

GAY RETIREMENT COMMUNITIES – DESIGNING FOR DIGNITY

BY

RAYMOND DUNNING

A Thesis

Proposal Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF INTERIOR DESIGN

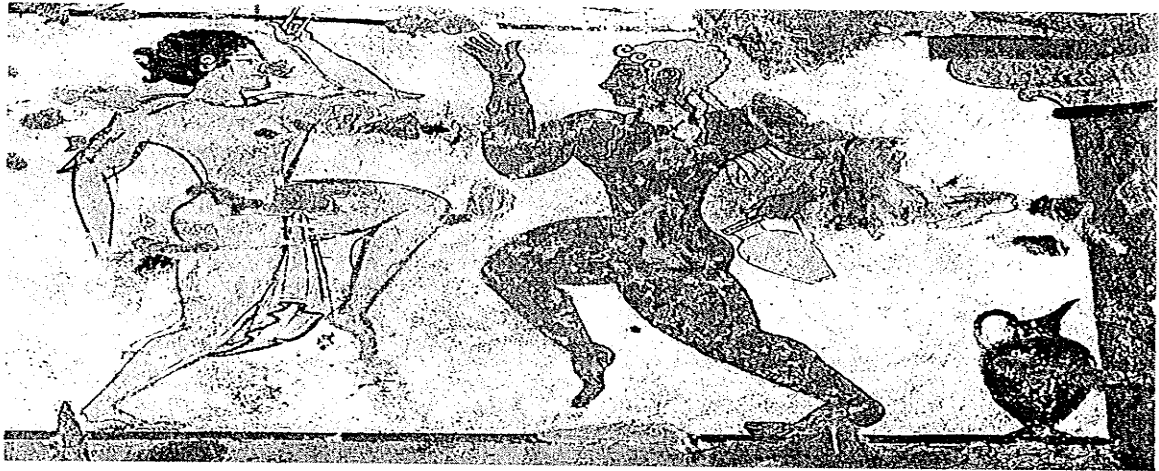
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Winnipeg, Manitoba

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## Abstract

This thesis explores the notion of gay retirement communities from a Canadian perspective and focuses on building a gay retirement community. During my research I discovered that gay baby-boomers are a social and vocal group. Many have spent the majority of their lives fighting for equal rights. As they approach retirement, they will expect to have retirement communities that are designed in a manner that allows them to age with dignity and respect.

This thesis also examines what other minority groups, including the Italian, Jewish and Chinese communities in the greater Toronto area have done in terms of providing housing for their elderly. Issues related to language, culture and food first prompted these groups to build retirement communities that serve their own seniors. These retirement communities continue to serve a purpose even today. Similarly, gay men require retirement communities that serve that segment of our population. People who are 65 years of age and older tend to be less tolerant of gay culture and are generally more homophobic than younger groups. My thesis argues that gay retirement communities are critical for the survival of the gay community. Furthermore, this thesis provides interior designers with an insight into the needs of their gay clients and establishes guidelines for the construction of gay communities.

The Introduction presents a need for gay retirement communities. Chapter One presents the necessary tools to conduct research with this social group; for example, having an open mind and being caring, compassionate and remaining impartial. Chapter Two discusses the lifestyle of gay men. This is necessary so that interior designers may

have an understanding of who their clients are. Chapter Three discusses Queer Space and asks whether or not queer space will disappear with equality. It also examines what the concept of home means to gay men. This is a critical discovery because it provides an understanding of elderly gay men's wants and needs in terms of retirement communities. Chapter Four provides a deeper understanding of the services that retirement communities built for minority groups including Villa Charities, Baycrest and the Yee Hong Centre offer their residents within their facilities. This chapter concludes by presenting a model for a gay retirement community. This framework was augmented through the interviews that I conducted with my respondents. Finally, this chapter provides guidelines that are necessary in order for interior designers to plan retirement communities that will offer gays the opportunity to grow old with people who share similar life experiences, and thus age with dignity and respect.

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## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Prologue.....	viii
List of figures.....	x
Introduction: <u>Gay Retirement Communities – Designing for Dignity</u>	
Statement of the problem.....	6
Gay culture from 1930s to present.....	7
Limitations.....	12
Chapter map.....	13
Methodological framework.....	15
The participants.....	16
Summary.....	18
Chapter 1: Methodology	
Introduction.....	20
My study.....	22
Methods used.....	25
What is an “emic” and “etic” study?.....	27
My own perspective.....	29
Advantages from being on the inside.....	31
The instrument.....	33
The physical setting.....	34
Pacing and timing.....	34
Data analysis.....	35

	The sampling.....	36
	Breakdown of sample.....	39
	Gaining trust is critical.....	43
	Being aware of personal biases.....	44
	Summary.....	46
Chapter 2:	What interior designers need to know about the lifestyle of their aging gay clients	
	Introduction.....	48
	I thought we were a caring society?.....	49
	Housing for marginalized groups.....	53
	Retirement communities in Toronto.....	66
	What can we do to understand the needs of gay men?.....	68
	Living arrangements.....	70
	Health issues.....	71
	What is growing gray like for gay men?.....	74
	What is ageism?.....	76
	How to build the dream.....	77
	Summary.....	80
Chapter 3:	Queer space – what does home mean?	
	Introduction.....	83
	It’s about having a home.....	84
	Home is also a living museum.....	91
	Queer space – what is it?.....	93
	Queer space is changing.....	97



Queer space – is also a reaction against the dominant culture.....	101
What is desired in a gay retirement community?.....	103
Building our dream.....	106
Summary.....	114
Chapter 4: If we built it will they come?	
Introduction.....	116
My exploration.....	117
Designing for Dignity.....	132
Design elements to consider.....	135
Guidelines for the private suites.....	137
Guidelines for the building itself.....	139
Summary.....	144
Conclusion: What can be done?.....	147
References.....	153
Appendix A: Consent Form.....	160
Appendix B: Illustrations of interiors.....	162
Appendix C: List of interview questions.....	166

## Prologue

As a gay man in university I experienced conflicts, contradictions, and frustrations concerning coming to terms with my research topic. Initially, I wanted to study the design of long – term care environments, and spent an entire semester establishing a need for gay long – term care facilities. However, I realized that governments would probably not build gay long – term care environments and shifted my focus to *Gay Retirement Communities – Designing for Dignity*. I realized that a gay retirement community would probably be more realistic, and that upon building a gay retirement community, gays would recognize their mortality and thus long –term care facilities would eventually transpire.

This research topic has been challenging on many different levels. Because there is little research on the design of gay retirement communities I had to plan the road that I would travel down to help support my claim; that gay retirement communities are needed. I suspected that because of my own homosexuality, I would be able to relate to gays who are of retirement age, yet I still felt strange and in unknown territory. Therefore, I felt it necessary to try and gain an understanding of who my clients are. Raymond Berger's *Gay and Grey* was an excellent starting point. As I later found out during my interviews, that gays are very different from one another, yet they had shared similar experiences such as coming to terms with their own sexual identities and being

victims of discrimination. Finding cultural patterns helped in terms of identifying a model to build a retirement community geared for gay men.

I also quickly realized that I would have to look to theories to help guide my own research. This was a very frustrating time for me; I found myself sitting quietly for hours writing notes and jotting down ideas. I experienced some difficult times because I honestly did not know of any person who had conducted research of this nature. Where do I start and which path should I travel? I remember sitting in the back garden last year, on a warm summer night and just looking up into the sky thinking...and thinking...eventually this thesis began to slowly take root. The journey has been long and often challenging, but also rewarding on so many different levels. When I think back to my own childhood, I always took the road that was less worn and now upon reflection of this task, I have taken such a road on my way to discovery. This research has proven that there is a need for retirement communities that are geared towards gay men, and as I suspected from day one, they are different from what is currently out there.

## List of figures

Frontpiece	Etruscan. <i>Two Dancers</i> (detail of a wall painting). About 480-470 B.C. Tomb of Lionesses, Tarquinia.....	1
Figure 1	Graph by Raymond Dunning.....	40
Figure 2	Graph by Raymond Dunning.....	40
Figure 3	Graph by Raymond Dunning.....	41
Figure 4	Graph by Raymond Dunning.....	41
Figure 5	Graph by Raymond Dunning.....	42
Figure 6	Graph by Raymond Dunning.....	42
Figure 7	Site Plan of Palms of Manasota in Sarasota, Florida.....	56
Figure 8	Palms of Manasota, Floor Plan of Majesty Model Phase II.....	57
Figure 9	Palms of Manasota, Photograph of Majesty Model Phase II.....	57
Figure 10	Palms of Manasota, Photograph of Majesty Model Phase II.....	58
Figure 11	Rainbow Vision Properties, Condo Type A.....	59
Figure 12	Rainbow Vision Properties, Condo Type C.....	59
Figure 13	Rainbow Vision Properties, Perspective of Dining Room.....	60
Figure 14	Home as a Living Museum.....	91
Figure 15	Illustration of Panopticon, courtesy University College London Library.....	95
Figure 16	Floor Plan of Model Suite.....	100
Figure 17	Sketch of Gay Community by Raymond Dunning.....	102
Figure 18	Typical Floor Plan of a One-Bedroom Unit by R. Dunning.....	108
Figure 19	Section through Retirement Community by R. Dunning.....	112
Figure 20	Typical Floor Plan for Caboto Terrace, Suite 1B.....	120

Figure 21	Typical Floor Plan for Casa Del Zotto.....	120
Figure 22	Site Plan of Villa Charities.....	121
Figure 23	Typical Bachelor Floor Plan for Baycrest Terrace.....	125
Figure 24	Typical One-Bedroom Floor Plan for Baycrest Terrace.....	126
Figure 25	Model of Yee Hong Centre.....	130
Figure 26	Entrance into Yee Hong Community Centre.....	131
Figure 27	Conceptual Plan of Ground Level by R. Dunning.....	141
Figure 28	Conceptual Plan of 2 <sup>nd</sup> Floor by R. Dunning.....	142
Figure 29	Conceptual Plan of 3 <sup>rd</sup> to 4 <sup>th</sup> Floors by R. Dunning.....	142
Figure 30	Conceptual Plan of 11 <sup>th</sup> Floor by R. Dunning.....	143
Figure 31	Conceptual Plan of 12 <sup>th</sup> Floor by R. Dunning.....	143
Figure 32	Conceptual Plan of Roof Plan by R. Dunning.....	144

# Gay Retirement Communities – Designing for Dignity

## Introduction

With advances in medicine and technology people in Canada are living longer and healthier lives. The average life expectancy in the early part of the twentieth century was only 47 years; in the 1950s it was 67 years, and today the average Canadian adult can expect to live to be 77 years of age (Foot, 1996). Baby boomers, the generation born between 1944 and 1960 are growing old, and they account for a large segment of the population. Today, people who are over 60 account for 20 percent of the population (Foot, 1996).

According to the latest Canadian Statistics, (Statistics Canada, 2004), approximately five million of Canada's total population of approximately 31 million are over 60 years of age, and experts estimate that approximately three to ten percent are gay. Bryant Welch, the former head of the American Psychological Association testified on June 2, 1989 that APA had found:

In fact all the research supported the conclusion that homosexuality...is a sexual orientation found consistently in about ten percent of the male population and about five percent of the female population...research showed that across the different historical eras and in totally different cultures the incidence of homosexuality remained the same irrespective of public attitudes and prohibitions.

Considering that three to ten percent of Canada's population of 31 million is gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT); this would equate to approximately 150, 000 to 530, 000 GLBT seniors living in Canada today. Research further suggests that GLBT individuals are more likely to live in urban areas and that larger cities have an especially

high concentration of GLBT seniors (Florida, 2002). Since estimates indicate that within the next 30 years the number of seniors over the age of 65 will grow by 30 percent, and due to the fact that larger cities have the highest concentrations of GLBT individuals in the country, it follows that the community of older GLBT adults will grow as well (Cahill, South & Spade, 2000).

According to at least one study, approximately 65 percent of gays and lesbian seniors live alone. This is nearly twice the rate of all people aged 65 years and older. While nearly 50 percent of the general elderly population live with life partners, this is true for only 20 percent of gay men and lesbians (Cahill et al, 2000).

