Design Strategies for Active Aging

Can design better support today's active aging population?

WHAT WE DID

We investigated and documented trends for baby boomers and the aging market, focusing on demographic shifts and the unique physical, mental, and social needs of this population. We read and summarized research findings from 170 documents produced by government organizations, professional associations, academia, corporations, and the popular press. We also interviewed industry experts and attended panel discussions and conferences on aging in place. Our goal was to identify current innovations and industry trends in senior-living housing types, and to document design opportunities to create successful active aging communities.

THE CONTEXT

Today's 50- and 60-year-olds don't see themselves as "old" and don't view aging as a time of physical decline. They're eschewing living and community situations that make them feel otherwise and expect to continue living life to the fullest. As their numbers grow, they have the demographic heft and buying power to back that up— baby boomers today outspend other generations by an estimated $400 billion each year on consumer goods and services, already accounting for 50 percent of total US consumer spending.

These "actively aging" boomers are looking for housing options to support their lifestyles and allow them to live a long, purposeful life. And their lifestyles are anything but traditionally "senior"—today's seniors are better educated than any of their predecessors, and as a population are well-connected and tech-enabled. As consumers, they are as savvy as these characteristics would suggest. As a result, **we recognize the U.S. active aging population as a population with discerning tastes and a hunger for good design.**
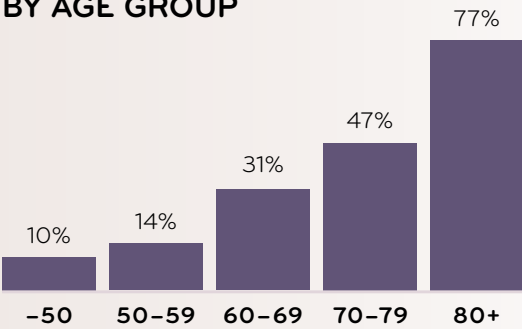
US POPULATION 2015–2050

- 2015: Under 18 — 15%, Over 65 — 23%
- 2050: Under 18 — 21%, Over 65 — 21%

▨ UNDER 18
● OVER 65
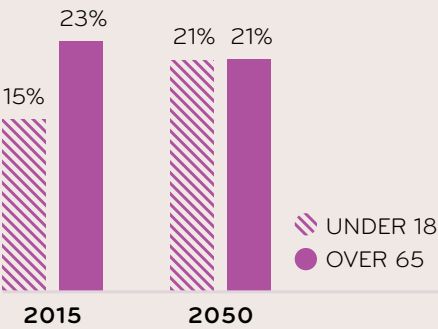
US Census Bureau, December 2012

PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE WHO FEEL "OLD" BY AGE GROUP

- –50: 10%
- 50–59: 14%
- 60–69: 31%
- 70–79: 47%
- 80+: 77%

"80 is the New 60," UBS *Investor Watch*, October 2013

THE RESULTS

We identified four major themes that define our design approach for an actively aging population:

Together, these factors underpin psychological, social, and physical health. By intervening to support an aging population across these factors, we can increase quality of life and "active" life expectancy. Design interventions across scales—from thoughtful urban planning, to buildings integrated with transportation and social service systems, to personal products and technology with a wellness focus—can help address these trends.

CONNECTIVITY

The ability to maintain relationships with neighbors, coworkers, family, friends, and community members—both in-person and online.

CHOICE

Living in a location that fits one's particular preferences, participating in activities that one chooses, and making one's own decisions about healthcare.

INDEPENDENCE

Relying on others as little as possible for personal care and getting around, including use of public transportation, ride-sharing, and walking.

WELLNESS

Not only staving off disease but also managing long-term illness to lead a productive and fulfilling life.

WHAT'S NEXT

Creating vibrant places that meet the needs of an active aging population requires bringing new approaches and disciplines to the table. We are working with multidisciplinary teams across Gensler's offices and practices to share expertise and insights, and continue to develop these ideas to create a holistic approach to design for active aging.

"There is less difference in aesthetic taste between young people and boomers than there is between boomers and their elders."

–An Executive at Kimberly-Clark

WHAT THIS MEANS

BRANDED RESIDENTIAL PROPERTIES

If and when a move is required, this population is seeking a different type of aging community. Stress urban living with "active aging" amenities.

AGING-IN-PLACE TECHNOLOGY

Use architecture, design, and "smart" technology to allow people to stay in their homes as long as possible—at the high levels of aesthetic and performance quality they've come to expect.

URBAN LIVING

SENIOR HOUSING ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES

Campuses can deliver the cultural and lifestyle amenities an aging population desires, and an aging population can bring welcome diversity (and income sources) to college towns.

RETAIL HEALTHCARE

Reposition medical services to focus on healthy lifestyles and an experience that feels more like retail than healthcare. Consider underused retail environments, from malls to supermarkets, for potential locations.

AGE-FRIENDLY CITIES

Urban environments designed to foster multigenerational living meet both aging-in-place preferences and the urban lifestyle this segment prefers.

LEARN MORE

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About Gensler

As architects, designers, planners, and consultants, we partner with our clients on some 3,000 projects every year. These projects can be as small as a wine label or as large as a new urban district. With more than 4,500 professionals networked across 46 locations, we serve our clients as trusted advisors, combining localized expertise with global perspective wherever new opportunities arise. Our work reflects an enduring commitment to sustainability and the belief that design is one of the most powerful strategic tools for securing lasting competitive advantage.

Gensler's Research Program is established to support research investigations important to our firm, our clients, and to the ongoing learning and development of Gensler professionals. Research projects are practitioner-led with involvement across the globe spanning our 46 offices, 31 practice areas, and 4,500+ professionals. Our teams bring thought leadership to the table as we seek to solve our clients' and the world's most pressing challenges by creating high-performance solutions that embrace the business and world context in which we work, enhance the human experience, and deliver game-changing innovation.

Locations

Abu Dhabi	Detroit	Morristown	São Paulo
Atlanta	Doha	New York	Seattle
Austin	Dubai	Newport Beach	Seoul
Baltimore	Hong Kong	Oakland	Shanghai
Bangalore	Houston	Philadelphia	Singapore
Bangkok	La Crosse	Phoenix	Sydney
Beijing	Las Vegas	Pittsburgh	Tampa
Boston	London	Raleigh-Durham	Tokyo
Charlotte	Los Angeles	San Diego	Toronto
Chicago	Mexico City	San Francisco	Washington, DC
Dallas	Miami	San Jose	
Denver	Minneapolis	San José	