



# Integrative Senior Living Design

Remarkable Senior Living Facilities,  
from Concept to Reality

BY **CAROLE J. HYDER, MA**

[www.carolehyder.com](http://www.carolehyder.com)



# Introduction

## What can an Integrative Space™ do for an independent/assisted living facility?

Independent/assisted living facilities face increased competition in terms of costs, quality, efficiency, and innovation. Resident satisfaction and employee retention are crucial factors in creating and maintaining a successful senior living facility.

For these reasons, it's more important than ever to distinguish your organization as a leading-edge senior living provider. One way to do this is through the incorporation of Integrative Spaces™, a process which can enhance satisfaction, well-being and the creation of a place called "home."



“Improve the efficiency, effectiveness and atmosphere of your senior living facility using the Integrative Spaces Strategy™”

The incorporation of an Integrative Space™ strategy provides a unique and exceptional outcome, assuring that your facility is one-of-a-kind. This approach is perfect for your facility if you want to:

- Be the place where more and more seniors will gravitate who are looking for an engaging place in which to live
- Be on target as the demand for additional housing options expands
- Be a leader in integrative and innovative lifestyles for seniors
- Be part of a cutting-edge initiative that designs spaces that are unique and inspiring
- Take a proactive stand about addressing the housing needs of residents before they ask

### What is Integrative Space™?

*An Integrative Space provides design features which can lead to positive experiences, feelings and thoughts.*

The best way to achieve this optimal environment is through the intersection between the ancient principles of Feng Shui and the modern research behind neuroscience—one speaking to the physical aspects of an environment and the other to the energetics of a space, both approaches merging to create a whole greater than the sum of the two.

“An Integrative Space™ builds on and surpasses functionality to create a space that addresses a deeper language.

Independent/assisting living facilities must be functional and meet stringent code requirements. It is also important that, in doing this, the space maintain useful design principles. But all that still does not create a space that *inspires* those who are in the facility—residents, staff or visitors.

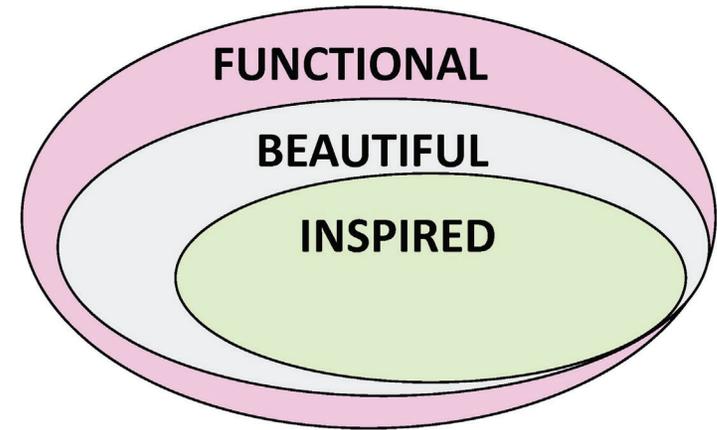
*Functionality and beauty are both enhanced by overlaying the powerful aspect of inspiration, taking an ordinary space and making it extraordinary.*

A resident's experience from the parking lot to the entry, the corridors, the common areas, and their own private space—all provide opportunities for them to have an inspired experience.

Creating a home where the residents feel safe, supported, and special leads to a whole and healthy life.

## How can an independent/assisted living facility apply Integrative Space™ principles?

In this e-book, *Integrative Senior Living Design*, you will discover practical applications of the Integrative Spaces Strategy, to support you in the creation of a senior living facility in which resident, staff and visitor will feel less stress and more inspiration. They will all feel like they've "come home."



**The Components of an Integrative Space**  
*Functionality and beauty are enhanced by the power of inspiration.*



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## CHAPTER 1

# Independent Living for Seniors: Starts Where You Enter

Living facilities that are constructed for people who are challenged or compromised in some way—by an illness, disability, surgery or aging—strive to assure that the occupants feel safe and empowered. This is particularly true for residents in an independent living facility who are still mobile and active, yet are no longer living in the place called “home.”

Whether it was because they needed more day-to-day care, they wanted to downsize their living space, or they felt isolated, seniors see an independent living facility as their answer. The situation with seniors is different than that of a hospital patient who can look forward to going home. Sometimes the decision to make this move was by their own choice; sometimes their family has made the decision for them.