Senior Agency International, a company that specializes in marketing to the elderly states, "that people who are over 50 own three quarters of the financial assets and account for half of all discretionary spending power in developed countries", and that same-sex male couples account for an even larger proportion of that spending power due to the fact that they have dual incomes, no children and have had the element of time to accumulate assets (Florida, 2002). As these gay baby - boomers age they will be living longer and more fulfilling lives during their retirement (Wilton, 2000). Unlike aging populations of the past, both heterosexual and gay baby - boomers are highly educated and thus have an understanding of what makes for good design in retirement communities. By good design, I mean retirement communities that are designed in a manner that is sensitive to our aging population and environments that have a warm homelike ambience, rather than an institutional setting. Colour plays a critical component in retirement facilities for example; dining room colours that are painted with warmer tones of coral, peach or soft yellow can actually help with improving appetite.

Colour schemes that are monochromatic are usually perceived as institutional (Leibrock, 2000) which can cause anxiety among residents. Healthcare design has improved greatly in the past decade and will only continue to improve as time goes on. Overall, future inhabitants of retirement communities will expect higher quality of care and better designed environments. Retirement communities should be supportive of everybody including minority groups. Interior environments help to shape and define us and these environments will have to be inclusive of the gay community too. Currently, there are no retirement communities in Canada that are gay specific. However, I believe that this will change as gay baby - boomers begin to retire and as gays and lesbians put pressure on policy makers and designers to accommodate their needs.

Between now and 2010 the predicted rise in the elderly population will create a demand for not only long - term care facilities but for retirement communities as well (Leibrock, 2000). Retirement living is an American concept and most retirement communities are privately owned and operated; candidates generally require financial equity to sustain their residency in these facilities. However, many people in Canada continue to equate retirement communities with nursing homes. This is because retirement communities did not exist 30 years ago. Generally, people stayed at home for as long as possible and would enter a nursing home when they were no longer able to care for themselves at home. Canadians are living longer and healthier lives and because of this retirement communities will gain momentum (Sperry & Prosen, 1996). They are ideal for person in relatively good health, who may have minimal care needs and do not want to remain in their homes.



Retirement communities can provide a safe environment that allows for the opportunity to socialize and obtain minimum care, while maintaining privacy, independence and dignity. There are approximately 600 retirement communities in the province of Ontario alone and all homes must abide by the regulations and bylaws set out in the Tenant Protection Act, the Health Protection and Promotion Act and the Fire and Building Codes (Goldstein, 2003).

In summary it would appear that based upon published works and theoretical statements that most people are not considering the needs of the gay community when planning retirement communities. During my ten years of practical experience as an interior designer I can honestly say that the needs of gay men were never discussed, even though we ensured that religious groups were accommodated for in the design of schools and hospitals. I would conclude that because issues of diversity are not being discussed, that much research is needed in the design of retirement communities that are geared to gay men. It is critical to ensure that a planning model accurately represents the needs and wants of gay men. Therefore, research is greatly needed to determine in what ways retirement communities that are geared towards gay men will differ from what is currently out there.

To reduce this gap, my research focuses on the needs and wants of gay men and provides the programming requirements and guidelines that are necessary for a successful gay retirement model. I am hoping that my research will aid developers, architects and interior designers in creating retirement communities that are “culturally” sensitive to gay men. I realize that the needs of lesbians, bisexuals and transgender groups are important cohorts that need to be studied too, but to study retirement living for the entire GLBT

community would have been too challenging for a thesis project of this magnitude. As a gay man, I felt that because of my own personal experiences, that I would be able to relate to the needs of gay men, therefore I have chosen to study this segment of the GLBT community. Consider what one of my research participants had to say regarding retirement communities and the research that I am doing:

The concept of a gay retirement community is something that is very much needed...Most gays are going to have very different needs than straight men...The research you're doing is critical. There is nothing out there for elderly gay men, at least when I'm 70 and if there are these types of facilities, than at least I will have choice, right now there are no choices (Edwin, 63 yrs).

The most obvious way of achieving the goal of creating retirement communities that are sensitive to gay men is to ask them through the technique of interviewing. I choose interviews and case studies and discuss this further in Chapter One which focuses on my methodology. Gay retirement communities are currently being planned in the United States and by studying them I was able to develop similar guidelines to establish gay retirement communities in Canada. The findings of my research are useful to developers, architects and interior designers to ensure that they understand the wants and needs of gay men when planning retirement communities. This research provides the framework in which to build gay friendly retirement communities.

### Statement of the Problem

Interior design practitioners need to re-think the way in which they solve design problems; especially ones that deal with retirement communities. It is critical to examine the individual needs, cultural differences, and historical and personal experiences of people in order to understand how their individual experiences have shaped their fundamental values and beliefs. The intent of this study is to focus on the future aging society of tomorrow, specifically gay men, and to investigate their needs in order to help shape the future design of gay friendly retirement communities. Human beings are all special and unique. Just as no heterosexual person is alike, the same is true for gay men. Through a process of in - depth interviewing, a better understanding of the gay lifestyle will unfold. How do gay men feel about growing old in existing retirement communities? What design elements and characteristics are common to gay men and their lifestyle? What design elements are special and unique to gay men? These are critical questions that need to be answered to ensure that as a group gay men feel safe. Interior designers may then be able to incorporate these findings into the design of retirement communities that are geared towards gay men. In order to ascertain the information needed, the following questions have been developed.

1. Is there a need for gay retirement communities?
2. What design features should be incorporated into retirement communities that will make gays feel comfortable?
3. What is the planning process that interior designers should consider when designing gay retirement communities?

These are critical questions which helped me to understand the wants and needs of gay men. However, it was also necessary for me to get an understanding of who my clients are and therefore delving into the past was necessary in order to understand the present.

### **Gay Culture from the 1930s to the Present.**

Many gays who were born around 1930 would be approximately 74 years of age today. During that era, their parents are likely to have experienced Freudian thought and its attendant held beliefs that homosexuality is a mental illness that requires a cure. As a result, many men of this generation married and had families hoping that heterosexual marriage would somehow “cure” them. Countless men during this period also turned to organized religion to help “mend” their ways. Given the Great Depression, times were challenging during the 1930s and many people lost their fortunes overnight. Because society was not accepting of gay culture, it was not often discussed. In their youth many of these young boys “blended” in as young “straight” boys. However, much research indicates that young boys continue to experience horrendous hardships dealing with their identities (Bergling, 2004). These historical events shaped gay sexual orientation and influenced their views about openness, relationships, and conception of self (Nardi et al, 1994).

The 1940s saw the rise of gay bars, the liberation of women due to World War II and the popularization of the first novels with gay and lesbian protagonists. It also saw the development of gay communities in urban areas such as New York City, Chicago and

Montreal. However, gay rights were still non-existent and it was common for gays to lose their jobs and to be evicted from their apartments if their homosexuality was discovered. If gays were brave enough to live their lives as gay men it was done in secrecy and hidden from mainstream society. At work, they would appear as heterosexual and their private lives would not have been discussed for fear of losing their job, being evicted from their apartment or being thrown in jail. Again, gay men simply remained undetected and invisible. Unfortunately, homosexuality was still viewed as a mental illness or a sin (Tully, 2000).

In the United States during the 1950's America swung to the political right and many gays retreated deeper into "closets" to escape the McCarthy era's witch-hunt for "commies, pinkos, homos, and spies" (Nardi et al, 1994). This decade emphasized the corporate man and his family, the race to the suburbs to escape the crises of the inner city and many women were forced back into their role as housewife (Tully, 2000). The 1950s were uncertain times for the gay community and as a group they remained virtually invisible.

The 1960s brought about social justice and the rise of civil rights movements. Previously disenfranchised minority groups suddenly had some political and legal clout. The Civil Rights Movement, Women's Liberation and Gay Liberation Movement pushed toward legal inclusion. The Gay Liberation Movement is credited with starting at the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village in New York City. It was a private gay club where gay men and female impersonators, could congregate, drink, dance and be social. It was a place where they could meet other gay men and feel safe. The peace and tranquility ended when police raided the Stonewall Inn on July 6, 1969. In Canada our former Prime

Minister Trudeau made amendments to the criminal code and decriminalized homosexuality in 1969 (Smith, 1999).

In Canada, the 1970s saw the declassification of homosexuality as a mental illness and increased public awareness of the gay community. It was also a time of increased support for the gay community and as a result many groups and organizations began to appear. Gay "culture" was beginning to be talked about and discussed by society at large. Finally, we began to feel a sense of security and peace of mind in larger cities such as Montreal. In 1977 Quebec included sexual orientation in its Human Rights Code, making it the first province in Canada to pass a gay civil rights law (Smith, 1999).

The 1980s saw an increase in the numbers of publicly identified gay men such as former Member of Parliament Svend Robinson, who were challenging the local, provincial and national policies. Unfortunately, it also coincided with the start of the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) pandemic. AIDS also gave the Christian Religious Right ammunition because they saw AIDS as God's condemnation of the gay lifestyle. In 1985 the Parliamentary Committee on Equality Rights releases a report titled "*Equality for All.*" The committee wrote that it was shocked by the high level of discriminatory treatment against gays in Canada. The report discusses the harassment, violence, physical abuse, psychological oppression and hate propaganda that gays live with. The committee recommended that the Canadian Human Rights Act be changed to make it illegal to discriminate based on sexual orientation (Smith, 1999).

The 1990s continued to challenge Canadian laws that oppressed gay men. Gays in many provinces no longer had to worry about the losing ones job or being evicted from their apartments, if their sexuality was discovered. The 1990's also made significant

advances in terms of treating people with AIDS. It is also a decade where Gay groups continued to fight off religious groups and their attempts to have homosexuality returned to the category of mental illness. Unfortunately, the province of Alberta continues to oppress gays. Delwin Vriend, a lab instructor at King's University College in Edmonton was fired from his job because of his sexuality. The Alberta Human Rights Commission refused to investigate his case, because the Alberta Human Individual Rights Protection Act does not cover discrimination based on sexual orientation. However, many other provinces had taken great strides to protect gays from discrimination. Finally, many gay men could live their lives without fear of being victimized at work or at home.

According to Tully, history and the historical era that gays and lesbians grew up in has a significant impact on how they view themselves and perceive the world. It would make sense that those who are in their 70's will view the world much differently than to gays who "came out" during Stonewall. The older cohort may harbor internalized homophobia and an unwillingness to be particularly open about their sexual orientation. Whereas the baby boomer cohort may be more open with their sexual orientation, due to the fact that their generation fought for issues dealing with human and gay rights.

Obviously, there is huge diversity within these groups. Younger gays today may not experience the same "back lash" that the older cohorts have had to endure. The younger groups today are able to live their lives more at ease. However, it would depend on one's family circle, support and geographical location. Gay rights tend to be accepted in bigger cities such as Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. Homosexuality is talked about today and often discussed in the work place, in schools and during dinner. There have been drastic changes in the last 35 years. There are gay television characters that are

portrayed in a positive way as the protagonist. Many celebrities are “out” such as *Ellen* and being gay is slowly being accepted as a “normal” way of life. Gays today have much more support groups available than ever before. The internet makes it possible for gays to be a part of a larger global gay community. Most Canadian universities have gay friendly zones that promote a gay positive environment. These are places where gay and lesbian students can meet without fear of being judged. There are laws in many provinces that protect gays from overt discrimination. What does this tell us about elderly gay men in their late 60s and beyond? It may be that being silent about their homosexuality was a tactic for survival. Many of these men have lived their lives “quietly”, not really discussing their sexuality, because being gay was against the law. However, many gay baby boomers spent much of their youth fighting for equal rights and they will not tolerate any sort of injustice because of their sexuality.

It is for this reason and others that there is a need for gay friendly retirement communities. Even though society in general has become more empathetic to the struggles of gay men, many of their heterosexual peers harbor homophobia. Gay men of this generation are not likely enticed to live their life as gay men and as a result many would most likely go back into the closet in a heterosexual retirement community. Because most of these gay men grew up during very oppressive times they are not likely to feel comfortable in an exclusively gay environment. Many of my own participants expressed this, especially gay men who have many heterosexual female friends and younger age groups in their 40s. A gay friendly retirement residence would be geared to the gay community and allow for open minded heterosexuals to live there too. Gay baby boomers are not as sensitive to the idea of living in a gay retirement community and thus



if a gay friendly retirement community was built they would most likely move in. However, as younger cohorts of gays enter retirement they may not desire gay retirement communities, because being gay may not be an issue when they reach retirement age, we hope.

