



Naturally social



ED WONSEK, COURTESY THE ARCHITECTURAL TEAM

The Cordwainer memory care community in Norwell, Mass., encourages residents to embrace life amid light-filled spaces and multisensory experiences

by Kristin D. Zeit

The community is sited within a wooded area and purposefully offers a more modern, yet natural, take on assisted living concepts in New England.

BEFORE LAUNCHING the first senior living property for their company, Anthemion Senior Lifestyles, husband-and-wife team Bodo and Tamilyn Liesenfeld spent 3 years researching memory care therapies, technologies, and building designs in Europe and the U.S. In November 2022, they opened The Cordwainer—a two-story, 54-unit memory-care community tucked into a picturesque wooded area in Norwell, Mass.

The Liesenfelds were looking to offer something unique to New England and unusual for the States in general. Within The Cordwainer, designed by The Architectural Team (TAT; Chelsea, Mass.), residents are surrounded by biophilic elements, serene colors, and a Scandinavian residential aesthetic.

The community's layout encourages socialization, and its immersive, dementia-specific programming focuses on engaging all the senses. "When we visited this thickly wooded property, we thought it was the perfect setting," says Tamilyn Liesenfeld, a 30-year veteran of the senior living business. "It's all about stimulating the mind. Our building has a higher percentage of its total gross area devoted to common areas [than typically found]. You walk into the first-floor neighborhood and there's this beautiful sensory garden full of trees and plants and flowers. It's something special."

The double-height entry and lobby provide an immediate sense of the role biophilic design plays in The Cordwainer. Warm wood materials climb the walls and envelop the ceiling, with a striking moss wall providing a lively focal point.



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— Bodo Liesenfeld, Anthemion Senior Lifestyles



Above: Eschewing pitched roofs allowed the architects to include an expansive central skylight and multiple light monitors (not visible) to bring daylight into all areas of the building.

Left: The large exterior garden provides a safe and beautiful space for residents to enjoy the outdoors and invigorate the senses.

Right: The open-concept common spaces on each floor are flanked by corridors that traverse the resident rooms and provide a promenade for easy strolls and safe wandering.

Below: Resident rooms are comfortable and homelike with oversized windows to maximize the wooded views and natural light. The design team choose materials, colors, patterns, and furnishings that are supportive and practical for people with dementia.



Lighting the way

Every decision was made with the distinct needs of this specialized population—those living with varying degrees of dementia—in mind. “Through biophilic design and introducing an abundance of daylight in the building, we’re working to stimulate the sensory capabilities of our residents,” says Bodo Liesenfeld. “That’s a very important part of the treatment and liveliness in the building. This is how we reach people.”

Daylight was a key driver of the design to ensure that residents reap the physiological and psychological benefits of light exposure. “We’re trying to drag daylight into every square inch,” says Anthony Vivirito, TAT associate and one of the lead designers for The Cordwainer.

Resident rooms feature oversized windows, while storefront glass at the east and west ends of the building maximize light and views for dining room patrons and those enjoying the living room/lounges. Clerestories, triangle windows, and light monitors do their part to bring diffused light into interior community spaces at The Cordwainer.

The biggest impact, though, comes from an 18-foot octagonal skylight installed above the double-height atrium at the center of the community. This light-flooded interior courtyard is open to all and features lush greenery, a bubbling water feature, and piped-in bird-song. Second-floor seating and pathways allow residents to enjoy the space from upstairs, as well; a living moss mosaic wraps the

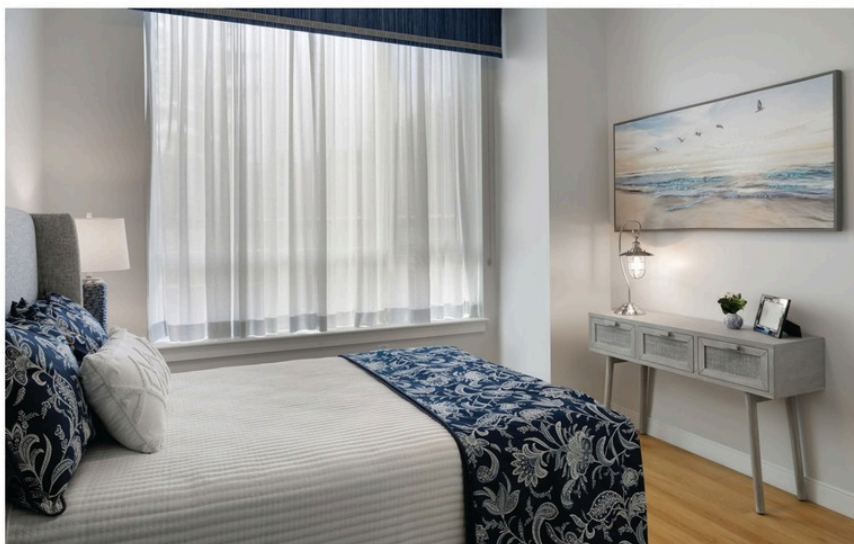
interstitial space between floors to extend the green theme.

