

Healing Environments Key to Recovery Process

Healthcare professionals in senior care industry realize more than ever the inherent values in connecting indoor spaces to outside environments.

By Nathan Murray

Perhaps more than in any architectural typology, senior care environments tend fall into an all-too-familiar pattern of unremarkable mimicry of neo-traditional styling and predictable program where ostensibly “the towel has been thrown in” as life has slowed to a crawl and is now expectedly devoid of exploration, progress, and wonder — in favor of basking in the nostalgia of a life already lived. Many would agree that elaboration on the topic is uncomfortable, yet necessary if things are to change, and the indictment warranted.

Not so with Elder Care visionaries at Rocky Mountain Care. As we came to experience with the strong leadership of Utah’s Bangerter family in the design of their new locale in the Heber Valley of the Wasatch Back. From the onset, and on the heels of a just-finished campus in Tooele, the leaders’ relentless desire to improve on their model continues.

Envisioned was a modern lodge and resort where new chapters of life await discovery in the hospitable arms of nature. Though at a slower pace, the world would be brought to each resident whether recovering



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briefly from major surgery or spending nurse-supported years in an inspiring and vibrant setting. Desired was to create a place where we all truly wanted to be.

Set in the Heber Valley on several acres of farmland that would be reclaimed by native flora and a surrounding creek bed, The Lodge emerges from the landscape as a retreat and a place of wonder. Acknowledging that residents are a captured audience — somewhat limited in mobility — the world is brought to them. The natural environs and views including Mt. Timpanogos lay just outside the window and along the accessible patios, courtyards, and nature paths. Main Street with all its shops and storefronts is just down the neighborhood street.

Yes, you can grab dinner in the made-to-order restaurant, a movie in the theatre and an ice cream for a stroll on the way back to your “cabin”. On another day, crafts and works of art and exercise classes are regular activities. The spa, the hair salon, library, warm, fire-lit living rooms spent with friends—they’re all there. The colorful and dramatic passage of season is celebrated with a native, self-seeding landscape watered largely by site-retained sources.

The architecture is developed as an extension of the landscape with creek beds and foundations of locally-sourced boulder and rock. A colonnade of select buff stone pillars captures and carries visitors from the butterfly roof of Main Street’s Gateway and over the bridge which, along with the landscape, flows into the interior. Framing high transparency glass inside and out, rough-sawn cedar and fir are the cladding of choice. The stone pillars and materials are brought generously through to Main Street and all its venues — expansive skylights, clerestories, and courtyards keeping the outside always close at hand. The vernacular of human-scaled cabins characterize the architecture, veiling and rendering approachable what are nearly a hundred resident rooms on the campus.

Integral, yet perhaps less visible are the sustainable technologies that keep the campus humming. Ground source wells provide heating and cooling for all spaces. Daylighting is maximized and plug load minimized with the aforementioned plentiful, high-transparency glass coupled with sensors. Soaring eyebrows shield the view-capturing glass from direct sunlight.

Best of all, staff and residents are thrilled with the new environs and life-enhancing amenities, and residents are experiencing better outcomes. In fact, at the exterior photoshoot, I happened upon a lovely German couple from the nearby town of Midway as he was pushing his wife on a late summer evening stroll along the nature paths, in what was her second recovery stay at The Lodge since it opened less than a year ago. They were gratefully effusive in their comments about their experience and the uplifting environment offered there.

I walked away from our brief exchange with the elevating and confirming sentiment that only comes from doing this kind of work with this kind of client; we appreciate forward-thinking healthcare owners like Rocky Mountain Care. ■

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