### **Limitations**

The gay community is a very close-knit community and it is difficult to conduct research within it, without inside connections. Gaining access into this community becomes even that much more difficult with elderly gay males; this is especially true since so many have had to blend into society for survival purposes. Bearing this in mind I managed to interview twenty – three participants who range in age from 43 to 69. Yet they are not a cross section of gay men since they are primarily well educated, middle to upper middle class, white gay males. Seventeen of the participants have their homes paid off in full and have some sort of savings whether thorough registered retirement savings plan, bonds or stock options. Two couples still have a mortgage and only one participant rented. There are limitations to this kind of sampling. It results in a more homogeneous population since connections are made through networks and friendships. Given this, the findings of this study should not be projected on all gay men in Toronto. It is impossible, in the gay community context, to draw a scientific random sample from the total population. Therefore this sample reflects the opinions and attitudes of a small portion of the gay community within the greater Toronto area.

## Chapter Map

In Chapter One, I will take the reader through the methodology that my research took on. This is an important journey to take because research of this nature has never been conducted in Canada to date. This documentation of my methodology is critical, because it will allow for future interior designers who are interested in conducting research on gay issues, to have a general understanding of the unique challenges they will face. By understanding the methodology, interior designers will get a sense of how my research evolved and the outcomes of the data collected.

Chapter Two outlines how gay men remain marginalized from society, primarily because of heterosexism. Focus will be given to Raymond Berger, who is the pioneer of elderly gay male issues. The work of Berger will be built upon in an analysis of more contemporary visionaries such as Bergling, who adds a recent perspective on issues of aging within the gay community. It is critical for designers to get a sense of the oppression that gay men confront on a daily basis and how they have endured to get to survive in what is a heterosexist society. I also pull in some recent studies on gay issues that relate to aging. In 2000 Cahill, South and Spade from the United States, produced: *Outing Age Public Policy Issues Affecting Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Elders* and in 1997, the Sum Quod Sum Foundation Inc. in Winnipeg, Manitoba created; *Needs Assessment Survey of Senior Gays and Lesbians* and most recently, OLIVE, (Older Lesbians in Valued Environments) issued a report in Toronto in August 2003 on the *Health and Housing Needs of Aging Lesbians* and in 2003, a report by Dr. Kitchen out of England, *Get Heard, Social Care Needs of Older Gay Men and Lesbians on Merseyside*.

It must be noted that the discussion of these contemporary theoretical frameworks is largely to understand our client and their wants and needs in terms of retirement living communities. As a result, a need for gay retirement communities is established and in doing this, a foundation is built, on which to address the second major section of this research - what to do with this knowledge. This awareness will be vital to help create a framework on which to build retirement communities that are inclusive of gay men so that they can age with dignity and respect.

Chapter Three begins by centering on the works of Clare Cooper Marcus who looks at the notion of home. I investigate what home means for gay men and make comparisons to Marcus's work. I then explore the concept of Queer Space and how it developed. I make reference to Michel Foucault and Griselda Pollock. This was necessary in order to gain an understanding of my clients' experiences. In doing so, interior designers will understand why it is important to build spaces that are inclusive to all. Queer spaces need to exist as long as there is hatred towards gay men. They serve a purpose of empowering the group through a sense of community and belonging just as other ethnic minority groups have their own clubs and organizations, so will the gay community. These theoretical frameworks are critical to get an understanding of what queer space is and to understand gay men wants and needs in terms of retirement communities.

Chapter Four begins by examining what other so called, ethnic minority groups have done in terms of providing housing for their elderly. This is necessary in order to determine if any design elements can be applied to a retirement community geared towards gay men. I also examine the gay retirement community models that are currently

being built in the United States and pull from the strengths of the facilities. Throughout my research I draw upon the unique perspectives of my participants and a model for a retirement community geared towards gay men begins to evolve. These guidelines will be useful for developers, architects and interior designers to design successful retirement communities for gay men where they can age with dignity and respect.

### **Methodological Framework**

This study was designed according to techniques and methods appropriate for qualitative research, specifically interviewing. The literature concerning research methods has been reviewed from several sources in particular, Booth et al, (1995); Maxwell, (1996); and Sommer, & Sommer, (2001). These writers use the type of investigation reported here. Therefore, the methodology that my research took on was based upon their work. A case study justifies the selection of a particular case in terms of the purposes of the study and existing theory and research, and a different kind of argument is needed to support the generalization of its conclusions. Interview - based studies employ a sampling logic, selecting interviewees in order to generalize to some population of interest.

The required size for any research design depends upon a number of factors including: the type of research being performed, i.e. quantitative or qualitative, the financial constraints of the research project, the importance of the results and the degree of accuracy that the researcher is able to achieve (Maxwell, 1996). Careful consideration was taken in the selection of the respondents for this study since I wanted to ensure that

an accurate cross - sectional sample would result in the richest possible data. As a researcher, I am interested not only in the physical events and behavior that are or may be taking place; but also in how the participants in the study make sense of such activities and events, and how their understanding influences their behavior. This focus is what is known as the interpretive approach to social science (Bredo & Feinberg, 1982; Rainbow & Sullivan, 1979). Personal interviews can provide a fascinating source of research data. Their intrinsic interest stems from the personal interaction that is the core of the procedure. The key element of the interview is that it is a “conversation with a purpose” (Bingham & Moore, 1959). With encouragement and recognition of general interest on the part of the interviewer, people will reveal a great deal about themselves and about their beliefs and feelings. The interview is particularly advantageous for the exploration of topics, and they can be used to assess beliefs and opinions as well as personal characteristics. An interview gives people the opportunity to tell their stories in their own words and can be empowering, as it recognizes people as experts of their own experiences. A further advantage of the interview is that it allows people who may be unwilling or unable to communicate their ideas in writing the opportunity to express themselves in an interview (Sommer & Sommer, 2002).

### **The Participants**

Many gay couples develop friendships with other gay couples that sometimes become an extension of their immediate family. In many cases this is true because gay men

especially gay men over sixty cut ties with their families in order to live their lives as openly gay men (Berger, 1982). However, my research indicated that many gay men maintained contact with their families albeit, their sexuality remained un - acknowledged. Identifying a varied cross section of gay males may be difficult to do for the average person because of the way in which the gay community protects and shelters itself from the hostility and homophobia of the outside world; they become insular, yet they function within society just as other minority groups do. I conducted a series of semi - structured interviews, a maximum of one interview each at two hours in length, with men from the gay community. I discuss this further in chapter one.

The participants are as follows:

Participant One: Benjamin is 69 years of age and retired.

Participant Two: Philip is 63 years of age and retired.

Participant Three: Albert is 62 years of age and employed.

Participant Four: Edward is 49 years of age and employed.

Participant Five: Ali is 66 years of age and retired.

Participant Six: Richard is 67 years of age and retired.

Participant Seven: Laird is 53 years of age and employed.

Participant Eight: Bruno is 68 years of age and retired.

Participant Nine: Scott is 57 years of age and retired.

Participant Ten: Darryl is 65 years of age and retired.

Participant 11: Frank is 57 years of age and employed.

Participant 12: Jack is 60 years of age and employed.

Participant 13: Enzo is 62 years of age and retired.

Participant 14: Joseph is 67 years of age and retired.

Participant 15: Robert is 51 years of age and employed.

Participant 16: Dean is 43 years of age and employed.

Participant 17: Darren is 53 years of age and employed.

Participant 18: Roger is 63 years of age and retired.

Participant 19: Thomas is 68 years of age and retired.

Participant 20: Edwin is 63 years of age and retired.

Participant 21: Walter is 55 years of age and semi-retired.

Participant 22: Ronald is 69 years of age and semi-retired.

Participant 23: Harold is 62 years of age and semi-retired.

### Summary

The needs of gay men are critical and should be included in the overall design of retirement communities. However, in order for this to occur, society needs to be re-educated in terms of how older gay men are treated. In virtually every scholarly discussion of gay culture and aging; heterosexual society has to be mindful of the historical circumstances in which older gay men grew up in (Garnets & Kimmel, 2003). In most cities, prior to the 1950s, there were few, if any meeting places such as bars, cafes, galleries and gyms for gay men to meet; and there were no gay organizations either. Society in general was very homophobic including the medical association. Psychiatry defined homosexuality as a mental illness until the 1970s. These backlashes

forced many gay people to opt to stay “in the closet” in order to survive. In the past, most religious groups condemned same sex unions as crimes against nature, and unfortunately, many still do today.

Throughout most of the twentieth century society in general reacted to gays with pity, ridicule, rage and disgust (Garnets & Kimmel, 2003). As society continues to evolve we must consider the steps that need to be taken to achieve a non-discriminatory environment. It is critical to have not only compassion, but also an understanding of the level of hostility and repression that gay adults have experienced. We must be prepared to adapt our experiences with current associates to meet the needs of post-Stonewall cohorts of gay senior adults. As we continue to progress as a society, future generations of gay men are more likely to have been out for most of their adult lives, just as this writer, and will expect to age with dignity and respect (Cahill et al, 2000). However, current generations deserve respect and dignity too.

Thinking of the elderly as a homogenous group is a serious misconception. Just as the elderly have only their age in common, gay men similarly share only their sexual orientation. Both of these groups share a wide range of backgrounds, interests, attitudes, and lifestyles. There are many ways to grow old as a gay man, and most tend to lean towards a relatively high satisfaction of life in old age (Berger, 1982). It is the responsibility of interior design schools to ensure that future interior designers have the tools to design retirement communities that are conducive and supportive of gay men, so that they are able to have a sense of belonging and home.



## Methodology

### Chapter 1

#### Introduction

This chapter examines my methodology and discusses where I fit into this research as a gay man. What are some of the advantages of having this “insider” position? How did I begin? How did I collect my data and analyze it? I touch upon the potential limitations of having this insider perspective, what my reactions were and what some of the reactions were of my research participants. I discuss some of the “problems” that an outsider researcher may have in trying to conduct research of this nature. One way that I gained confidence and strengthened my research participants’ trust was through ensuring confidentiality. I also had to stand back from my research and look at where I fit into this and being aware of my own personal biases. It was critical that I follow the University of Manitoba’s *Ethics of Research Involving Human Subjects*, policy 1406 in terms of conducting my research. Finally I make suggestions as to other areas that require further research.

Within the last twenty years research has been conducted on issues such as aging within the gay community however relatively little research has been conducted on gay retirement living per se. This research advocates for the use of qualitative methods to empower study participants and uncover their unique perspectives. This study will add to the body of knowledge by examining the participants’ wants and needs in terms of a

retirement community and a gay - friendly model evolves. I discuss this more in Chapter Three and further in Chapter Four.

Since the 1970s, researchers have studied the unique experiences that elderly gay men encounter as they age. Overall, most studies suggest that gay males are psychologically well adjusted, have high levels of self acceptance, have strong ties with friendships and tend to have friends similar in age (Berger, 1982, Quam & Whitford, 1992). Other advantages include the fact that gays are able to manage stigma and learn self – reliance and gender role flexibility at an early age (Berger, 1982, Friend, 1980). Gays are generally adjusting well to the concept of aging. However, there is little documented research available in Canada in terms of housing needs, including gay retirement communities. Gay retirement communities are becoming popular in the United States. The research and qualitative studies that I have undertaken has confirmed a definite need for similar facilities in Canada.

I uncover the “obstacles” that gay men have faced in their lives; a necessary criteria associated with this exercise in order to obtain an understanding of who my clients are. Finally, I establish a definite need for a gay retirement community and I examine how a gay retirement community would differ from facilities currently available to the elderly segments of the population. Client needs and wants are critical as they have a direct impact of the overall outcome of the project. Therefore, I emphasize certain “cultural” aspects of gay lifestyle that separate us from heterosexuals. The programming for a gay retirement community would also differ as a direct result. This research chronicles my exploration of this little - known phenomenon and highlights the opportunities in conducting qualitative research with segment of society that lacks a

sufficient voice. I also discuss the challenges in conducting research in this area and the strategies implemented to overcome those challenges. Finally, the lessons learned through this process, and suggestions for future studies, are shared, particularly in the conclusion.

