



New England Facilities Development News

Contributor

How Successful Multifamily Project Teams Are Designing Inspiring, Healthy Interiors

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by Jennifer Phan

After spending considerable time working from home this past year, today’s potential multifamily tenants and buyers are more interested than ever before in spaces that support health and wellness. For developers, owners, and operators of apartment and condominium properties, the question is, how can we plan and design these environments most effectively? As architects and interior designers working on a broad range of new construction and adaptive reuse projects across New England, here are a few key trends and considerations we have seen driving successful interiors in the current market:

Active Design and Encouraging Movement



Avalon Residences at the Hingham Shipyard

By seeking to make physical activity more accessible and appealing, the planning and design approach known as Active design is one of the most fundamental ways a project team can deliver healthier buildings. Effective active design strategies can be simple, for instance, it can include adding feature walls, customized accents, artwork, signage, or windows and skylights in stairwells to promote walking instead of elevator usage.

Thoughtfully designed fitness centers with a variety of workout modalities are another path toward promoting resident wellness. Children’s play spaces now command

an ever-increasing role in multifamily: The latest trends focus on encouraging exploration, experimentation, and imagination through active but less structured types of play.

Beyond the obvious health benefits for residents, active design principles are essential for the pursuit of building certifications such as Well and Fitwel, which makes it necessary for design and development teams to be familiar with a range of strategies for achieving these goals.

The Value of Biophilia

In a similar vein, many of today's most successful multifamily projects incorporate elements of biophilic design, an approach that reconnects residents to nature within the built environment. Effective design strategies include a focus on visual connections to the outdoors, and where possible, the creation of exterior "rooms" that allow residents to move effortlessly and freely between the built and natural environment. These types of indoor/outdoor zones are an increasingly significant part of multifamily amenity packages. They provide an active connection to nature, which also increases residents' ability to experience daylight and brings a positive impact on individual health and wellbeing. Plant life is also an important element of biophilic space, and design teams should include living elements in common areas both inside and outside. In addition to promoting higher indoor air quality, studies have shown that plants enhance creativity and productivity.

Natural materials are also crucial for promoting healthy indoor environments. Where possible, design teams should specify cork, wood, and similar materials instead of vinyl and plastics. In addition to lower levels of toxic compounds, natural materials have a beneficial calming and soothing effect.

Get the Light Right

Studies also show the positive mental health benefits of good lighting, from both natural sources and from well-designed artificial illumination. This means that a thoughtful lighting strategy can have a significant impact on how residents feel inside a multifamily property. For example, smart design teams utilize sunlight to emphasize and activate interior spaces such as a resident lounge. Sun studies early in the planning process can help align interior programming with the most effective daylighting.



Elan Union Market, Watertown, Mass.

When it comes to artificial light, tunable LED lights are today's most compelling solution. With a wide range of brightness and color temperatures, high-quality LEDs give users maximum control over how to light a space. Dimming lights can be effective as well. Considering that exterior lighting changes frequently over the course of a day, interior light levels should adjust also to maintain a comfortable environment. Artwork is also a major component that should be thoughtfully selected and illuminated — it can create a powerful statement invoking positive emotion and provides an indirect opportunity to experience nature.

Thinking Creatively, Both Big and Small

Ultimately, designing a truly healthy multifamily environment requires creativity at all scales. This can mean thinking about the smaller details — for instance specifying hands-free motion sensor fixtures and doors so there are fewer points of contact for germs to spread. It can also mean thinking elastically about the larger design decisions like reimagining an entire amenities package, perhaps by creating maker spaces that allow

residents to express creativity in a therapeutic way. With these and other thoughtful strategies, design teams can realize powerful interior environments that improve residents' lives – and stand apart from the crowd.



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