

Querencia at Barton Creek

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5



AIA Design for Aging

Project Information

EVALUATION SITE: Querencia at Barton Creek

COMMUNITY TYPE: Continuing Care Retirement Community
11 Retirement Cottages
156 Independent Living Apartments
40 Assisted Living, 23 Assisted Living for Dementia
42 Skilled Nursing

REGION: Southwest

ARCHITECT: CSD Architects

OWNER: Senior Quality Lifestyles

DATA POINTS:

Independent Living Apts/ Villas: 1,050 to 2,200 gsf

Resident Room: 400 to 525 gsf (assisted living)
280 gsf (nursing care and assisted living for dementia)

Total Area: 2,404 gsf/independent apartment
375,000 gsf/independent living
623 gsf/assisted living apartment
39,250 gsf/assisted living
377 gsf/nursing resident
15,825 gsf/nursing care

Overall Total Area: 430,075 gsf

Project Cost: \$259.42/gsf
Total Project Cost: \$111,570,000

Occupancy: 75% as of October 2008

FIRST OCCUPANCY: May 2007
DATE OF EVALUATION: October 2008
EVALUATION TEAM: Dennis Cope, AIA, Frank Crane and Tom Hauer



Introduction

Querencia and several other communities began as a dream of Charlie Bremer, who wanted a nice place for his mother to live. He is the founder, President and CEO Senior Quality Lifestyles Corporation, the sponsor of this development. His efforts have resulted in the creation of what he describes as resort style independent living communities in Texas, with Querencia being his third such community. This project's marketing has benefited greatly from the early and enthusiastic support of Texas icon and famous American football coach Darrell Royal. Coach Royal and his wife live as residents of Querencia.

Querencia is an upscale continuing care retirement community located in a wealthy suburb of Austin, Texas, part of the beautiful Texas hill country. The site is surrounded by hills and is positioned on a slope which falls approximately one hundred feet in elevation. While the site is one of the community's biggest assets it is also one of its biggest challenges. Local governmental ordinances restrict building ground coverage area to no more than twenty-seven percent of the site area. These restrictions also require the finished topography of the site to be altered only four feet higher or lower than its original elevation.

Querencia consists of eleven independent living cottages or villas, and one main building which houses independent living apartments, assisted living apartments, memory support apartments, skilled nursing, a spa/wellness center with pool and common areas and amenities typical of contemporary retirement communities. The main building consists of two wings with a central connection spine. The building conforms to the land with one side being six stories in height while the other is four.

Architect's Statement

Querencia is a full-service continuing care retirement community with a focus on resort-style living. Amenities include a destination spa and a beautiful location in the heart of Texas Hill Country. The program called for a much-needed first-class, top-tier alternative to the stereotypical retirement community and for the creation of a community that would attract the finest quality of employees, not only experienced in the field of health care and caring for seniors but also with extensive skills in hospitality.

These employees, with strong hospitality and customer service skills, undergo extensive "senior-living-specific" training. Ongoing training and teaching opportunities will keep the staff up-to-date with current trends in the field.

The design of the community was to appear to have grown from the surrounding landscape, with a Texas Hill Country look and feel to the architecture.

Designers' and Operators' Stated Objectives and Responses

Objective: Protect native landscape, including native plantings. Also, restore and recreate natural water features including creeks and waterfalls. Severe limitations on site-only 27% of site could be covered with the built environment.

Design Intent: In conjunction with the building design, it was important to retain a contextual feel for the campus. The approach to the overall design includes retention of as much existing landscaping undisturbed as possible and, where not possible, restore native plantings to the campus in order to enhance the feeling of Texas hill country.

Objective: Create, on a busy street, a quiet resort style environment, featuring a destination spa/wellness center. Campus is on a long and winding road, set back from the main street.

Design Intent: Because the site is of a size that can accommodate the building program and still provide substantial setback, and because the natural landscaping and topography allows for some seclusion, the siting of the building could allow a more quiet environment for the residents.

Objective: Use an architectural style consistent with the historical architectural tradition. Materials used include natural local stone, stucco, metal roof overhangs, inspired by local architecture, and the site itself, building into the landscape.

Design Intent: The building design approach as well as the landscaping and retention of as many natural site features as possible contributes to the Texas hill country feel of the project.

Objective: Be the premier provider of life care based senior living services in central Texas.

Design Intent: With the design, the marketing and the care approach, this project sets the standard for continuing care retirement communities in this area of central Texas.