### **My Study**

The aim of my study was to develop an understanding of the key issues that would be necessary for interior designers to encapsulate in order to design a retirement community geared to gay men. Why focus on gay men and not the gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and transgendered community (GLBT)? It was necessary to narrow my focus otherwise the scope of the topic area was too broad. A retirement community geared toward gay men was deemed appropriate for a reasonable graduate studies project. By limiting my study to that group, I was able to provide an awareness and a deeper understanding of my clients' needs and wants in terms of retirement living. Why study this group? Because I had a sincere interest in obtaining knowledge about how gay men feel about aging and retirement living. Would gays be open to the concept of living in a retirement community built specifically for gay men and if yes, would the design of the retirement community differ from what is currently out there in terms of heterosexual retirement communities? Why should interior designers care about retirement communities that are geared to gay men? As a society, and as members of the "creative class" (Florida, 2002), it is "our" responsibility to ensure that we are open to issues of diversity. It is critical that

interior design education stress the importance of being socially aware of all members of the social fabric, including gay men. As gay baby boomers continue to age and retire, they will ask for retirement communities that are designed to meet their needs. These communities will require sensitive, caring, and well-rounded interior designers to help shape gay retirement communities. I am confident that some in the academia may ask; how does this research benefit the design community at large?

Chapter Two provides details of my clients' lives in order to obtain an understanding of their life experiences. Critical perspectives are uncovered; necessary in order to design gay retirement environments. Chapter Three examines the notion of home and queer space in order to gain an awareness of gay men's experiences; and to help solidify what design features would be necessary in a gay retirement community. Finally, Chapter Four examines what other ethnic minority groups have done in terms of providing housing for their elderly and a model begins to flourish for a retirement community built for gay men. A qualitative approach was employed to substantiate the development of a template for a gay retirement community. It is first necessary to clarify the definition of a qualitative approach before providing a rationale for and a detailing of the specific methods used.

There are many ways of conducting qualitative research and there are usually common elements that "link" them together. Qualitative methods are usually used when trying to obtain experiences of a group being studied. Qualitative studies seek to produce understandings and explanations, and findings that are credible and confirmable. A strength of conducting qualitative research is that it derives primarily from its inductive approach; its focus is on specific situations or people, and its emphasis is on words rather

than numbers. The researcher is used as the data collection instrument, and the data collection occurs in naturalistic settings of the respondents (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Through data collection, the researcher seeks to discover meanings, or how people make sense out of their world and of events in their lives (Bogdan & Bilken, 1998). Data analysis is inductive, without regard for preconceived hypothesis, and themes and patterns emerge from the data of words of the study respondents (Patton, 1990). The overall design is developed and it continues to evolve as the study progresses (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Methods are flexible and may change through the course of the study (Patton, 1990).

Therefore, qualitative methods are appropriate for addressing the topic of this study. An exploratory study with an emergent design was sought as there is presently little known about this topic in Canada. Qualitative research also gives a voice to the people being studied and allows respondents to feel a sense of empowerment. Because my research participants were given the opportunity to tell their story, it sends the message that others care about and value their experiences. Furthermore, when talking about difficult experiences, concepts and issues, this helps the participant to make sense of their suffering and allows them to gain insights and understanding of their experiences.

Qualitative research can be especially useful when studying ethnic minorities or marginalized groups such as gay men. Qualitative research methods can be empowering for such groups and enables and promotes social justice, community, diversity, civic discourse and caring (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). My research gives a voice to members of the gay community, a group that traditional research generally does not accurately capture.

### **Methods used**

I chose several qualitative methods while conducting this study. Sampling was purposeful, meaning that subjects were chosen based on the purpose of the study and my knowledge about the area of interest. I wanted to ensure that I captured a good cross-section in terms of the gay community but I did not succeed, given I did not interview people from a wide range of social and cultural backgrounds. I recruited participants by having an “insider’s” perspective that I discuss later in this chapter. The study involved structured in-depth interviews to collect data from the twenty – three respondents. I discussed the participants in detail in the introduction. A structured interview guide was created to ensure that key topics were addressed with each of the respondents. As new topics and themes emerged, the interview guide was revised accordingly for subsequent interviews. The interview guide contained social type questions to get an understanding of who my clients are and design related questions to determine their wants and needs in terms of retirement communities.

I interviewed a senior architect from Dunlop Architects Inc. and a senior partner / interior designer from the Interior Design Collaborative Inc (IDCI), an affiliate of Dunlop Architects. The interview itself was significant in that it provided me with an insight into whether or not the architectural and design (A & D) community are aware of gay retirement communities and whether or not Dunlop Architects and IDCI would know where to start if asked to build and design a gay retirement community. This interview is discussed at length in Chapter Three.

Finally, I examined existing retirement communities in Toronto that were originally established for distinct minority groups such as Villa Charities, for the Italian

community and Baycrest Centre, that was recognized for the Jewish community, and most recently the Yee Hong Centre for the Chinese. There were, and still are, reasons why these retirement communities were built for these diverse groups. As new immigrants to the country they found themselves unable to speak the English language and as a result felt cut off from mainstream society. There were also issues that centered around ethnicity that included culture, food and religion that come into play in these retirement communities (Ariemma, 1996). I am inquiring whether or not similar design principles could be used as guidelines to establish retirement communities that would focus on primarily the needs of gay men. This is detailed further in Chapter Four.

The semi - structured interviews allowed me to use consistent criteria for comparison and contrasting purposes that facilitated the disassembling of data. The information was scored using a method known as thematic analysis. The objective was to find patterns and meanings from the mass amounts of data that were collected. I conducted the interviews in the comfort of the respondents' homes to allow them to feel safe and relaxed enough to share their stories. At the end of each interview I took photographs of the participants' home to aid me in recalling the environment during the coding of material. I also audio recorded each interview and manually transcribed each interview the following day. The transcribing was a tedious process and took many hours. I found that each interview took approximately seven hours to manually transcribe. Upon completion of the transcribed interviews I began to review my field notes taken during the interview and began to read the manually transcribed interview notes for further clarification. I repeated this process until I began to find re - accruing themes. I then began to divide the data into units of meanings. My findings were

compared and contrasted and organized into categories representing topic meanings such as issues of privacy, issues of security, desired features within private units, common unit sizes and desired common amenities. This resulted in the identification of patterns among the categories.

Upon the completed transcription of each interview, I provided the interviewee with a copy of the interview to ensure that I had accurately recorded the details of the event. This allowed an opportunity to make revisions as required to ensure that I had accurately documented the interview. Interestingly, only two out of the twenty-three interview participants took the time to revise the document as the participants believed that the information was an adequate reflection of the interview given that the sessions were audio-taped and manually transcribed verbatim.

### **What is an “emic” and “etic” perspective?**

Anthropologists used the terms “emic” and “etic” to try and gain an understanding of the different perspectives of individuals who belong to a group or community. An “emic” perspective is how the people who belong to a certain group or culture view the world. The researcher describes behavior and events in terms of what they mean to the participants being studied. The researcher is “speaking” from an “etic” or an outsider point of view, when she/e uses appropriate theories to describe the people within the group or culture. However, good research should incorporate a combination of “etic” and “emic” perceptions (Sherman & Reid, 1994). For example, gay men might state that they



feel most comfortable in the comfort of their home than in a public space and thus view the world very differently than heterosexual men; and as a result would experience the built environment differently. Men often feel more comfortable in wide - open spaces and women feel more comfortable in smaller intimate spaces (Marcus, 1995). From an “etic” point of view, the researcher might relate gay men’s behavior to theories and research which suggest that because of being marginalized from society, gay men do experience the world differently, and thus establish queer spaces as a reaction against the dominant heterosexual (Ingram, Bouthillette, Retter, 1997). A reasonable balance of these standpoints would conclude that even though theory might be applicable, the belief that gay men perceive to view the world differently, should be considered and further explored.

In isolation, “emic” and “etic” viewpoints have their own limitations, and if one is favored over the other the research may seem restricted or partial (Sands & McClelland, 1994). Social scientists have always been interested in the “emic” perspectives of their informants albeit, “etic” points of view have always been overemphasized. For instance, white, heterosexual sociologists in the United States studied “deviance” among gay men (Humphreys, 1975). This type of investigation has been criticized because not only was it unethnical, but while studying this marginalized group, evaluation of research participants’ behaviors was based against white dominant American culture and thus it failed to capture the perspectives of the respondents. Therefore, perspective research such as *Tearoom Trade* failed to capture the “emic” perspective of the participants, which only further marginalized gays.

Up until the mid-twentieth century, it was believed that insiders could not perform un-biased research within their own groups. It was believed that the inside investigator would be unable to separate him/her self from the group being studied and interfere with their ability to remain objective (Aguilar, 1981). It was also believed that only an outsider was capable of distancing him/her self from the group being studied and report viable and accurate findings (Aguilar, 1981). The special advantage of using an “insider” to investigate groups was generally not acknowledged.

### **My own perspective**

Feminist pedagogy - with its attention to collective processes, redefining power relationships, deconstructing false dichotomies and eliminating inequities in gender, race, class, disability status, and sexual orientation – can be especially useful in constructing a new model for architecture education and practice attuned to today’s real problems and possibilities (Weisman, 1996:280).

How does Raymond Dunning fit into this equation? Firstly, I have lived more than half of my life as an openly gay man. I don’t walk around with a sign that says, “I’m here and I’m queer”, but at the same time, I have no qualms about discussing my relationship with my partner of almost 13 years. My rationale is that if heterosexuals can talk about their husbands, partners and children, what they did on the weekend; then I can discuss what my partner and I did on the weekend. I share my life because I’m proud of who I am and I don’t feel it necessary to separate my private life from my responsibilities at work.

As a child growing up in Calgary, I was born into a culturally diverse family. My mother is Metis, (French and Cree) and my father, Dutch and Irish descent. I learned

from a very young age how cruel children, mothers, fathers, teachers; people in general can be to people of the non - white culture. Throughout my childhood, because of my lighter skin-tone, I was able to blend into the dominant culture undetected. However, it was devastating to hear the racist comments and slurs against "Indians", it was truly heartbreaking. Add these experiences to the fact that I always knew I was "different" from my peers throughout my adolescent years. It took me years to get over some of the experiences that I encountered during my youth. Years later, my heart, soul and mind are healed and I am proud of who I am, and the role that I play as a ethnic minority, gay man, interior designer, researcher and teacher. I realized years ago that all of these experiences, whether good or bad, have shaped who I am today and will continue to shape me tomorrow.

I also feel privileged to have a well - rounded and diversified education. I have a diploma and a degree in interior design. My parents taught me and my siblings, at an early age, to value education, and that post - secondary education is the key to success. I also have over ten years of practical interior design experience. I have practical work experience in the following areas of interior design: corporate, exhibit, government, healthcare, hospitality, institutional, residential and retail design. I have also been teaching interior design for the past four years on a part - time basis. One of the reasons why I wanted to pursue a Masters in Interior Design was because I was hoping that it would open doors to interior design education. My dreams and goals are finally coming true for me. I was recently hired to teach interior design in a full time capacity commencing September 2004 at a community college. As an interior design educator and a practicing interior designer, I feel that it is my responsibility to be open to issues of

culture and diversity. I believe that my research, because of its sensitive nature, has been beneficial, in that it has helped me to understand how to conduct research with marginalized groups and has made me a much more sensitive interior designer and teacher. Finally, this research will benefit the gay community because a set of guidelines have been established so that interior designers can design retirement communities that are sensitive to the needs of gay men.

#### **Advantages from being on the inside**

I had decided from day one that I was most interested in pursuing a qualitative approach for my research on designing a retirement community for gay men. However, before I could begin my research I knew that I would have to conduct some research on gays and aging. Raymond Berger's *Gay and Gray*, (1982) was useful as was Tim Bergling's, *Reeling in the Years; Gay Men's Perspectives on Age and Ageism*, (2004). I felt it was not only critical, but necessary to obtain a general understanding of my client. I needed to find out what it was like growing up gay. Did the interviewees feel comfortable about their sexuality? What did they fear as they age? Do they feel that current retirement communities would be open to gay men? Did they believe that a gay retirement community would be necessary in order to age with dignity and respect? I believed that it was important for me to obtain an understanding of what life was like for them because as previously mentioned their personal experiences have shaped their lives. Gaining an

understanding of their perspectives would confirm if they were interested in gay retirement communities per se. This concept is examined further in Chapter Two.

Because I am a member of the gay community, I have an insider perspective and recognize its significance in terms of my research. Researchers who are on the “inside” are familiar with issues that affect their respondents’ lives and this may allow them to prepare research questions and hypothesis that might not occur to outsiders (Staples, 1976). Unless a heterosexual investigator knows gay men, their “culture”, lifestyle and history, they may make harsh judgments and assumptions about these men. The heterosexual researcher and my research would result in noticeably different studies of the same experience, and lead to very different conclusions from similar data.

