

# GOLDEN YEARS

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## Design for the future

### Architect plans for America's aging population

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"If you ask people if they would like to go to a nursing home, people say they would rather die on the street than go into a nursing home," says Denver architect William Brummett.

Two years ago, Brummett started his own firm specializing in designing homes and buildings for older people.

A lot of Brummett's current work involves renovating facilities that were built as recently as three years ago.

"It is clear that what is being done right now is not going to be successful for the future," he said, adding that designing homes for the elderly is changing dramatically. "There is a real need to shift the way we think about housing for the aging."

One of the main concerns of Brummett's work involves people who suffer from dementia.

"If they don't have an environment that accommodates that, it is catastrophic," he said.

Brummett said that in more intense environments such as assisted living, nursing homes and facilities for people with dementia, more specific things that have to be done with how people perceive the environment.

For example, in most nursing homes, about 50 percent of the people have dementia, and fluorescent lights are usually used in these facilities, according to Brummett.



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William Brummett at the Kentucky Circle Village in Cherry Creek, where he designed an addition.

The architect said that people with dementia pick up on the flicker of the lights more than other people. "It's like being in a room with a strobe light. They are freaked out and don't know how to deal with it. I never put anything but incandescent lights in nursing homes," he said.

People with dementia often also suffer from incontinence, but Brummett said that if they can see and look into their bathroom from their bed, it helps them find and get to it easier. Brummett designs rooms to accommodate this and said that it reduces problems related to incontinence by 50 percent.

"It is such an easy thing to do and yet so many people don't think to do it," he said.

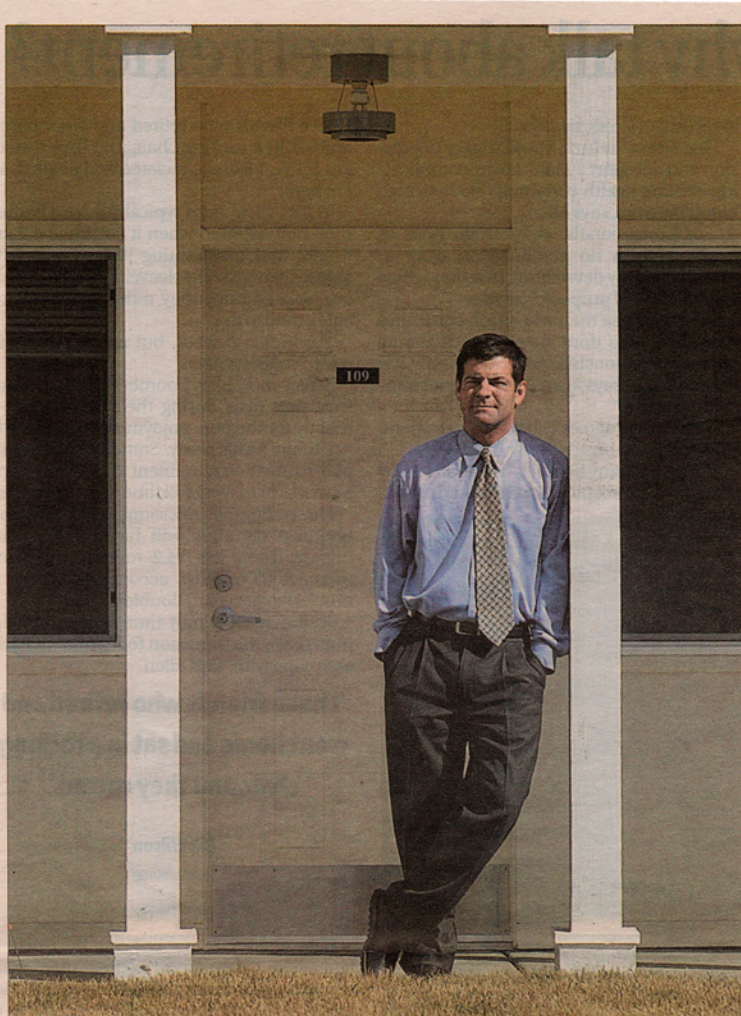
In assisted living, where Brummett said that about 25 percent of the residents suffer from dementia, he uses French doors with glass so that residents can see into the rest of their apartment so they don't become confused or feel trapped. The doors can also be easily removed.

"Adaptability is very important. Doing something that staff can come in and make it work better is very important," he said.

"Considerations like these make a huge difference," he added.

Brummett also focuses his work on creating a pleasant and enjoyable environment for those





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Architect William Brummett at the Kentucky Circle Village in Cherry Creek.

## ARCHITECT: Designing for the baby boomers

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who will live there.

"Designing nursing homes is designing places where people live. People want to feel like they are in a nice home and not in an institution," Brummett said.

Since the people in these facilities don't really have much opportunity to get out of their environments, Brummett said that his designs allow for simple pleasures like looking out of a window and allowing sunshine to come through. He said that he always puts in series of special window seats in the facilities that he designs.

Brummett said that there is a giant need for good design. "I really believe that good design can make people's lives better. If you create places that people want to be, that inspires them and gives them simple pleasures; it helps the healing process."

Brummett's projects have included Kentucky Circle Village and Casa Dorado Assisted Living, both in Denver; the renovation of the Golden West Senior Residence in Boulder, and Wheat Ridge Assisted Living.

John Torres is the CEO of Golden West Senior Residences in Boulder, a low-income facility for seniors. Brummett was the project architect for a renovation and upgrades made to the facility.

"I think it's impressive that Bill is targeting seniors and he goes beyond doing the architectural work," Torres said, adding that as the baby boomers age, there is a lot more potential for people to get focused on elder design.

Blake Chambliss is a senior housing specialist for the Rural Community Assistance Corporation. He works with nonprofit

groups to develop assisted living in rural areas, and also published book on developing community-based assisted living in rural areas with Brummett.

Chambliss said that one of the major issues in Colorado is the cost of providing service. He also said that the most cost-effective solution for the elderly is in a non-institutional environment because assisted living costs much less than nursing homes.

Moving into an institution as one ages is not always necessary.

Brummett said that designing houses that allow people to stay in them longer is being largely ignored but is very important. He said that he is encountering more clients who are looking into having houses that are designed to allow them to live in them longer.

Laura Landwirth is the executive director for the Colorado Association of Homes and Services for the Aging. She said that as the population is aging, adaptable housing is becoming more and more important.

Adaptable housing centers around designing a home so that as one ages, the home can still accommodate them.

"Thinking ahead on this subject can make it possible to stay in your home longer, which is the goal," Landwirth said.

Some examples of things to consider in adaptable housing are wide doorways to accommodate wheelchairs and scooters, grab bars in bathrooms and levers instead of knobs on doors and cabinets to make it easier to open if one has arthritis.

"There is a need to educate the general public about this, especially with the aging baby boomers so that they can know what to look for in a home," she said.