Objective: Provide an elevated level of care, unlike anything else in the area, with the focus on a resort style way of living.

Design Intent: The building program included close attention to the higher levels of care and making certain that they were simply not an “add-on” to the independent living. Throughout the campus design, care was taken to assure residents would feel this campus was more resort than retirement community.

Objective: Provide dignity and respect for seniors at all levels of care.

Design Intent: Regardless of the care level, the building design was conceived to collaborate with resident comfort, privacy and enhanced dignity, providing residents with ample opportunity to engage socially with one another or to enjoy their own company whenever they desire, and to ultimately respect the privacy and dignity of other residents.



Field Observations: Meeting the Objectives

Objective: Protect natural landscape.

Field Observations: One of the most outstanding features of Querencia is the consideration given to the local landscape. Great care was taken in preserving the natural landscape. Several natural areas are under restoration following the construction of the campus structures. Water features were used tastefully as part of the landscaping, blending in very well with the natural materials used for the buildings and the natural landscape itself, and adding both visual and auditory enhancements to the “resort” feeling of the campus.

Objective: Create a quiet resort lifestyle environment, featuring a destination spa/wellness center.

Field Observations: Querencia has indoor parking with only a small amount of exterior surface parking. This makes the site very attractive compared to the usual sea of automobiles found at most retirement communities. By governmental regulation, seventy-three percent of the site must be free of building or hard surfaced coverage. Utilizing under-building parking and a limited amount of surface parking, this contributes to the quiet resort feeling that was an objective for the site and project design.



Very nice outdoor areas, including a waterfall, water sculpture, trellis, outdoor fireplace and seating, all contribute to the development of a resort feel to the project. A breathtaking “infinity” pool is part of the spa/wellness center. Unfortunately, a well-meaning government regulator required a gate to be installed at the end of pool to keep people from falling out of the pool. Safety glass was used for a gate, which only detracts in a minor way to a pool that is still very attractive. The spa includes an exercise area and beauty salon with the exercise area having glass on three sides of the space making it a visually inviting place in which to exercise. The spa is connected to one of the main building wings so residents do not have to leave the building to gain access to it. However, the spa appears to be a separate building and an entity unto its own. This separation provides the enhanced sub-conscious feeling that the spa is a “destination” and not simply another part of the building.

Objective: Use an architectural style consistent with the historical Texas architectural tradition. Materials used include natural local stone, stucco, metal roof overhangs, inspired by local architecture, and the site itself, building into the landscape.

Field Observations: One of the most outstanding features of this project is the use of regionally appropriate form, materials and style. The building blends nicely with the surrounding west Texas architecture and landscape. There are beautiful views from nearly every apartment balcony and window. The cottages or Villas, in particular, would be very difficult to distinguish from surrounding residential homes and other structures, with their natural materials of stone, stucco, wood and metal roofs. The exterior of the main building incorporates these elements as well as metal roof overhangs, iron gates and window shading. This project is a great example of the use of local vernacular aesthetic to drive the design and makes it a meritorious project.

Objective: Be the premier provider of life care based senior living services in central Texas.

Field Observations: This very beautiful “upscale” continuing care retirement community is indeed attracting the affluent market sought by the developer. There is no doubt that the spa, the independent living apartments and Villas are very well designed and attractive to the intended target market. There are three issues that may be a future challenge in order for Querencia to maintain its status as the premier provider in their area: the somewhat more medical model design of the skilled nursing and memory support areas; the size of the common social and activity areas; and the ability of Querencia to meet the future demand for catered food services and special functions.

The assisted living residence is based on the double loaded corridor, central nurses’ station model. This unit is decorated in a similar style as the other residential areas, and the individual apartments consist of two room suites with a galley kitchen. Apartments are 400 to 525 gross square feet. The bathrooms are well designed to promote independence, but the showers are undersized for care provider assisted bathing. The staff reported getting wet while providing assistance during showers. The activity spaces are at the end of the corridors and they tend to be rarely utilized except for scheduled activities.

The skilled nursing and memory support residences are also based on the double loaded corridor, central nurses’ station model. These resident areas are sparsely decorated and are not at all in keeping with the quality of finishes in the remainder of the campus facilities. The individual nursing rooms are 280 gross square feet with no closets, but small wardrobes for clothes. There is space for one chair or one wheelchair and no options for bed placement within each room. A visitor has no place to sit in these rooms except on the bed. The bathrooms are Spartan in nature, with no shelves, drawers or other areas for staff supplies or the residents’ personal toileting articles. However, it is beneficial that the nursing and memory support rooms are private. For now, this is step-up in the market place, but in the long run, it is difficult to imagine that residents coming from large apartments and villas will be satisfied in this small living area with no storage and limited personal space.