It was useful to sit down and prepare a list of questions that I felt would be useful in terms of coming to terms with what design elements would be necessary for a gay retirement community. I needed to find out what the concept of home means for them and what design elements they liked best about their current home and why. I needed to inquire if they were interested in the concept of gay retirement communities and if so what would it look like? How would it differ from what is currently out there? I realized from the very beginning that this was a very complex design problem. Designing a gay retirement community is so much more than selecting finishes and fabrics. The model itself will differ from city to city and location will greatly determine its overall success.

### **The Instrument**

Researchers who conduct qualitative studies sometimes endeavor to use the semi - structured or semi - standardized interview. I chose to conduct structured interviews for my study of gay men and retirement communities. This format helped me to ensure that the overall structure was consistent with all interviews. The interviews were also audio taped and I took important notes during the interview, and made more detailed notes upon the completion of each interview.

The interviews were coordinated with the respondent two weeks in advance and participants were asked to complete a Consent Form (See Appendix A). There were a series of structured questions, for example, "what do you think about x." At the end of each interview the respondents were asked to select from cards, which had images of interior environments (See Appendix B for images). Participants were asked which image or design elements they like the best and why. The images contained a variety of styles of interior environments that were representational of the lobby.

It was important that the sample questions be asked in the same manner for all respondents, so that I could gather the data and analyze it into smaller components upon completion. The actual questions pertain specifically to the area under investigation, refer to (Appendix C) of this document which includes sample questions that were used in this research project.

Finally, at the end of each interview I took photographs of the physical setting in which the interview took place. This was necessary to help me recall the physical environment upon the completion of each interview.

### **The Physical Setting**

Because of the sensitive nature of this topic, most gay men will did not want to discuss issues of sexuality in the public domain. Therefore, I choose to interview the respondents in the comforts of their own homes. I felt that they would probably be more candid and honest with me in familiar surroundings. It is also very important to ensure that they are convinced that their responses will remain confidential. It is also important to be detached, because interviewees will be truthful when they perceive that no moral evaluation is being made of them (Sommer & Sommer, 2002), I discuss this further later. It is very important to be prepared for the interview and to ensure that mechanical equipment, i.e. recording devices are working properly. I learned the lesson of ensuring that you carry extra batteries, film if using a camera and audio tapes. It is polite to ensure that cell phones and pagers are turned off to minimize distractions that may interfere with the flow of the interview and the data being collected. It is also critical to ensure that the interviewees feel relaxed and as comfortable as possible so that they can feel comfortable enough to tell their story. A major consideration in putting another person at ease is to be at ease yourself (Sommer & Sommer, 2002).

### **Pacing and Timing**

The interviewer, after formulation of the interview questions may forget that the questions are totally new to the respondent. As a result, it is necessary to allow enough time for the interviewee to answer questions and to ensure that they are not pressured

because of time constraints. A person needs time to think about each question and to prepare an answer. The interviewer must learn to be comfortable with silences, yet recognize when longer silences are too long and are making the interviewee uncomfortable. The interview should not be allowed to drag on. When the respondent has finished answering a question, the interviewer should simply move to the next question. If the respondent gives an unclear answer the interviewer may have to probe to obtain clarification from the interviewee. If the interviewer is unprepared for the interview because of a lack of organization, the respondent may become irritable with the situation. In other words, the interviewer should be well prepared and ensure that the interview moves at a pace that is rapid enough to retain interest but slow enough to allow adequate coverage of the topic (Sommer & Sommer, 2002).

### **Data Analysis**

The study does not pose any ethical problems. I used pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of the twenty – three participants (Riessman, 1986). Transcribing data should occur as soon as possible while the information is still clear and fresh in the mind. Transcription is the best way to analyze the interview. These verbatim word for word transcripts are usually the best way to code the material, when organizing information, it is better to have more, rather than less details from the interview (Maxwell, 1996). I decided to paraphrase the information obtained from the interview when forming the analysis. I chose to describe the most significant results first. Areas of less agreement



came next; finally trivial or irrelevant findings were simply discarded (Maxwell, 1996). It is critical to ensure that confidentiality of the respondent is maintained throughout the process of material documentation. Ideally the best way to gather data that is rich and to ensure accuracy is by using multi method approach that is by using a combination of observations, interviewing and focus groups. I chose to use the observations, semi-structured interviews and case studies. Using a triangulation method ensures for “full” and detailed data. However, a series of interviews may accomplish a similar result. One way to ensure validity of the data is to allow the respondents the opportunity to verify that their version of the story has been told, by providing them with a copy of their transcriptions prior to finalizing the data (Sommer & Sommer, 2000).

### **The Sampling**

The gay community can be very insular and complex. Couples tend to socialize with other couples and the dynamics end up being very intricate. These friendships will overlap with other friendships where cliques develop between certain groups. With the circle of men I interviewed I learned that the dinner party itself is a reciprocal event where one couple acts as hosts one week and as guest the following week. I made contact with this group through “Bill and Bob.”

My partner and I know “Bill” and “Bob”, who have been together for approximately 30 years. They happen to know a great deal of gay people and have countless friends. Their weekends are consistently filled with entertaining or being

entertained. I do not know how they make time for their large circle of friends, but they manage. I was hoping that I could have had the opportunity to have them participate in my research, but they politely declined. However, they did lead me to other participants who became part of my study. Very quickly the word began to spread about the type of research I was conducting. A “snowball” effect started to happen where one couple told another couple about the project I was working on. Designing a gay retirement community was a topic of great interest for this group, because almost half of them were retired and many more will be retiring within the next five years.

I later asked Bill and Bob why they declined to partake in my study and they informed me that they were afraid of having their identities disclosed because they were both still working. They realized the formality of the project when they saw the Consent Form and that reaffirmed their decision to not partake. Even though, I assured them I would do everything in my power to protect their identities I respected their decision to decline. This fear of having their sexuality exposed is very real, especially if they are still working. This was true of other studies including Berger, 1982; Bergling, 2004.

Gay men are not easy to identify, especially this age cohort. Because they grew up in times where it was difficult or dangerous to be gay, many are very secretive about their sexuality and they tend to blend into the landscape. As previously mentioned in the Introduction, unfortunately, Canadian gay culture is obsessed with youth, just as the heterosexual culture is. Many older gays try to maintain a youthful appearance and outlook on life, and I found this to be true of all the research participants I interviewed. Many older gay couples are hard to contact because they are not as connected to the “ghetto” as younger age groups are; they also tend to socialize with friends similar in age.

Because of this, gay couples are hard to identify and researching this segment of the population is difficult.

Oppressed minority groups are more likely to identify with a gay researcher and will want to partake in the study, especially if they feel that the researcher can help to change misconceptions, or if future generations can benefit from the research (Gwaltney, 1980). I found this to be particularly true with all of my participants. When they found out what my research was about, most were more than willing to help me by partaking in the study. However, I had eight people who did not return my telephone calls and declined to partake in my study. I suspect that the Consent Form and a fear of having their identities disclosed was a real concern. Interestingly all eight people were still working full time.

I also believe that because of my openness about my own sexuality that my interviewees felt that I would tell their stories as accurately as possible. My ability to communicate and understand participants' expressions, sentiments and objectives was useful because I was able to be engaged with my participants, relate to their fears, hopes and aspirations. My gayness benefited me in establishing a rapport with my participants, something that is vital for honest reporting see (Davis, 1997). Even though my participants were older and had more life experiences, I was still able to share in my own personal experiences such as coming out and experiencing homophobia. Having an awareness helped me to communicate and relate to my interviewees stories and I encouraged them to trust and be honest with me. By being able to relate to these life experiences, I was also able to use my own understanding of the studied event and to cultivate appropriate interview questions.

### Breakdown of sample

The most significant challenge in conducting the study itself was recruiting a diverse and numerically adequate sample. This is something that is always a challenge for researchers, including those who research the gay community (Berger, 1982; Bergling, 2004, Quam & Whitford, 1992). As a result, the majority of samples tend to represent younger (ages 50 - 60), male, white, middle to upper class, urban members of society. Some believe that the difficulty in sampling is due to the "invisibility" of older gay men (Berger, 1982, Bergling, 2004).

My research respondents included twenty - three men who ranged in age from 43 - 69 (M=61). I was only interested in participants who were 50 and beyond, because people of this age will most likely be planning for retirement. I also wanted to ensure that my research accurately reflected the needs of the current group that will most likely be entering retirement within the next few years. Yet, I appreciate that the needs and wants of somebody in their 40's may change by the time they reach retirement age. A couple of the participants who were in their 40s were in a same-sex relationship with an older partner and I did not want to add tension to the interview by disqualifying them. As previously mentioned, approximately, sixty percent of the participants were working and forty percent were retired. Eighty - two percent of the participants had post - secondary education. Twenty - two of the participants owned their own homes and seventeen of the participants' homes were fully paid off, thus they were mortgage free. Approximately, fifty - one percent of the participants lived in houses that were 1000 to 1500 square feet (Sq Ft) and forty - two percent of the population lived in homes from 1500 Sq Ft and beyond. Seventy - eight percent of the participants were in same-sex relationships that

ranged from approximately fourteen years to forty years. See figures 1.1 – 1.6 for client profile.