Even though a hospital patient might have to endure a wall color they don't like or artwork that is not their favorite, they can do this because their stay in the hospital is temporary.



“Set the tone and intention for an Integrative Senior Living Facility with a welcoming common area

Let it be known, however, that studies have shown unpleasant situations actually slow down the healing process. That said, a hospital patient will be going home soon. A senior, however, has left his or her home and will not be returning.

An Integrative Space™ approach can help with this transition because it considers all aspects of life: physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. It provides a template for creating a space that “just feels good”—something about it is “right.”

Using neuro-scientific studies, architectural considerations and the ancient art of Feng Shui, an Integrative Space is more than functional and attractive. It is, above all, an inspired place for those who are making this big move, willingly or not.

One area that creates an initial impression for someone who is considering an independent living facility is the lounge—because it’s the first taste of what’s to come.

The lounge is a shared space where residents can sit, talk to other residents, wait for someone to pick them up, or visit with friends and family. It serves as the role of a living room (a public one) and sets the tone for the intentions of the facility.

Tips for creating Integrative Space™ in a common lounge area:

- Assure that furniture is arranged so there are conversational areas that accommodate large groups as well as just one visitor.
- Keep the TV focused in ONE area of the lounge to accommodate those who won’t want to watch or even listen to it.

- Have a reminder of nature somewhere—fresh flowers or plants (nice silk ones are acceptable).
- Provide some first-class distractions: an aquarium, an aviary, a beautiful scene out one of the windows, a fountain, sculptures or art on the wall.
- Have coffee, tea and/or water available as a hospitality gesture.
- Position a greeter or concierge near the lounge to answer questions, call a resident or direct visitors in the right direction.

Obviously, there must be space for walkers and wheel chairs to move around so the furniture can't be too cozy. It's important to keep the furniture clean and up-to-date as well. It should be a welcoming place for all.

The goal of an Integrative Space™ is to create an environment a senior will feel at home in and proud to show off.

It doesn't negate that they may miss their home terribly, but it may help them look upon their new life as that next great adventure.



## CHAPTER 2

# Hallway Design Factors for a Positive Patient or Resident Experience

A waiting room or entry to a medical, senior living or clinical facility is important because it creates the first impression. As a result, it can have a lasting positive or negative impact on a patient's or resident's experience.

However, there is another area that is sadly overlooked when it comes to making a statement about the professional and heart-centered care that someone might expect—those are the hallways that act as arteries leading people through the building.

Hallways are sometimes the forgotten stepchild of the space, treated only as a functional thoroughfare with little thought given to the possibility of creating another positive experience. Their potential remains untapped, ignoring the opportunity to echo the experience which the front entrance may be expressing.

There are, of course, necessary “back street” hallways in facilities that must remain straight and efficient to accommodate deliveries, move a patient or resident easily from one area to



“ Cultivate a positive impression on residents, staff and visitors as they make their way through the facility

another, transport of carts, etc. But there are other hallways that are open to residents and visitors alike and which can make an extraordinary statement.

Ways corridors can become an integral part of patient experience:

1. **Aspire for curves.** To remove the perception of a long and tedious walk, curve or jog the halls to create interest and reflect the natural movement of biophilic principles. Although this feature is best integrative when the building is being designed, any opportunity during a remodel to soften the experience is optimal.
2. **Offset long straight halls.** When a public hallway is long and straight, “speed bumps” can act as a counterbalance. Windows overlooking a garden may offer some relief; a small seating area or a bench will break up the expanse of the hallway. Interesting lighting could create patterns on the floor providing short-term areas of focus. And, of course, artwork could provide a moment of relaxation and distraction, and even a moment of surprise and delight.
3. **Provide directional assurance.** A dramatic and interesting hallway can support verbal instructions or provide appropriate cues as to where to go. Looking for the blue wall or the pillar covered in plants or the red tile may be a landmark that might work better than signage.

The corridors can be just as much of an ambassador for the facility as any other part of the space. In fact, they may be more so because no one really expects inspiration to be carried through at this level. Don't waste this space.

## CHAPTER 3

# Senior Apartment Design for Health & Longevity

Senior living facilities are an accepted and desired transition for those who no longer want the responsibility of a home. A move to a senior facility is appropriate for individuals who need or who are looking for a simpler and smaller life—a place with less demands.

For those who move to an independent senior apartment, there are some Integrative Space™ considerations that should be factored in.