The memory support area has a very nice, secured outdoor patio with rocking chairs, many well-maintained plants and nice views through decorative fencing. The central bathing areas in this and the assisted living are very much like a spa and may make up for the deficiencies found in individual showers.

The common areas in the independent living area have tasteful “upscale” decorating with some very nice modern art throughout. Extensive use of fresh flowers also contributes to the resort feeling. The common areas, however, seem undersized for this type of community and the program the residents will demand in the future.

When interviewed by the evaluation team, staff complained that the dining room was undersized even at the current 75% resident occupancy. The original plan was to have four dining venues, a private dining room, a bistro, a fine dining area and the regular dining room. The fine dining and the regular dining room have been combined to meet the demand for regular dining room



service. As more residents are added tables will need to be reset or there will need to be two settings. There appears to have been no consideration for storage of assistive walking devices and powered wheelchairs outside of the dining room and other gathering spaces. This may become a more difficult issue to address as residents age in place and more residents require these assistive devices.

The single private dining room may be insufficient to meet the demand for private parties and there is not another appropriate space to host large parties and meal functions. This private dining room is almost certainly to be increasingly more in demand given the economic level of residents. The kitchen also seems undersized to accommodate catered functions such as private parties.

The assembly room seats between fifty and seventy five people and is of insufficient size to hold large scale activities and performances even at the current campus occupancy level. Additionally, no storage was provided in the assembly room for activity supplies and equipment, tables, chairs and other things required for large functions.

A bistro located on the top floor of one of the wings offers beautiful views and an informal atmosphere. The bistro is used to serve a continental breakfast and sandwiches during the day. While this room might be used for private functions but the seating is inflexible due to the use of built-in seating. The wonderful exterior spaces on this campus offer a tremendous potential in the use of large group functions. A trellised area with an outdoor fireplace next to a nice water feature is a great place for large or small parties.

Objective: Provide an elevated level of care, unlike anything else in the area, with the focus on a resort style way of living.

Field Observations: During interviews with the evaluation team, the people who live and work at Querencia report that there is no other comparable community in their area. Providing private rooms in the assisted living and skilled nursing areas makes Querencia stand out from local nursing homes which offer only shared occupancy rooms. Residents in these areas appear to be well cared for and the staffing levels appear to be above average. As noted earlier, the design of these areas and the individual living units may be a handicap if Querencia faces the competition of a newer facility that uses a more up-to-date model for its higher levels of care. Certainly, a resort style of living has been accomplished in the independent living areas.

Objective: Provide dignity and respect for seniors at all levels of care.

Field Observations: There is no doubt that the residents of Querencia are treated with the utmost respect and that the staff has been trained to provide a real customer service orientation. Private rooms in the health care areas, in spite of the limitations mentioned earlier, are key to providing privacy, dignity and respect at all levels of care.

Field Observations: Themes and Hypothesis

Creating Community

The early promotion of the community by future resident Darrell Royal gave a sense that this was a special place for special Texans. The residents are driving the sustainability movement at the community and have already initiated the installation of solar heating panels for the swimming pool. Accomplishments like this will help residents gain a greater sense of ownership of their community.

There does seem to be a good sense of community among the residents, with the exception of those who live in the Villas. The small number of Villas compared to the apartments, 11 versus 156, seems out of proportion and there is a sense that people in the Villas feel they are somewhat separated from the remainder of the community. Due to site limitations, there can be no more Villas constructed. These limitations provide an interesting question as to the reasoning behind the diminished number of Villas and if a higher density of apartments may have been a more viable course to fully integrate all residents into the community.

It is very challenging to make any skilled nursing area feel like an integrated part of a continuing care retirement community. This might have been more readily accomplished if the skilled nursing area and memory support had been more in keeping with the design and finishes of the independent and assisted living areas, and had taken on more of the contemporary concepts of “household” or small scale, resident-oriented design.

Making a Home/Regional and Cultural Design

Querencia has captured the essence of the west Texas hill country building vernacular. This will go a long way in making



residents feel at home. The decorating also seems to be in keeping with the west Texas style and the Austin residents' interest in modern art as evidenced by the way they have decorated their apartments and Villas. The project is decorated with modern art including a dramatic two-story sculpture at the dining room reception area. There are also decorating touches that reflect the Texas influence, as evidenced by the inclusion of a cowhide-covered chair and the use of the emblematic Texas lone star as a decorating theme in the bistro.