Figure 1  
Age of respondents

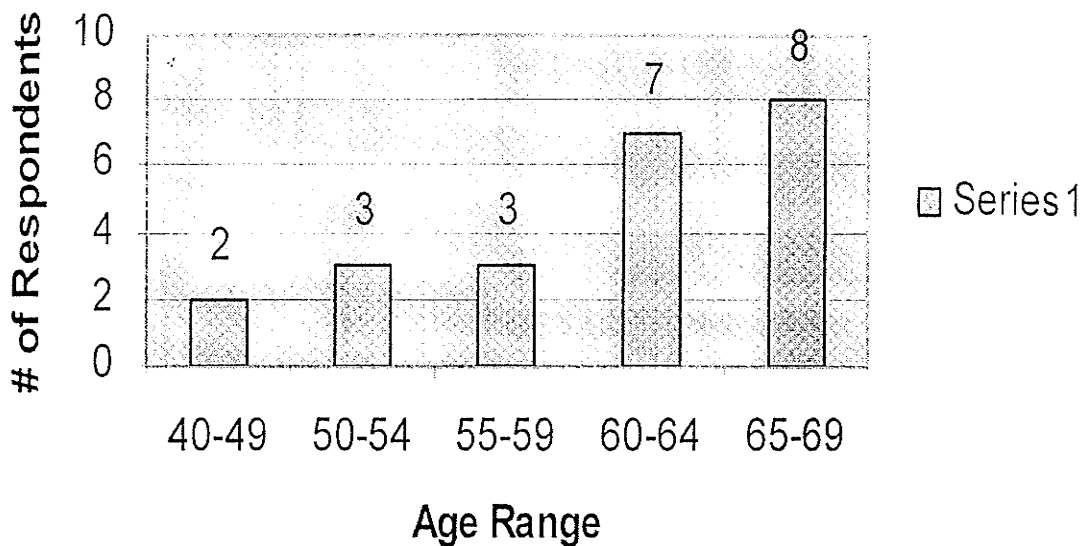


Figure 2  
Working versus retired

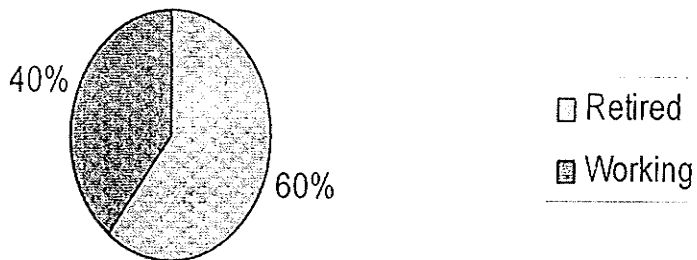


Figure 3  
Educational levels

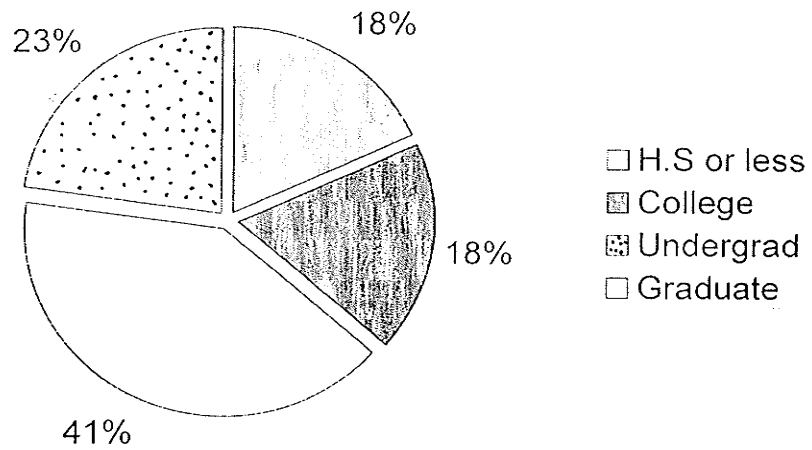


Figure 4  
Current residential square footage

**Current Residential Square Footage**

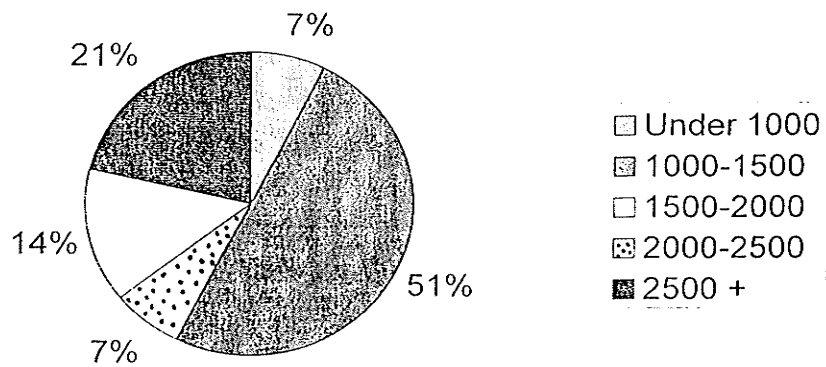


Figure 5  
Home equity

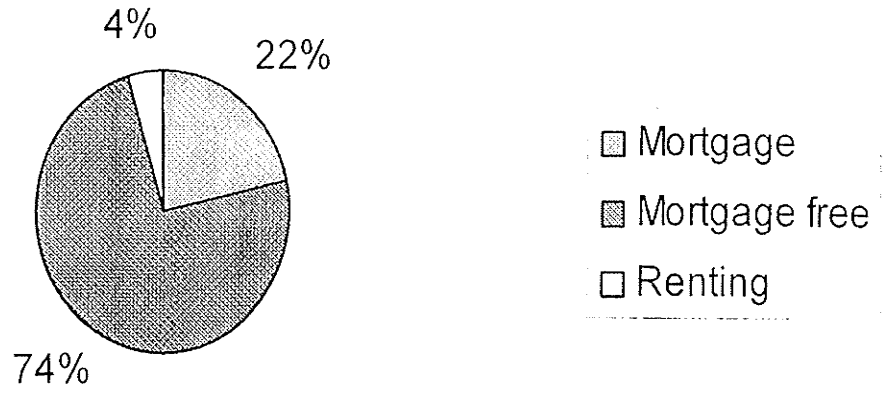
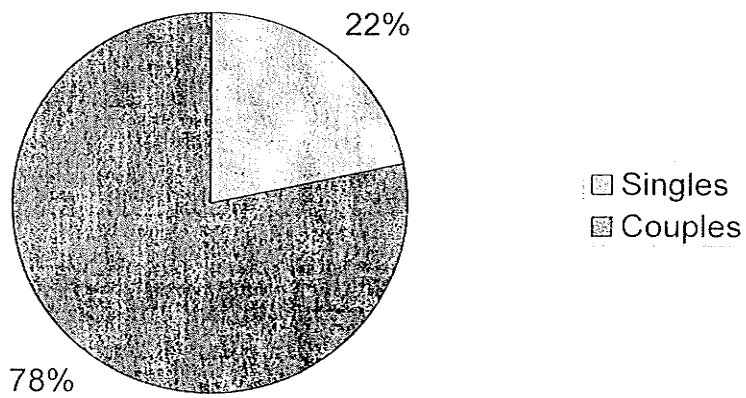


Figure 6  
Singles vs. couples



### **Gaining trust is critical**

The first thing that I did when I met with my participants was to assure them that I would keep their participation and their responses to my prepared questions confidential. It was critical for me to ensure that I would protect their identity at all cost. Many of the participants secretly feared that disclosing who they are would leave them open to discrimination and harassment from colleagues and family. Many of the participants in my research were “out of the closet”, albeit, many had never been open at work or to their families. I ensured my interviewees that when I begin to write up my thesis that I would use pseudonyms to protect their identities.

Even though confidentiality is clearly spelled out in the Consent Form, it is still a good idea to talk about issues of confidentiality prior to beginning the interview and again at the end of the interview; otherwise the respondent may censor their responses. I remember conducting one of my initial interviews with Dean and Robert. At one point during the interview I sensed that Robert was feeling uncomfortable, he then looked directly at me and said, “Well, you sure know a lot about us now.” I gently reassured him that I would use pseudonyms to protect identities. I then said that if he felt uncomfortable with any question that he did not have to answer it and at any time during the interview we could stop. As I recall, he was really upset with the question, “Have you been able to live the majority of your life as an openly gay man.” This question seemed reasonable for me to ask, because I am providing a “blue print” if you will, for a gay retirement community. And if people are not “out” then why would they move into a community that is geared towards gays. Robert was upset because he had kept his gay life quiet at work and never discussed Dean to any of his co-workers. This was true of many of the



participants who participated in my study. Yet it is understandable considering the research indicates that this is typical with many gay men and upon retirement they feel a sense of freedom, because they no longer have to worry about colleagues finding out about their gay lifestyle (Cahill et al, 2000). Therefore, it is critical to continually stress confidentiality and to ensure that identities will not be revealed in the final report.

### **Being aware of personal biases**

I had to stand back from the group that I was studying and look at my own ethics. What are the driving forces that guide me to live my life the way I do? Would my morals prevent me from being honest and being able to truly reflect my clients' wishes in terms of their retirement community? Being able to stand back and to be impartial is a critical trait to have.

By being on the inside I share my sexual orientation with my research participants. Even though I could have participated more and become further involved in some of the discussions; I realized that it is important to quietly sit back and listen. Being a silent observer was beneficial because it allowed me to stay a safe distance; observing the participants and listening to their desires in terms of retirement living. This was also advantageous in that it allowed for the opportunity to give my own personal perspective, which will be useful for interior designers to successfully access and mediate with gay men. By being aware of the fact that I am both an insider and outsider helped me to

balance my perspective with the theoretical perspective which is believed necessary for knowledge building (Sherman & Reid, 1994).

As mentioned earlier, it is also critical to maintain a safe distance when researching participants of the same group because the researcher wants to avoid respondents giving answers that are socially desirable, rather than honest. For example, when I was interviewing Enzo and Joseph, I asked the question, "what common rooms would you want in the retirement community" and Joseph answered, "well maybe there could be a big screen television that showed gay pornographic films one night a week." Both Enzo and Joseph looked at me for some kind of reaction; I just smiled and said, "why not." I think had I looked embarrassed, disgusted or shocked, neither one of them would have been truthful with their answers beyond that point. This was beneficial for me, because with the following interviews I made sure to mention the "gay video porno night" to help relax the respondents so that they would open up and be honest with their responses. This was useful because it made me aware of the complexities at hand in terms of insuring that the common areas would have activities that would be useful to the majority of the participants living within the gay retirement community.

The interviews proved useful in that they allowed me to confirm some of the social issues that I had researched. As mentioned previously, I knew that this topic was complex and that I needed to get an understanding of who my clients were so that I could plan a retirement community in which they could age with dignity and respect. During the interviews, I was able to develop an understanding of where my participants' stood in terms of retirement living and whether or not they would feel comfortable in an all gay retirement community. Because my interviews were lengthy, anywhere from one and

one half to two hours, I was able to pick up on inconsistencies in respondents' answers. It made it difficult for them to lie or to tell me something that they thought I wanted to hear. Extended engagement gave me the opportunity to structure the same question slightly different and to get a richer understanding of their wants and needs in terms of retirement living. It also allowed for an opportunity to probe further when required. For example, during my interviews I realized that some of the respondents wanted to live in an environment that was gay - friendly, available to open minded heterosexuals. This was strongly desired by the single gay respondents as well as the younger respondents in their 40's. However, approximately 75 percent of the couples wanted the community to be strictly gay; again this refers to the notion of safety in numbers. I discuss this further in Chapters Two and Three.

### **Summary**

It was important for me to maintain a connection to both the "inside" and "outside" world because it allowed me to balance where I fit into this research and what theories could be applicable. I found that I was able to give voice to my participants and in doing so enabled me to develop a gay model for a gay retirement community. I was able to achieve this by being able to integrate personal and theoretical perspectives; and ensuring that the voice of my respondents' was accurately reflected. Their view points and experiences brought new insight to existing retirement models. Their participation in my research allowed for a gay model to unfold.

I found that my sensitivity enabled me to recognize and describe similar complexities in my participants' lives. This skill was an asset in that it enabled me to conduct meaningful research with my interviewees. By being aware of my insider and outsider role, I was able to ensure that the wishes of my participants would be accurately reflected. I know that this was possible because I was able to sensitively portray the lives of my respondents from this balanced insider viewpoint.

This chapter has provided the reader with the opportunity to see how I carried out this study and will be useful when reading the following chapters. As mentioned earlier, the following chapter will provide a background on the lifestyle of gay men. This will benefit the interior designer in understanding who their clients are. The thesis will provide the necessary guidelines to successfully designing retirement communities geared to gay men.

## Chapter 2

### What interior designers need to know about the lifestyle of their aging gay clients

#### Introduction

This chapter examines some of the unique issues related to interior design that the elderly gay population face. Because Canadian laws do not recognize living arrangements with same-sex partners, it is difficult to put gay relationships on the same foundation as heterosexual couples because little in the social world encourages gay couples to stay together (Cahill et al, 2000). Although attitudes about human rights for gays have become more tolerant in recent years, many people continue to condemn homosexuality and same-sex relationships (Peplau & Spalding, 2003).

*Is there a need for gay retirement communities?* In order for interior designers to design gay retirement communities they need to understand “who” their clients are. Therefore this chapter will explore some of the unique challenges and situations facing gay men. Interior designers will have the necessary “tools” to create gay retirement communities in which gay men can age with dignity and respect.

There are some limitations with the scope of the research to date. First, information about aging issues as they relate to elderly gay men is scarce. This cohort is generally an invisible group. The major reason for this is that many grew up during a time when being gay was not discussed partly because homosexuality was considered

illegal, immoral, sinful and wrong, particularly for elderly gay men (Cahill et al, 2000). For these reasons, a majority of these individuals kept their sexuality secret. As a result, many of these elderly gay men do not define themselves with the label gay (Sum Quad Sum Foundation, 1997). Consequently, it can be difficult to research this segment of the population.

Liberation movements of the 1960s helped to establish gay rights, but unlike most minority groups, gays continue to lag behind (Cahill et al, 2000; Kitchen, 2003; Sum Quad Sum Foundation, 1997). This chapter will review Canadian and American sources from the 1960s onward and it will analyze relevant factors for this trend. Unfortunately, very little research is being done in Canada in relation to gay men and retirement communities, therefore American sources are the primary source of data. This chapter will also look at the key issues that gay men have experienced in order to provide the reader with an understanding of the journey that elderly gay men face as they cope to survive in the domain of a heterosexist domain (Garnets & Kimmel, 2003). Finally, evidence will be given to help interior designers design gay retirement communities.

### **I thought we were a caring society?**

Regardless of where one lives in Canada, elderly gay men should not have to worry about being rejected from society as they age. Society – at - large has a responsibility to ensure that the needs of the gay community are accounted for when space planners design retirement communities. Yet the question is, what are their needs? There are many.

The perception that everyone in society is heterosexual is called heterosexism. This only further marginalizes the gay community (Garnets & Kimmel, 2003). Since being able to live openly as a gay man is crucial to a person's well-being there should be a mandate in place for health and housing service providers in every Canadian city that give people the opportunity to "self-identify" their sexual orientation, if desired, that would be under provincial jurisdictions (Ross et al, 2003). The federal government needs to work with the provinces to ensure that elderly gay men are allowed to live the later parts of their lives openly, whether in privately run and operated retirement communities or provincially operated nursing homes (Ross et al, 2003).

It is critical that Health, Housing Service Providers recognize this diverse group and to have protocols in place that deal with elderly gay issues, regardless of where the facility is located in the country. Administrators of these facilities should insure that the term "same sex spouse" is included in any administrative forms so that the gay community feels included (Cahill et al, 2000; Ross et al, 2003; Sum Quad Sum Foundation, 1997).