Suggestions for creating a space in which a senior can thrive:

### THE KITCHEN

*The kitchen should not be the first room seen when entering the apartment.*

- Because the kitchen is a food prep and eating area, it is not ideal to have it positioned in the “runway” between the front door and the back of the apartment. Such a pass-through disturbs the cooking



“Living space all their own,  
set up for seniors to thrive

process, diminishing the nutritional aspects of the food. It will be harder for a resident to relax while preparing a meal and to have a restful meal when the kitchen is so obvious.

- Separating the kitchen from the rest of the living area with a half-wall would act as protection while still maintaining a visual connection is a better option.
- The resident should be able to take advantage of windows and daylight while eating or preparing meals, nourishing themselves both inside and out. This option would probably place the kitchen furthest from the entry.
- Planning for a small table or building a counter in the kitchen will discourage a senior from eating in the living room in front of the television, which is not a healthy option.

## THE LIVING ROOM

*The living room should be situated by the front entry.*

- Having comfortable seating by the front door welcomes people into the apartment and provides an immediate opportunity for connection, conversation, and community—an essential need for someone who is creating a new life.

## THE BEDROOM

*The bedroom is a private room.*

- There should be no visual access to the bedroom. Anyone walking into the apartment should not be able to see where the resident sleeps. I realize that accommodations must be made for walkers and wheelchairs, but that doesn't prevent hanging a curtain if an actual door wouldn't work. The bedroom is private—enough said.

## THE BATHROOM

*A bathroom should not open to the kitchen and it should not be the first room seen when entering the apartment.*

- A bathroom next to the bedroom is ideal, even if it requires visitors to walk through the bedroom to get to it. The sacrifice of privacy is better than front and center.

I have no doubt senior living floorplans are designed and laid out for plumbing and electrical efficiency which, in the long run, means cheaper costs for the residents. But by knowing some basic issues with these generic plans, it may be possible to create an enhanced and integrative place in which a senior can thrive.

A space can help a senior live a longer and healthier life if the layout intentionally supports that.



## CHAPTER 4

# Thoughtful Design Elements to Create Community in Senior Living

About 8 to 10 years before my mother passed away, she spent some time in a senior apartment building in our hometown. She carefully and deliberately made the decision to sell her home and move to a smaller place where many of her friends were already living. When I would come to visit her in her new senior apartment, she would always insist we have a “candy walk.”

This involved the two of us walking both levels of the apartment building, taking advantage of the candy (sometimes cookies) that people put out in front of their entry doors. In her facility, each apartment was built with a small set-back by the door in which the individual could display photos, special mementos, flowers—and candy. My mother had a sweet tooth!

A lot of the residents there found this little alcove a great way to express their individuality, their interests and their latest family photos. During the holidays some would even put up a small tree with lights since each alcove had access to electricity.



“A neighborly way to share residents’ stories and lives

Even if there wasn't candy, my mother and I would enjoy the walk just looking at what people had done. Perhaps more importantly, my mother herself got into decorating her own area.

It was a personal expression that over-rode the idea that they were just their apartment number. They could let others know of the unique life they had led and were still experiencing.

I came to realize how unique and charming this was during a recent visit to a friend who is living in another senior building. There were no alcoves and no decorations and certainly no candy dishes. There were only numbers. Long hallways of numbers.

In a single-family dwelling, a distinctive front door transmits an invitation according to Integrative Space™ principles. As though it has secretly winked to passersby to notice its color, the use of plants or flowers, lighting, a rocking chair, etc., this tempting flirt is symbolic of good luck finding the owners.

But when people move into an apartment, that flirting experience pretty much stops.

And for someone in a senior apartment, where many aspects of life have already slowed or stopped, the front door does not need to become invisible.

Of course, there were seniors in my mother's building who didn't bother putting anything in front of their door—just weren't up to it or didn't find it important. But those who did, they were remembered and sought out, not just for their candy but for the photos of their new grandchild or great-grandchild, the new quilt they had made, the flowers someone had brought them.

It goes without saying, security wasn't an issue in this place. No thefts were reported, only empty candy bowls. No doubt in other communities this might be more of an issue.

But until my mother had to move into a facility offering her more care, she and I enjoyed those candy walks. Where residents weren't just decorating for the holidays—they were decorating for life.



## CHAPTER 5

# Senior Living Design Where Nature Has the Power to Heal

**Integrative Space™** is comprised of various analysis systems in order to create an optimal place in which people thrive. One of these systems that I use is Biophilic design. “Bio” means life and “philia” in Greek means fondness or love for something.