The small rooms and layout of the skilled nursing and assisted living areas unfortunately do not lend themselves to the creation of a home. Concerns about these areas are discussed previously in this chapter. A double loaded corridor is an efficient way to provide large private rooms but this increases the travel distance between common areas and discourages interaction between residents as well as contributes to staff inefficiency.

Environmental Therapy

An attempt was made to connect with the residents in the memory support areas by decorating different stations in common areas with historically relevant memorabilia. An example would be a WWII uniform hanging in an open closet and a vintage typewriter sitting on a desk. Whether or not this

is relevant to individual residents and their historical perspective is questionable. If nothing else, this decorating is attractive and at some level more stimulating than the “usual” decorating schemes.

The memory support unit also has a lovely rooftop garden, with lots of plants, raised gardens, nice views and rocking chairs. The garden is enclosed, except for several windowless openings. There is appropriate fencing at these openings for safety that are very tastefully done so as to appear as decorative wrought iron.

In the independent living areas, long corridors are broken-up with architectural treatment at hallway midpoints. The carpet however is one continuous run of the same carpet and is not broken with a different color or pattern at the midpoints. This makes the hallways seem rather long.

The independent living areas have small sitting rooms throughout although no small lounges or gathering spots for small resident groups. Entertaining takes place in resident apartments, but the development of community among those who live on a particular wing might have been better encouraged if they had gathering areas near a grouping of apartments. This lack of small gathering spaces is exacerbated by the fact that the main building in general lacks space for entertaining groups.

Outdoor Environment

One of the outstanding features of this project is the development of the outside environment. The transitions between exterior and interior spaces are exceptional. The plan creates many opportunities for passive and active interactions with nature, thereby encouraging wellness, socializing, choice and community. The views from all the windows are wonderful, and the enclosed furnished porches are very inviting. Water features, outdoor seating, seemingly natural landscaping all add to areas that have the potential to be used and enjoyed by residents and visitors.

Alcoves are located on either side of the main entrance, blending in nicely to overall exterior design. The alcoves are used for cart storage and to keep those waiting for rides into the surrounding community out of the weather as they wait.

Quality of Workplace and Physical Plant

The building is highly energy efficient and has been designed and constructed to many sustainable standards. It is recognized as one of only a few local businesses recognized by the local utility as “Green Choice,” a sustainability standard which results in a special billing rate for facility utilities.

The needs of the staff and the operation of the facility were given thoughtful consideration during the design process. A service corridor runs down the spine of the connector between buildings, allowing staff functions to occur in the back of the house. It includes offices, storage areas and a hallway for transporting materials and equipment unseen between buildings. There is a large well-equipped shop area for maintenance and repairs. The kitchen is well laid out, but may be a little on the small side if residents demand catered services for private functions held on campus. Little thought was given to special function storage for items such as chafing dishes, banquet tables, and other infrequently utilized items. Banquet tables are even now being stored in the corridor that leads to the staff break room, a location that is somewhat less than desirable.

Satellite kitchens in the health care areas are well equipped. The staff support areas that have been designed in conjunction with these kitchens all seem to function well. The spacious staff break room with windows to the exterior is very nice compared to most communities.

Operator Perspective

Although the campus is somewhat new and there will surely be design items that, in retrospect, should have been more thoroughly considered, the operators of Querencia are generally pleased with the project and with the design. There is consensus that the design has captured the essence of the local West Texas Hill Country vernacular and has utilized the site quite well, given the numerous restrictions that were placed on it. Staff functions well as their workspaces have been, for the most part, well considered in the design.

However, the operators understand that they will probably face some challenges in the future, including a continued development of a sense of community. This is particularly true considering the small number of Villas and attempting to integrate these residents into the larger campus community. This can only be exacerbated by the limited amount of common social areas on campus combined with an anticipated growing demand for private resident functions and the catering that accompanies these.



