

Designing for dementia: Concepts to consider

“Design is one of the major non-pharmaceutical interventions for people with dementia. We can really keep people confident and independent for as long as possible.”

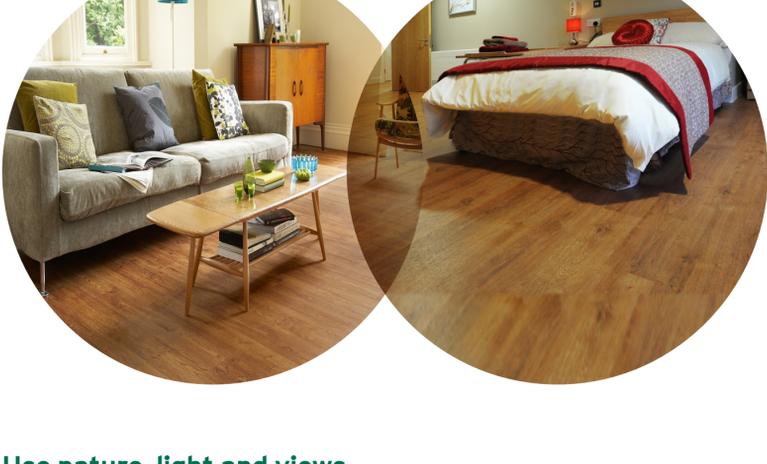
PROFESSOR MARY MARSHALL, DEMENTIA SERVICES DEPARTMENT CENTRE, UNIVERSITY OF STERLING.

“It is incumbent upon you to exercise some kind of open empathy towards the people you are designing for and to try and understand the world through their experiences.”

NIALL MCLAUGHLIN, UK-BASED ARCHITECT, SPECIALISING IN DESIGN FOR DEMENTIA.

Keep it simple and warm

Open-plan, simple, easy-to-understand and easy-to-follow layout is critical. Orientation, spatial recognition and a sense of ownership are important design considerations. Make sure you appreciate the issues that dementia patients have with spatial perception, such as difficulty understanding spaces like doorways, knowing that glass doors are there or distinguishing objects from their surroundings.



Use nature, light and views

The importance of access to a safe, calming natural environment cannot be underestimated. Explore and implement the health and wellness advantages of biophilic design in your general and interior planning. For example, beautiful, soothing views provide landmarks to help dementia patients understand where they are. They also provide natural light so patients know what the weather is like and what time of day it is.



Assist with wayfinding and navigation

Build in wayfinding methods using landmarks, colours, clever layout and excellent signage. Use a clear, bold font in a colour which contrasts well with the background.



Understand visual- and spatial-perception requirements

Excellent lighting and strong colour contrast are necessary to help patients distinguish between various items, levels and spaces (e.g. between a toilet and the wall it is fixed to). Avoid the use of sparkly materials, stripes, dark patches or mats on floors and keep the floor covering consistent throughout the space.



Think about the feel you are creating

Try to ensure your design maximises independence as well as a sense of belonging and comfort. This helps to reduce anxiety.



Keep it safe and quiet

Consider safety at all times, particularly with regard to slips and trips. A noisy environment is stressful for dementia patients so be aware of acoustics, both in communal areas and in private rooms.



EASY-TO-FOLLOW OPEN-PLAN LAYOUT

BIOPHILIC DESIGN | NATURAL ELEMENTS

WAYFINDING | BOLD LETTERING

CLEAR COLOUR CONTRAST

INDEPENDENCE | COMFORT

SAFETY FIRST | QUIET SPACES