Biophilia is a term coined by Erich Fromm in his book *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (Fromm, 1973). Edward O. Wilson popularized the concept further in his book *The Biophilia Hypothesis* (1995).

Biophilic design suggests that there is an unspoken, innate connection between humans and nature—and that this connection to nature helps people heal. A study in 2010 by [Susan Rodiek](#) determined that natural environments can help improve sleep, reduce pain, enhance recovery and can even be a factor in longevity.

On the other hand, the loss of connection to nature threatens health, spirit, and economy according to Richard Louv. In his book *The Nature Principle: Human Restoration and the*



“ Biophilic Design—connecting a senior’s mind, body and spirit with nature

*End of Nature Deficit Disorder* (2011), Louv writes: “The more high-tech we become, the more nature we need.”

Rodiek has done extensive studies on the effect of nature on the elderly which provides support for the principles of an Integrative Space which can occur outside as well as inside.

Biophilic/Integrative Space™ ideas that move toward creating a place for seniors which supports health and wellness:

- **Ambling walkways.** Having accessible paved paths that curve and meander with visual access to flowers, plants and trees will encourage seniors to walk. They can determine whether they want to power-walk or stroll. In either case, the natural environment will feed the soul.
- **Places to sit outside.** Comfortable seating, some of which offers protection from a light rain or from the sun, can provide a senior the option to linger. Creating seating areas for 2-3 people as well as for a single person will fulfill the need for privacy as well as conversation.
- **Water feature.** Water will introduce another sensory experience due to its sound. Not only is a fountain or pond intriguing to reflect upon but it also can provide some soothing sounds.
- **Objects of interest.** Sculptures, a labyrinth, or bird feeders can entice someone to engage with it and therefore remain outdoors a bit longer.

For some seniors, a walking path may constitute a stroll through a parking lot. The only sound of flowing water comes from the bathroom sink. A beautiful sunset is missed because there’s nowhere to sit outside.

Being connected to nature and its systems proposes a bigger world to someone whose outer one has diminished. While taking care of the mind and the body is the focus of a senior living situation, getting out in nature completes the Integrative Space goal by bringing back their spirit.

## CHAPTER 6

# Visual Cues That Can Turn Back the Clock in a Retirement Facility

Scientific research proves that the environment in which people work and live affects the mind, which in turn affects behavior, which in turn defines a person's experience in that space. Depending on the outcome of that experience, it can influence a person's quality of life positively or negatively.

Having a space that supports those who live in it is the intention behind an **Integrative Space**.™ Creating an Integrative Space is even more important when the people involved are seniors. How do we create a space that helps them transition to a new version of "home" that supports another phase of their life?

In an article published in December 2012 in *AIArchitect*, environmental psychologist and interior designer Migette Kaup explains:

**"Architectural cues can provide reinforcement to the desired behaviors that we would like to see enacted in specific place types."**



**“Keep seniors feeling young with reminders of happy days gone by**

She was referencing her work in a Kansas retirement community where she was attempting to create an environment that nourished and supported the residents. Incorporating residential touches in hallways like rocking chairs and installing different residential doorways entering into apartments to underscore an entry into an individual's home were part of her plan to create a home-like feeling for seniors.

A controversial study done in 1979 by Harvard psychologist Ellen Langer entitled "Counterclockwise" explored the question of environment and how it might impact an aging population psychologically.

Langer re-created an environment that was identical to one 20 years prior (1959). Eight men between the ages of 75 and 80 and in various stages of decline were dressed in clothes of that timeframe, listened to 50's music, watched television programs from that era, lived with corresponding décor and furnishings, and read books and magazines in line with this new reality.

They didn't just reminisce on that time of their lives but lived with cues that they were actually 20 years younger. Langer included no mirrors in their space; they couldn't wear modern clothing or watch the current news on television. They could only have photos of themselves from that time or earlier.

The results? One week later, the men tested better on intelligence test scores. A comparison of photos taken when they arrived and when they left showed a reversal in age and many did not need their canes.

Although Langer has received criticism about this study because it had not been peer-reviewed and replicated, the study still shows that with a surrounding that projects a specific message, it can promote corresponding behavior.

Architect Ryan Mullenix from NBBJ calls this visceral experience a “reminiscence bump.” It floods you with memories which helps you turn the aging clock backward.

