

# Best Standalone Memory Care Design of 2023: The Cordwainer Goes Big on Biophilic Elements

By [Andrew Christman](#) | January 24, 2024

When setting out to design The Cordwainer, owners Bodo and Tamilyn Liesenfeld had one goal: to make the community outstanding and unique.

The Cordwainer is the first, and currently only, community owned and operated by Anthemion Senior Lifestyles. To help the community stand out, it only offers memory care and includes multiple European influences, which come from the Liesenfelds' experiences traveling and Bodo's German heritage.

According to Bodo, it took some time to find the proper piece of land The Cordwainer would come to inhabit.

"We had very high expectations for the piece of land that should be easily accessible traffic wise, but it should also be serene and have enough landscape and greenery around it," he said. "We don't want the same typical New England ... assisted living that you see everywhere, we want something that is outstanding."

Greenery was an important concept from the outset, and the design of the building focused on biophilic and contemporary designs, so much so that it includes a full natural garden, complete with flowers, beds and a natural tree, that can be accessed by the community year round.

Designed by The Architectural Team, The Cordwainer also has an emphasis on a looping natural circulation, which helps create zones of activity for residents.

These design components helped cement the community as the 2023 Senior Housing News Architecture and Design Awards' Best Standalone Memory Care category winner.

## The concept

Planning for The Cordwainer began in early 2020 and took around a year to complete. The project was different from anything The Architectural Team had done previously, according to Associate Anthony Vivirito. The desire to only be memory care, alongside site constraints, presented several unique challenges from the onset.

"The majority of the work that we do is usually a combination of assisted, independent and memory care," Vivirito said. "So this one from the onset had a couple of unique conditions set on us."

The community's design puts extra emphasis on its biophilic design principles to "enhance human well-being through a greater connection with nature." In order to accomplish this, the community was designed with "unique outdoor sensory spaces" and utilizes clerestory windows to better incorporate natural and indirect light throughout the day.



*The Cordwainer via Ed Wonsek*

An early request from the Liesenfelds was to have an 18-foot diameter skylight directly over the central atrium garden to greet guests and residents with plenty of natural light as soon as they enter the room.

While the effect adds a focal point for visitors and residents, early on it was a technical challenge for the design and construction teams. The two-story atrium itself created challenges for Vivirito's team between working with the light gauge designers and safety features for the community.

"Framing those [light well] openings was definitely a challenge," Vivirito said. "This atrium needed to have a fire separation from the floor above. And we had to design in a horizontal fire curtain across the 14-foot opening. The team spent a lot of a lot of time trying to figure out how to minimize the impact of that."

Despite the challenges and land constraints, early discussions of having an internal circuit helped planning for the community proceed smoothly, which led to the organizing principles for all of the floors of the building. This allows The Cordwainer to avoid having the traditional double loaded corridors seen in other memory care communities, and helped avoid the need for artificial lighting when possible.

The community's amenities were also meant to highlight interactivity with residents, including a device called a Tovertafel, which projects games specifically designed for memory impaired individuals that residents can interact with just by using their hands.

“It’s also good for them because they can play with their grandchildren and great grandchildren, because it’s a computer game,” Liesenfeld said.

### **The construction**

Construction on The Cordwainer began in January 2021, and largely avoided serious delays throughout the process.

However, according to the Liesenfelds, the project experienced several delays caused by disruptions to the supply chain caused by the Covid pandemic. Because of this, there were material exchanges that needed to be made and cost escalations caused the project to come in around \$50,000 over its initial budget, totaling around \$17 million.

A small benefit for construction on the project was that contracts were signed during the pandemic, and as such restrictions were already known, according to Tamilyn.

“We fortunately had no shutdown of that project due to Covid,” she said. “But ... it’s a project that was built during Covid. So it did have some stress on the project. But, we knew what we were getting into when we signed the contract.”

However, outside of these issues construction as a whole went relatively smoothly, according to the Liesenfelds, and the design of the building remained largely unchanged from the original planning stages.



*The Cordwainer via Ed Wonsek*

## **The completion**

Coming several months behind its initial opening date, The Cordwainer celebrated its grand opening in November 2022, and according to the Liesenfelds, it was exactly what they had envisioned.

“We had a vision in the beginning. And what we have physically standing there now is exactly what we envisioned that to be,” Bodo said.

Vivirito said the project hit all of the marks, and early reviews from the residents and their family members have been “fantastic” so far, and part of that comes from the elements designed specifically for the residents in their care.

“If you listen to Bodo and Tamilyn talk about their passion for this specific group of folks and the disease, they spent a lot of time trying to figure out how to cater and maybe do some things that are like the Tovertofel or some of these other program elements that they’ve implemented not just to differentiate, but to try and improve people’s quality of life,” Vivirito said.

Vivirito added since the project’s completion, there has been interest expressed from other companies that are curious about how The Cordwainer’s architecture can be incorporated for upcoming projects as well.

Architecture and Design Awards judges praised The Cordwainer on its overall design and incorporation of natural light and programming, particularly for a standalone memory care community.

“A very attractive project that incorporates a great use of natural light, biophilic design and understated design elegance that is appropriate for this care type,” wrote judge Chris Frommell, an architect who is managing partner with Direct Supply Aptura. “I especially like the sensory garden and the fact that it can be experienced from both levels.”