benefits of cottage living with some of the benefits of apartment living to create something

that has the best of both,” explained Linford Good, vice president of planning and marketing.

The three-story, apartment-style structure has many of the draws of cottage living, such as garage parking and larger balconies.

Good also noted that, in general, residents today are looking for more square footage than was desired previously.

“Most people want at least two bedrooms or one bedroom with a den, and two bathrooms or at least a bath

Open floor plans of hybrid homes accommodate a variety of furniture arrangements in the great room.



Mission-style exterior of hybrid homes combine brick, stone, and stucco.



and a half," he explained.

This is in stark contrast to the 1970s, '80s, and early '90s, when one bedroom and one bathroom seemed sufficient for most retirees.

Baby boomers are also expressing a greater interest in more modern, open floor plans featuring a lot of natural light and connections to the outdoors, be it through larger windows, larger porches and patios, or both.

"With apartment-style housing, there's more effort to try to build so that the exterior wall is staggered, so that more homes are on a corner and therefore have two outside exposures," explained Good.

Additionally, baby boomers are looking for eco-friendly living. Landis Homes' most recent expansion features homes with sustainable materials and practices, partially because potential residents are looking for greener construction and improved energy efficiency.

Community Spaces

Now more than ever before, the social scene is as important as the home when it comes to choosing a retirement-living situation.

As such, many retirement communities are now offering plenty of communal space where residents can socialize, get to know one another, and attend events together. Residents can form their own groups and go out and do things together.

An important aspect to be considered when planning or redesigning space within retirement communities these days is the need for more large gathering spaces—for meetings, lectures, concerts, and more. It can be a big investment, but communities are finding it is a worthwhile expense.

Additionally, residences themselves are being redesigned to accommodate boomers' desire for increased social interaction with their peers.

Good explained that many retirement communities, including Landis Homes, are now breaking down a larger campus setting into smaller groups of households—sometimes called neighborhoods—to encourage social connection within a smaller cluster.

"We break it down into smaller entities so social interaction is more likely to happen," he said.

Their buildings also include more semi-public spaces, open only to those who live in the neighborhood and their visitors, again to foster a greater sense of community.

Dining

When it comes to dining, choice and flexibility are of utmost importance to baby boomers.

To accommodate this, some communities are beginning to offer more options for how and where the residents spend their money.

The "where" includes increased choices of dining venues. While many communities continue to offer a formal, sit-down dining option, it's now likely to be complemented by more casual dining venues as well—bistros, coffee shops, and delis.

Similarly, the food options are expanding to accommodate boomers' more varied tastes. Cuisine from around the globe is often offered side by side with traditional meat-and-potatoes meals.

Directors of dining and nutritional services at most communities understand the new eating patterns of their guests and are committed to

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accommodating residents' differing dietary needs and restrictions. There is more awareness of people who are vegan or vegetarian or have a gluten-free restriction.

Wellness

The average age for moving into a retirement community is dropping, meaning residents are more independent—and active—than ever.

To accommodate residents' desire to stay physically active, communities are offering onsite, indoor fitness facilities and swimming pools, plus outdoor options like tennis courts and walking paths.

What's more, boomers can expect greater options when it comes to mental wellness, too.

"People living in retirement have always been interested in continuing education," explained Good, "but there's more being offered that's targeted specifically to them. In the past you could audit college courses, but that doesn't always quite fit."

Today, boomers are looking for onsite courses or lectures targeted to their specific interests, and communities are working hard to meet that desire.

Over the past decade or so, retirees have started looking for places where they want to live, as opposed to places they feel like they have to live. Boomer and senior housing has been changing and expanding to create those kinds of spaces—offering fewer cookie-cutter living options and more one-of-a-kind retirement experiences. >>>

¹ Ecumen. 2009. "A New Day and New Trends in Senior Housing Development." Accessed at www.ecumenddevelopment.org/aging-whitepapers/