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Tech-infused Airbnb shows seniors how to age in place in style



Lisa Cini's Werner House is an Airbnb outfitted with high-tech touches that make senior living safe and stylish. The nine-bedroom retreat's living area, pictured, features a coffee table that can rise to desk or dining height, patented walker holders on chair backs, high-density foam seat cushions to make getting up easier, and a zero-edge area rug to reduce tripping. (Photo Columbus Pics)

By [MARNI JAMESON](#) |

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Thus, I was encouraged to learn that new technology and a forward-minded designer promise to make aging at home a lot easier. According to a recent AARP survey, 77 percent of those over age 50 want to “age in place.” That percentage jumps to 86 percent among those over 65, which tells me that the older you get, the less appealing the idea of sitting in a nursing home becomes.

“Boomers are especially reluctant to give up their freedom,” said interior designer Lisa Cini, a senior living design expert and owner of Mosaic Design Studio, of Columbus, Ohio. “Especially after COVID went down, and assisted living centers became places no one could visit or leave, Boomers are even more determined to guard their autonomy.”

She’s making it easier for them. After 25 years of designing assisted living facilities, and after remodeling her own Columbus home, so it could accommodate four generations – including two teenagers, her 70-something parents and her 92-year-old grandmother who had dementia – Cini channeled her personal and professional knowledge into a novel project.

After her grandmother passed, and the kids had gone off to college and careers, she found a historic mansion for sale. So she turned it into a nine-bedroom Airbnb designed to host seniors in comfort, safety and style. (I like the style part. If I’m going to age in place, that place has to look good.)

The Werner House features more than 50 senior-centric technologies, most of which blend invisibly into the beautiful decor. “Some guests stay and never know there’s anything unusual,” she said.

As Cini takes me on a virtual tour, what strikes me most is that nothing in the 10,000-plus square-foot property screams “this is for old people!” Tech touches throughout are discreet and practical. In addition to the bedrooms and their adjoining bathrooms, the Airbnb has a ballroom, a fitness spa and walking pool, a speakeasy, three kitchens and a movie and music room.

Marketed as an Airbnb with a mission, The Werner House (www.infinite-living.org), which opened to guests in April, aims to subtly market products to those who want to age in place, and encourage them to experience new technology during their stay that they may later embrace at home. Cini wants to take the Airbnb concept nationwide.

Here’s a sampling of the built-in amenities:

Floors that feel. Five of the suites feature Sole with SensFloor technology from Shaw Floors. The subfloor, which allows any kind of flooring to go over it, has built-in sensors that can detect when someone falls, versus when they’re just sitting on the floor, and can then send the appropriate alert for help. You can also program the floor so that when your feet hit the floor from bed, the bathroom light goes on.

Noise-canceling carpet. In public areas like the dining room, speakeasy and living room, the carpet has noise cancellation technology. “Many seniors have hearing loss,” Cini said. “The carpet absorbs the din, making conversations easier.”

Firmer seats. Chair and sofa cushions are made of ultra-dense foam, and no seat is lower than 19 inches. Some upholstered club chairs have a handsome wood and brass hanger on their backs for holding a folded-up walker.

Full-service bathrooms. Adjustable toilets rise to help guests get seated, and lower for ease of use. Toilet paper holders have built-in grab bars, and bidet seats have been added to standard toilets to aid hygiene. Adjustable sinks can drop down to wheelchair height, grab bars help people stand and sit, and the spa tubs are accessible.

Cabinets that come to you. Smart kitchen cabinets have a mechanism that lets them come off the wall and down to your level, a boon for those who have difficulty reaching and lifting items from upper cabinets. Once you have what you need, back goes the cabinet. Kitchen counters are height adjustable to accommodate both a five-foot woman and her six-foot husband.

“Having a house that adjusts to you and keeps you safe shouldn’t be out of the question,” she said.

And now it’s not.

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