General Project Information

Project Address:

Querencia at Barton Creek
 2500 Barton Creek Boulevard
 Austin, TX 78735

Project Design Team:

Architect:	CSD Architects
Interior Designer:	Interior Design Associates
Landscape Architect:	Talley Associates
Structural Engineer:	L.A. Fuess Partners
Mechanical Engineer:	Blum
Electrical Engineer:	Blum
Civil Engineer:	Murfee Engineering Company, Inc.
Development Consultant:	Greystone Communities
Contractor:	SpawGlass

Project Status:

Completion date: May 2007

Occupancy levels:

At facility opening date:	85%
At date of evaluation:	75%

Resident age (yrs):

At facility opening date average:	79
June 2007 average:	80

Project Areas

Overall Project:

Project Element	Included in this Project	
	Units, Beds, or Clients Served	Total Gross Area
Apartments(units)	167	375,000
Senior Living/assisted living/personal care (units)	40	28,875
Special care for persons with dementia	23	10,375
Skilled nursing care (beds)	42	15,825
Common social areas (people)	500	
Kitchen (daily meals served)	550	
Fitness/rehab/wellness (daily visits)	18	
Pool(s) and related areas (users)	45	

Residential Facilities:

Project Element	Apartments		
	No.	Typical Size (GSF)	Size Range (GSF)
One bedroom units	62	1,050	65100
Two bedroom units	77	1,450	111650
Two bedroom with den units	17	1,950	33150
Three bedroom units	12	2,200	26400
Total (all units)	167	236,300	GSF
Residents' social areas (lounges, dining and spaces)		79,625	GSF
Total gross area		375,000	GSF
Total net usable area (per space program)		315,925	NSF
Overall gross/net factor (ratio of gross area/net useable area)		1.19	

Assisted Living Facilities:

Project Element	New Construction		
	No. Units	Typical Size	
One Bedroom Apartment Unit	35	525	GSF
Two Bedroom Apartment Unit	5	900	GSF
Total (all units)	63		GSF
Residents' social areas (lounges, dining & recreation spaces)		2,550	GSF
Medical, healthcare, therapies, and activities spaces		1,110	GSF
Administrative, public and ancillary support services		2,340	GSF
Service, maintenance, and mechanical areas			GSF
Total gross area		28,875	GSF
Total net usable area (per space program)		22,875	NSF
Overall gross/net factor (ratio of gross area/net useable area)		1.26	

Site Size:

Acres: 38

Square feet: 1,655,280

Parking:

Type of Parking	For this facility			Totals
	Residents	Staff	Visitors	
Open surface lot(s)	0	27	24	51
Under building parking	191	40	0	231
Totals	191	67	24	282

Dementia-Specific Assisted Living:

Project Element	New Construction		
	No. Units	Typical Size	
Studio Apartment Unit	23	325	GSF
Total (all units)	23	7,500	GSF
Residents' social areas (lounges, dining & recreation spaces)		1,270	GSF
Medical, healthcare, therapies and activities spaces		375	GSF
Administrative, public and ancillary support services		930	GSF
Service, maintenance, and mechanical areas		300	GSF
Total gross area		10,375	GSF
Total net usable area (per space program)		9,145	NSF
Overall gross/net factor (ratio of gross area/net useable area)		1.13	

Nursing Facilities:

Project Element					New Construction		
					No. Beds	Typical Room Size	
Residents in private rooms					38	275	GSF
Residents in shared rooms					4	250	GSF
No. of residents:	40	Rooms:	40	Beds:	42	10,950	GSF
Social areas (lounges, dining, and recreation spaces)						2,375	GSF
Medical, healthcare, therapies, and activities spaces						1,080	GSF
Administrative, public and ancillary support services						920	GSF
Service, maintenance, and mechanical areas						500	GSF
Total gross area						15,825	GSF
Total net usable area (per space program)						14,405	NSF
Overall gross/net factor (ratio of gross area/net useable area)						1.10	

Construction Costs:

Source of Cost Data:

Final construction cost as of May 2007

Soft Costs:

Land cost or value	\$5,500,000
All permit and other entitlement fees	Included in below
Legal	Included in below
Appraisals	Included in below
Marketing and preopening	Included in below
Total soft costs	\$43,070,000

Building Costs:

New construction except FF&E, special finishes, floor and window coverings, HVAC and electrical	\$64,800,000
Renovations except FF&E, special finishes, floor and window coverings, HVAC and electrical	N/A
FF&E, and small wares	\$2,500,000
Floor coverings	Included in above
Window coverings	Included in above
HVAC	Included in above
Electrical	Included in above
Medical equipment costs and FFE and window coverings	Included in above
Total building costs	\$67,300,000

Site Costs:

New on-site	Include in below
New off-site	N/A
Renovation on-site	N/A
Renovation off-site	N/A
Landscape	\$1,200,000
Special site features or amenities	N/A
Total site costs	\$1,200,000

Total Project Costs:

\$111,570,000

Financing Sources:

Tax Exempt Bonds