Many gay elders currently live their lives as "chameleons" and appear to blend into the social "norm," following along with the social majority. Health care workers and agencies should be trained in Gay Studies to ensure that gay seniors are not marginalized.

In terms of the physical space itself, it too should be inclusive of elderly gay seniors. How would this be done? By creating a gay-friendly "zone" for seniors where they could gather and socialize. The room itself could have gay papers and materials that discuss issues within the gay community (SAGE, 2002). However, because many gay men grew up during a time when being gay was considered immoral, they may not want

to draw attention to themselves, and thus would not congregate in the “safe” zone. These “safe” zones may also create a ghettoized atmosphere. For example consider Shevey Healy, a 75 – year - old retired clinical psychologist’s comment:

It’s unhealthy to segregate people-gay or straight-by age. There is a crying need for old people, gay and lesbian to be supported and anyone who’s working toward that needs to be supported. But I just want to caution them not to make the same mistakes heterosexuals are making. It’s an antihuman model. Everybody wants community. We need to talk about the best way of achieving that (Kornblum, 1997:46).

However, many ethnic groups have created retirement communities for their elders and this may be the only option for elderly gay men. Being together with like - minded people would allow gay men to age with dignity and respect. Furthermore, creating gay communities for this group may be the only option, because many heterosexual people of similar age are not open-minded about homosexuality, and therefore are not very welcoming of gay elders (Kitchen, 2003). Similar situations are occurring for gay youth who experience considerable harassment from peers and seldom have family support. To deal with this situation, schools in Toronto, New York and Los Angeles have been created to deal with gay, lesbian and bi-sexual youth (Garnets & Kimmel, 2003). Just as there are gay - friendly schools are being created for our youth, there is most definitely a need for gay retirement communities. Take for example author Malcolm Boyd’s comment:

I am accusing gays and lesbians on not being aware enough in this area (issues of aging). The first thing is, be aware. Then be less selfish. No one else is going to do this for us. We’ve got to take care of ourselves and our own (Kornblum, 1997:47).

Future generations of elderly gay men who are currently baby - boomers and “Generation X’ers” who were born after the baby - boomers will probably be able to live



in mixed retirement communities. By the time the current "Generation Y" (the children of the baby - boomers) reach retirement, issues of sexual orientation will hopefully no longer matter.

All levels of government and health and education agencies should be to express the positive diversity of the gay community so that gay seniors are accounted for when policy makers, architects and interior designers design retirement communities (Ross et al, 2003). If the wants and needs of gays are not accounted for, then society only further marginalizes them, and when a society marginalizes any community then all of society suffers. For example, consider these comments from my participants when I asked the question (participants' identities have been changed for confidentiality purposes) "Have you been able to live the majority of your life as an openly gay man":

No. Actually, it was never discussed. I've never come out in a formal way (Ali, 68 yrs).

They suspected at work, but I didn't come out and say that I was gay...I never came out to my family except for a very close cousin (Richard, 67 yrs).

I had no choice...I'm sure that they suspected...I don't ask them if they are heterosexual...No matter how much I changed my walk, my high heel shoes always gave me away (Bruno, 68 yrs).

I don't think I ever mentioned to my mother, mom I'm gay (Laird, 53 yrs).

Yet, in the last 40 years the gay community has made unparalleled advances in terms of human rights in Canada. In the late 1970s, homosexuality was finally declassified as being a "mental illness." Today, it is illegal to be fired from one's job, evicted from one's apartment or persecuted by homophobic groups (Smith, 1999). These laws were created to protect gays from discrimination and they were brought about through Provincial Human Rights Codes and the Charter of Rights & Freedoms.

Currently elderly gay men throughout Canada are being discriminated against in terms of housing in retirement communities, and this is not acceptable.

With the advances that have taken place in the gay community, it is critical for society in general and health care policy makers to understand the needs and wants of elderly gay men. In 2003 developer Gordon Davies had unveiled plans to build housing developments for older gays and lesbians in Toronto. Unfortunately, plans for the retirement community were shelved and the focus was re - shifted to a gay condominium adult building. Davies claims that elderly gay men and lesbians have different needs than heterosexuals, and they often face discrimination in conventional senior homes (Owens, 2003). By getting to know the needs of gay men then, interior designers can ensure that retirement communities are designed in a manner that is respectful of gay men, their wishes and desires. By being inclusive, I believe that this will allow gays to live more freely, and to feel as though they are part of the social thread within Canadian society.

### **Housing for marginalized groups**

The Gay and Lesbian Association of Retiring Persons (GLARP) is a non - profit organization based in Los Angeles, California. That association is a strong advocate for building gay retirement communities that are owned and operated by gays and lesbians. They believe a gay retirement community would be more attractive to aging gay baby - boomers than current options available. The organization is in the process of raising

funds to develop gay retirement communities in Los Angeles (GLARP, 2003). Open House is a good example of this.

Open House is a non - profit organization based in San Francisco, California. Its mission is to create and sustain two retirement communities for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered seniors in San Francisco. This housing community is unique for including low, moderate and upper income seniors. Currently most retirement communities in general are geared to income, which displaces those who do not have the economic resources. Traditionally, retirement living has been for people who can afford it, and still is. Open House's main objective is to keep San Francisco a diverse city for people of all ages, races, ethnicity and income. Both of these retirement communities will be built and operated by gays and lesbians and they will protect and care for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender elders for many generations to come (<http://openhouse-sf.org/who.html>).

A few participants of my research talked of the need to have a gay retirement facility that would be geared to income, because it would make for a better sense of community and more importantly, so that it could be a place for everybody to call home, not only the rich. For example, consider this comment:

It should be geared to income, so it's not just for the rich. I would be unhappy with the gay community if it was an exclusive retirement facility. I mean we've been excluded all our lives and now we're going to exclude each other (James, 68 yrs).

Currently there are only three existing retirement communities in the U.S. that cater specifically to gay seniors. They include: The Palms of Manasota in Sarasota, Florida, The Resort on Carefree Boulevard in Fort Myers, Florida and The Pueblo in Apache Junction, Arizona. While other gay retirement communities are in various stages

of development, Rainbow Vision, another “high - end” option was about to commence at the time of my research. By the end of 2004, Rainbow Vision Properties in Santa Fe, New Mexico, will break new ground by being the first to offer luxury amenities unmatched by other gay retirement communities. Joy Silver is president of Rainbow Vision’s Properties Inc., a properties company based in Santa Fe, New Mexico that caters to the gay community. Ms. Silver also worked for Senior Action in a Gay Environment (SAGE), in New York prior to establishing Rainbow Vision. She has dreamed for decades about building a retirement community for gays and lesbians. While working in New York she strolled through Manhattan’s West Village one night and that convinced her to try to make her dream for a gay retirement community into a reality. She remembers flashing lights coming from the second floor of a nursing home where most of the elderly were gay.

There was a disco ball, and go-go boys dancing on the table, and I said to myself, now that’s the party that I want when I’m that age and I’m in that condition, because if there isn’t dancing, I don’t want to be there (retrieved May 30, 2004, from *Retiring Out of the Closet* from, <http://www.vivatgroup.com/media.php>).

In the spring of 2005, Rainbow Vision Properties in Santa Fe will be operational. The facility will be owned and operated by gays and lesbians. While Santa Fe may seem like an unlikely gay retirement hotspot, it is second only to San Francisco in the percentage of households with same-sex couples, according to the 2000 Census. The \$28 million project will be built on a 12.7 - acre site just south of downtown Santa Fe. It will have 146 units: 40 condo units, 80 apartments for independent living and 26 apartments for assisted living. The dining facility will include: Featured guest chefs, cooking classes, Sunday brunches, a café as well as a roof top lounge. The spa fitness centre will include: Fitness centre with free weights, and state – of – the – art equipment, personal training,

yoga, tai chi and aerobics, as well as steam and sauna, facials, manicure, pedicure and outdoor hot tubs. Common amenities also include: Organic community gardens, multi-use rooms for classes and meetings, art - studio space, guest accommodation, concierge, security as well as, housekeeping, emergency call service, banking services and postal services (Rainbow Vision Properties, 2004).

