

New model allows seniors to live well

By Lindsey Laing
The Bolling Aviator

Americans are living longer. Thanks to innovations in medicine, health and its positive effects, 30 is no longer considered middle-aged. Today, it is common for people to live well into their 80s and 90s.

With “living well” in mind, Vinson Hall Retirement Community, a home for retired military and their spouses in McLean, Va., and designer Moira Q. Leite decided to bring innovation to the standard of living for the community’s residents.



Photo by Lindsey Laing
“Innovative Model of Living” designer Moira Q. Leite demonstrates the remote-controlled blinds in the newly unveiled model apartment in the Vinson Hall Retirement Community.

“This is a very exciting time for us. Vinson Hall Retirement Community has a vision. Our vision is to develop innovative models for senior living,” said Kathleen L. Martin, CEO of the Vinson Hall Corporation and retired U.S. Navy rear admiral. “We are dedicated to creating a better life for our residents.”

Leite, president and design principal of M. Quinn Designs, proposed the idea of “Beautiful Accessibility” to Vinson Hall’s residents last year. The idea offered improved safety and accessibility in the home, while at the same time, incorporated beautiful design.

The project was a collaboration between Vinson Hall and Leite which included recommendations and requests provided by the residents themselves. Armed with the support of the entire community and her more than 30 years of expertise, Leite’s vision has come to fruition in a masterfully planned 528 square-foot model apartment.

“The living space should be adapted to the resident. Not the other way around,” said Leite of her design philosophy. “We can’t be afraid as we age to design spaces that embrace our function.” That approach is evident in the finished home. Leite has kept even the smallest of everyday activities in mind.

The tour of the model apartment begins in the entryway. Leite incorporated a “zero transition” or a smooth floor transition from the hallway into the home to eliminate tripping hazards. This feature is especially essential for residents who require the use of a walker. The entryway is also equipped with a sensor that turns on the light automatically as the resident enters.

In the main room, the apartment boasts a Murphy bed which can be stored upright into a cabinet in the wall, maximizing the apartment’s available square footage, and an ample desk with additional cabinet storage space. Two recliners with a remote-controlled lifting feature allow for comfortable conversation in the living area. A flat screen television and a slim entertainment center ensure that there is enough clearance between the recliners and the entertainment center for residents to move around safely, especially with walkers or wheelchairs.

“The goal for the environment is to meet the needs of the resident, instead of an environment that they just move into and have to live in,” said Leite.

A tremendous amount of thought went into Leite’s design for the kitchen area. The countertops feature a contrasting edge. According to Leite, as the eye ages, it is more difficult to see the edge of certain objects. The darker counter edge in the model apartment can reduce the number of spilled or dropped items. The counters are also continuous, or what the designer calls “channeling.” This allows residents to slide objects from one end of the kitchen to another, instead of picking them up.

The design for the bathroom was intended to give the resident the greatest independence possible. The toilet is equipped with a bidet. Increased hygiene, Leite said, is an important factor in being able to “age in place.” “Also, this (bidet) is a product that gives them a lot of dignity,” said the designer.

The shower space is walk-in and includes both a wall and a hand-held shower head. There is seating and additional grab bars, reducing the possibility of slips and falls.

Most items throughout the apartment were donated by the manufacturers themselves. Additionally, Leite’s attention to detail in the home is reinforced by her choice to include items from all over the world.

Just as a retired service member or their spouse would have collected objects from all their overseas tours, the model home also conveys an eclectic, acquired look. Wall colors and artwork were chosen to create an exciting, yet harmonious environment.

Lighting also plays a key role in the model. Leite is an expert on lighting and the aging eye. “Everyone sees differently,” she said. The designer incorporated all types and combinations of illumination including incandescent and fluorescent, ambient and general to maximize visual acuity for the residents.

“In designing this model, we designed it for the greatest good,” said Leite of her decision to incorporate the most popular requests. As the “Innovative Model of Living” becomes available to residents in the future, they will be able to modify their choices in the home to suit their own individual needs and taste.

For information on the “Innovative Model of Living” and M. Quinn Designs, visit www.mquinndesigns.com. For information on Vinson Hall Retirement Community, visit www.vinsonhall.org.