Bringing nature in

Common rooms and activity spaces extend east and west of the courtyard on both floors. Resident rooms line the periphery north and south, with a racetrack-style walking path in each floor’s neighborhood to encourage movement. “Residents have an ability for autonomous and guided activities throughout the footprint of

the building,” Vivirito says. An open-air, trellised garden with raised planters, along with a second-floor terrace dedicated to family visits, extend that footprint out of doors.

This being New England, time spent outdoors can be rather limited for more vulnerable residents during long stretches of colder weather—yet another reason for designers to double down on interior natural elements. The front lobby sets the tone with a two-story moss wall and a wood-plank effect spanning the ceiling.



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Inspired by the local landscape, TAT employed warm woods and a palette of greens and blues. “There’s a feel to the property of a wooded 1960s estate,” says Meghann Van Dorn, TAT’s director of interior design. Then, encouraged by the owners’ desire for a more European aesthetic, they infused a mid-century modern spirit throughout the interiors. Adds Bodo, “We wanted something that doesn’t look too modern, nothing that would make residents think, ‘Oh, that’s not for me.’ It’s European-looking, but very comfortable and natural.”

Sense and sociability

The Cordwainer’s design and programming strive to support residents’ interaction not only with their environment but with different experiences and other people. A proprietary dementia therapy program called “The Learned Environment” incorporates curriculum-based activities (art, music, foreign languages) to stimulate cognitive function. There’s a prominent common area featuring the Dutch game console Tovertafel (“magic table”), a system of sensors and light projection designed for those with cognitive challenges that was recently introduced to the U.S. market. “It keeps residents engaged with our staff and with their families, including a way to play with great grandchildren,” Tamilyn says.

Common spaces include a “wood shop”—no saws or hammers, but a 3D printer and guided use of mallets, glue guns, and the like—as well

as a salon/barber shop, fitness room, and what Tamilyn refers to as the rejuvenation room. “For those who might not do well in high-stimulation activities. It’s a space with reclining chairs for four to six residents at a time,” she says. “They can have aromatherapy, massages, soft music, or poetry read to them. It’s very cozy and calming.”

The looping circulation path on both floors encourages socialization, too. “The racetrack path, or promenade—again, it’s very European, the idea that after a meal, you take your walk,” TAT’s Van Dorn says. Vivirito adds that the residential entries open right out onto the circulation space as well. “We know this is important to serve the wandering desires of memory care residents,” he says. “There’s a nice interplay of public and private.”

Hand in hand

Anthemion Senior Lifestyles is on the hunt for other locations to replicate the model introduced with The Cordwainer, but it’s a slow-and-steady process. “We like the natural settings and that’s not always easy to find,” Tamilyn says. “We’re interested in ground-up, in-field development because we want to control the design and bring in the features we feel are most important.”

Bodo concurs: “The building and design and concept go together. It’s all one.” *ea*

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The central interior courtyard is the natural heart of the community, filled with live trees, plants, and flowers beneath a flood of daylight from the 18-foot skylight two stories up. Multisensory artwork, like the two playable xylophones shown in the photo, line the courtyard walls and invite interaction.

project details

Project: The Cordwainer

Location: Norwell, Mass.

Completion date: 2022

Owner: Anthemion Senior Lifestyles

Total building area: 50,000 sq. ft.

Total construction cost: \$17 million

Cost/sq. ft.: approximately \$330 (includes site work)

Architect: The Architectural Team

Interior designer: The Architectural Team

General contractor: Nauset Construction

Engineer: McKenzie Engineering Group Inc. (civil), Michael E. Waterman PE (structural), Petersen Engineering Inc. (MEP, fire protection)

Builder: Nauset Construction

Art consultant: Kelly Filocco

Art/pictures: Boston Art

Carpet/flooring: Patcraft, Mannington, Armstrong, Division 9 Collaborative, Mats Inc.

Ceiling/wall systems: Carnegie, SoundPly, Armstrong

Fabric/textiles: Opuzen, Kravet, LebaTex, HBF Textiles, Pollack, Posh Textiles, Knoll, Brentano, Fabricut, Richloom, UltraFabrics, Architex, DesignTex, Momentum

Furniture—Seating/casegoods: Kwalu, Kellex, Fairfield, SitOnIt

Handrails/wall guards: Woodcraft

Other: Cityscapes (green walls and interior garden)

For an expanded list, visit efamagazine.com. Project details are provided by the design team and not vetted by Environments for Aging.