The question is whether a senior housing community or a retirement facility can figure out how to walk the line between ultra-modern, high efficiency space to one that also reminds the occupant of an earlier happy time in their lives—when they were younger and more agile. Yet still reminds them of home.



## CHAPTER 7

# A Successful Senior Living Facility— More Than Just Their Apartment

Moving out of a home and into a senior living place involves a lot of changes, particularly for someone who is moving into the phase of their lives when change in general is hard. A lot of thought and effort goes into re-creating the home that was left behind. Bringing the living room furniture, bedroom set, kitchenware, and artwork all helps to make their residence familiar.

But on the other side of the entry door may be a strange and contrived setting that doesn't contribute to the elements of an Integrative Space.™ Long hallways or colors and artwork they may never have chosen themselves abruptly reminds a senior that they're not at home anymore.

Ideas to help a senior living facility create a more welcoming neighborhood (and integrative) experience:

1. A café with eating options other than those offered at the facility's cafeteria. The senior will appreciate the freedom to select what they want to eat and when.



“ Self expression, convenience, and community—a multi-faceted approach to designing a facility seniors call home

2. A store in which to buy gifts, cards, and stamps, especially if a senior is no longer driving.
3. A library which might spawn a book club or at least some in-depth conversations.
4. A gathering place for “happy hour” whether wine or beer is served or not.
5. Communal television area to watch programs or movies with others.
6. A music room where those seniors who had incorporated music in their lives can practice or even perform with other residents.
7. A painting room where someone can continue their hobby without worrying about the flooring in their residence—and where classes could even be held.
8. A bank which may only be open one day a week but would enable residents to manage their own finances.
9. A game room to encourage card games, puzzles, board games, conversations.

And what if all these options were on a Main Street so the residents could go “downtown” to shop, eat, do some banking, run into friends—just like they used to do. These “reminiscence bumps” (as described by architect Ryan Mullenix from NBBJ) have been shown that they can turn back time and slow down the aging process.

Realistically, many facilities can’t invest in these amenities due to funding restrictions and size. Plus, there’s the question of who would manage all this when the staff is already busy. But just a few of these options could make a difference in the lives of seniors. Some of the residents might appreciate volunteer opportunities, a job that contributes to the neighborhood—and to help provide a familiar experience for those who have moved into an unfamiliar place.



# In Conclusion

*Integrative Senior Living Design* has provided many ideas about how to proceed in creating a space that leads to positive experiences, feelings and thoughts. These intentions can begin before there is even a physical structure.

From a resident's first experience entering the facility, to the common areas, to the corridors, to their own private apartment, *Integrative Senior Living Design* outlines changes that can be made, often for little cost, as well as new perspectives that can certainly be adopted to create an unforgettable facility.



“ Improve the Efficiency, Effectiveness and Atmosphere of your Healthcare Facility

## Getting the Help You Need

It will be important to put an expert on your team to assure that the approach to an Integrative Space™ will be optimal. Carole's experience in overlaying the ancient principles of Feng Shui and modern research in a variety of healthcare and senior living environments enables her to provide clear and workable solutions to almost any issue.

If you want your healthcare facility to express a unique and outstanding experience for patients, staff, and visitors, contact Carole for a free consultation to see how an Integrative Space can assist.

[carole@carolehyder.com](mailto:carole@carolehyder.com)

612-823-5093





## About the Author

Carole J. Hyder is an internationally recognized consultant, speaker, teacher, author and trainer in the field of Feng Shui. Her Integrative Spaces Strategy™ combines ancient practices with modern research to create superior environments in the healthcare industry.

Carole holds an MA in East Asian Studies, and has been a Feng Shui consultant since 1992, having studied with His Holiness Grandmaster Thomas Lin Yun, Her Holiness Crystal Chu Rinpoche, and Roger Green, all master teachers in their respective philosophies of Feng Shui.

Carole is an international speaker on various Feng Shui topics and has appeared regularly on TV programs in the Twin Cities area. Besides authoring articles in countless publications, she has written three books and produced one video/DVD on the topic of Feng Shui. In 1998, Carole founded The Wind and Water School of Feng Shui, a 7-month certification program for those interested in studying Feng Shui in greater depth.

Her Integrative Space™ work has been incorporated in hundreds of residential, commercial, and healthcare environments, most notably her long-term tenure at the Hudson Hospital in Hudson, WI.