Figure 7  
Site Plan of the Palms of Manasota in Sarasota, Florida

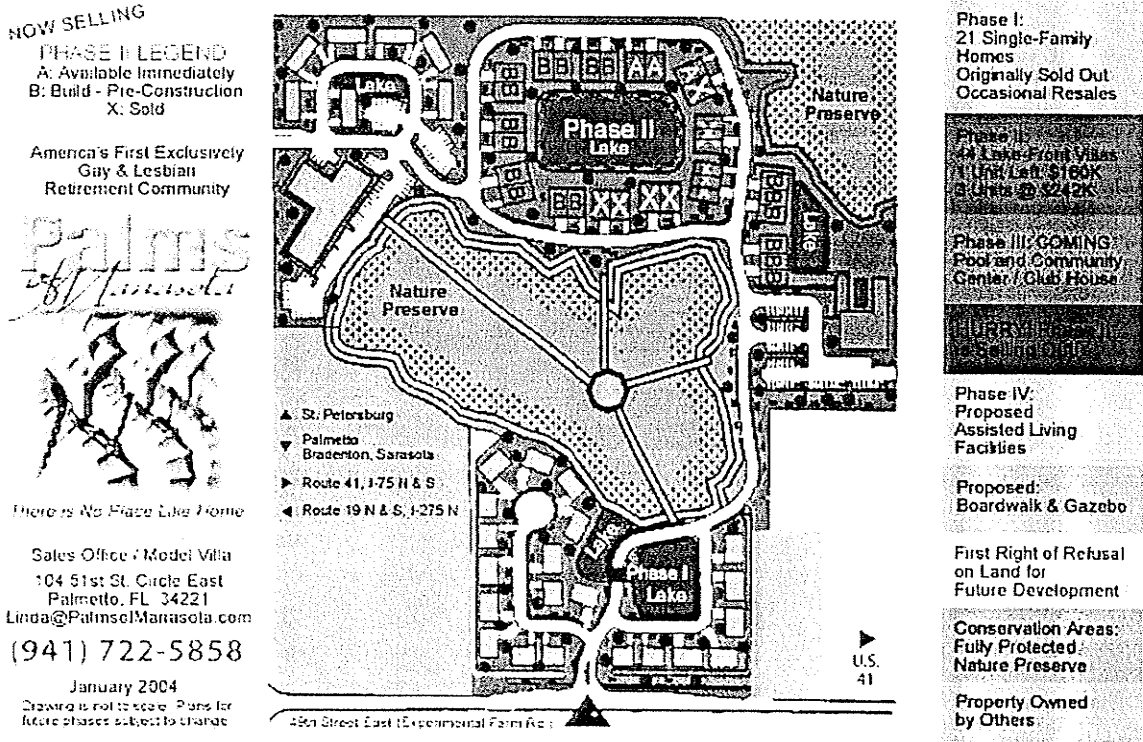


Figure 8

Palms of Manasota, Floor Plan of the Majesty Model Phase II

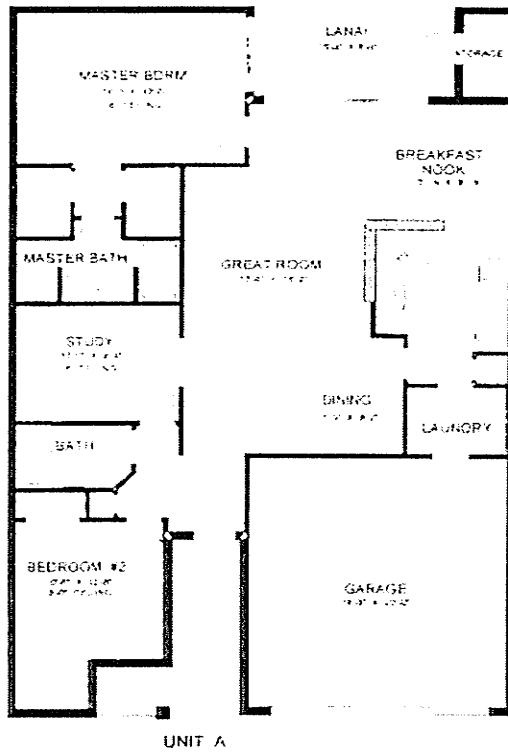


Figure 9

Palms of Manasota, Photograph of the Majesty Model Suite

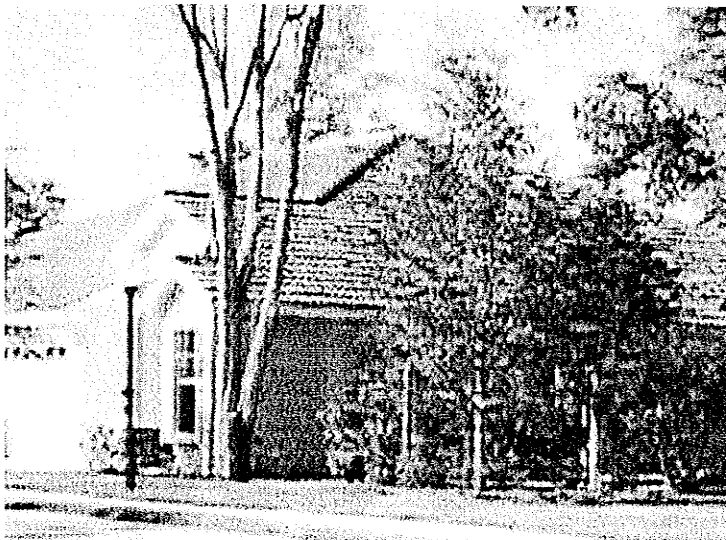


Figure 10

Palms of Manasota, Photograph of the Majesty Model Suite



Figure 11  
Rainbow Vision Properties Condo Type A

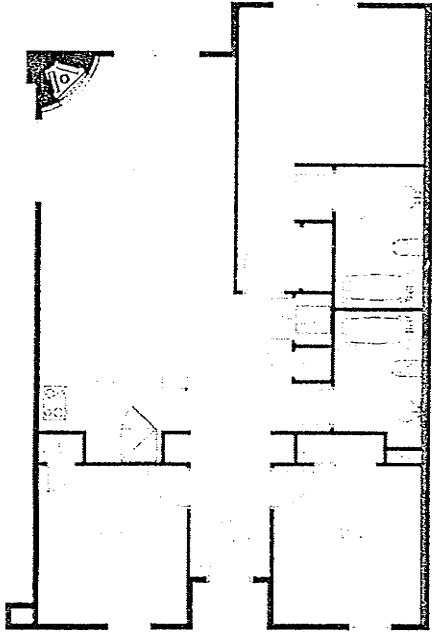


Figure 12  
Rainbow Visions Properties Rental Unit Type C

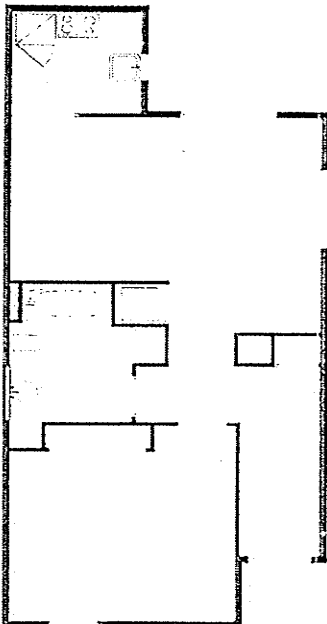
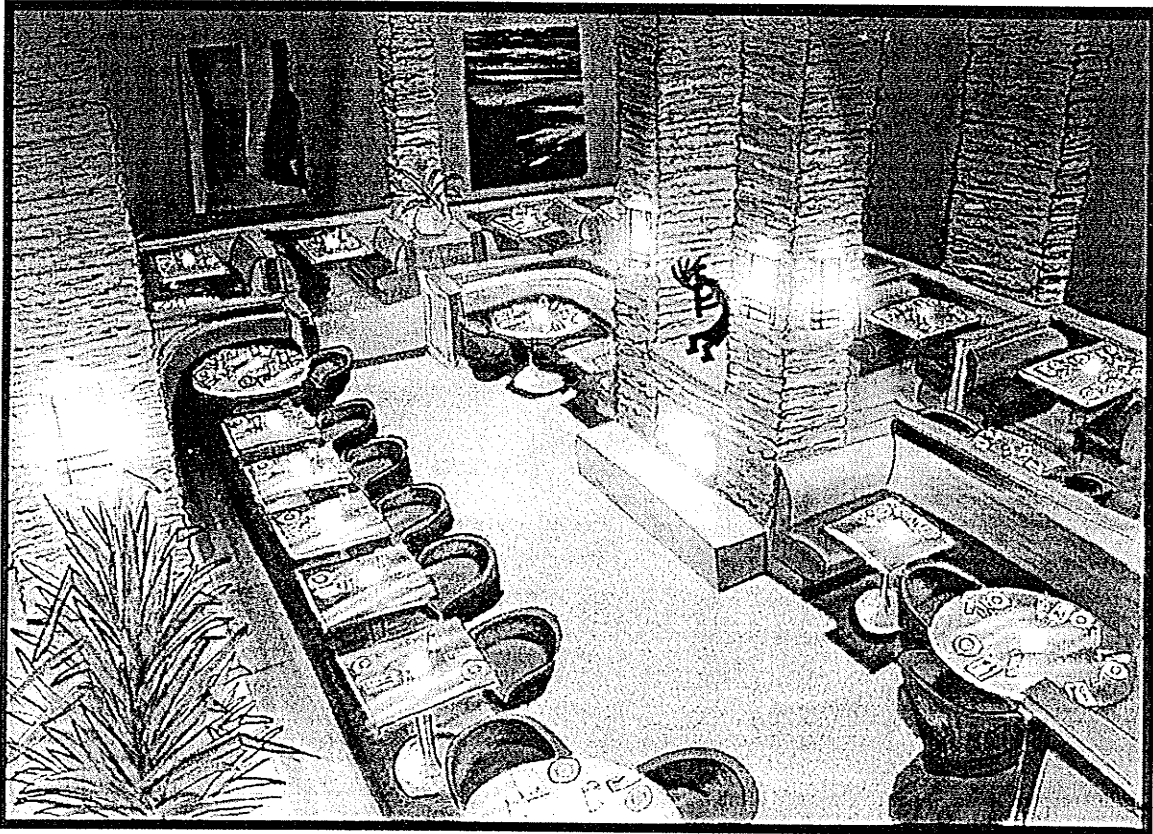




Figure 13

Interior perspective of dining room of Rainbow Visions Properties



The growing acceptance of same sex marriage is evidence of the growing desire of many gay people in Canada to settle down and grow old together (Owens, 2003). In March 2003, it was announced that the VIVAT Group in Toronto was in the process of organizing the first gay and lesbian retirement home in Canada. Although the original concept focused on a retirement home, the age requirement of the potential applicants was lowered because of a widespread perception in the gay community that somebody over the age of 45 is considered “old” (Owens, 2003). Since then the organization has

changed its focus to a gay and lesbian adult building with no resident care support. The future residents will be people who are financially secure and want that reflected in their homes (Owens, 2003). Take for instance, Gordon Davies of the VIVAT group who said:

This is the kind of community that I would like to live in: it has the right degree of what I call shared independence-the idea of a place where I have a strong neighborhood and yet have my own space (Owens, 2003).

Ideally, these retirement communities will be protected from the homophobia that many heterosexuals display towards gay people. The fact that private organizations are providing retirement communities geared towards the elderly gay and lesbian community in the United States indicates that there is a market and there may be a need for these types of facilities in Canada (SAGE, 2002; Rainbow Vision Properties, 2003).

Based on my own research, many of the interview participants, especially single gay men, indicated a strong desire for a gay focused retirement community. What I mean by gay focused is that they were willing to allow open - minded heterosexuals to also live within the facility. This is largely because many people of this age group grew up in times where it was difficult to be gay and are used to coping within the boundaries that society sets (Bergling, 2004).

Creating such centres would also be strategic in the recognition of gay and lesbian rights generally. If the gay community initiated fund-raising for a retirement community centre then perhaps this would put pressure on the provincial and federal government to provide funding as well as infrastructure development and operating costs (Vivat, 2002). Without public funding, these gay retirement communities will become places for the "rich" to call "home." Provincial governments could provide subsidies for residents based on an income ratio scale. However, some gay men believe that the gay community

members will have to initiate the process in terms of building gay retirement communities. For example, consider this comment:

The government will not build those types of long - term care communities so perhaps it will have to come from retirement communities first (Jack 63 yrs).

Yet, if we begin to build gay retirement communities, might we begin to segregate our gay elders from mainstream society? Is this the best solution? There are many immigrant groups that have come to Canada. They were unable to speak the language and they had different religious beliefs, customs and foods (Ariemma, 1996). They built retirement communities for their elders so that they could age with people who have similar backgrounds. Even though creating gay retirement communities may isolate gay men from the rest of society, it may be the only option for having gay men's rights recognized. Reasons included comments, as follows:

In terms of existing retirement communities though you hear about these elderly gay men having to go back into the closet in their old age. Even if you're an elderly person who's had to struggle to come out and live your life then to face this in your later years is just devastating (Owens, 2003).

Interestingly, my own research has indicated that many single gay male participants do not want to be totally segregated into gay retirement communities. Some expressed an interest in being in "mixed" environments that were tolerant of gay issues and feared being in an environment that would not allow them to be themselves. The "mixed" environment was desirable for many reasons. Essentially they have "survived" in a heterosexual world their whole lives. They have never lived their lives in a completely gay environment. A great proportion of the respondents had never gone on gay cruise ships or vacationed at gay resorts. However, the vast majority liked places that are welcoming of gays and were most comfortable being in places where they could be

openly gay, if they so desired. Many of these men were not interested in “flashing” their sexuality, because their sexuality had never been their focus. It was apparent that these single gay men were survivors of oppression. Most of them had lived through persecution and legal sanction and had endured much homophobia whether directly or indirectly, yet they still wanted to be a part of mainstream society and not “isolated” in gay retirement communities.

For example, consider these comments:

My preference would be friends getting together whether they are straight or gay and living together. When I say sixty percent of my friends are straight that's a large number (Harold, 61 yrs).

I don't think my life has been lived where being gay has been the focus (Walter, 62 yrs).

Many of these single gay men socialize with other gay men but also have a large proportion of heterosexual friends too. When asked whether or not they would feel comfortable living in existing retirement communities all of the respondents answered, “probably not.” Their biggest fear was not being able to be themselves (Cahill et al, 2000; Sum Quad Sum Foundation, 1997). They feared that if people discovered their sexuality that they would be hassled and ostracized from the group. Many felt a variety in terms of age would also be important. Being in an environment with different age groups was important to many respondents. They did not want to be in an environment where everybody is old, and “waiting for God” was also seen as undesirable. Surprisingly, even though they feared harassment from heterosexuals many had no desire to live in a retirement community that would be geared exclusively for the gay community.

However, when I inquired whether they felt there was a need for a gay retirement community, all twenty – three interviewees responded with “yes, I would think so.” Even though five respondents had no interest of living in an exclusively gay environment, all participants believed that there is a market for a gay retirement community in Toronto.

My own research indicated that many gay men who have been in long - term relationships were determined to age at home for as long as possible because they also feared the homophobia within existing retirement communities. Many of these gay couples have been together for over 25 years and they were adamant that they would feel most comfortable in gay retirement communities. When respondents were asked whether or not they would feel comfortable living in exiting retirement communities? Most of the gay couples said, “no.” They feared the thought of being in a “heterosexual” retirement community. There were many issues that came up, however the common theme was not being accepted as a gay couple from heterosexual couples. They also mentioned that they would feel uncomfortable living in that environment especially when their gay friends came to visit. Many of the interviewees developed their relationships with their same-sex partners during very hostile times, where being gay was dangerous (Berger 1982). They had survived through many years of “being in the closet” at work, and their homes became a refuge for many of these gay couples. Now retired, they no longer have to worry about their sexuality surfacing at work and many felt a sense of freedom (Bergling, 2004). Many of the respondents said that they would do everything in their power to avoid going into existing retirement communities. Reasons included comments, as follows:

Gays have a totally different relationship, totally different interests, as an example, they like the creative arts and movies. I think gays are more prone to

discuss those things. The visiting grandchildren would probably make gays really feel lonely because gays will not have grandchildren visiting (Philip, 63 yrs).

There is then, definitely a need for a gay retirement community. For example, consider this comment:

We would prefer a gay environment. When we go on our vacations to Puerto Vallarta it's the gay community that draws us there. It's the dynamics of it. It would be nice to be in a place that is familiar with like-minded people (Laird, 52 yrs).

These stories are consistent with the comments of many gay couples I interviewed. The main reason for wanting to be with "like-minded" people is mainly due to the fact that they wanted to be assured that they would be able to be themselves and not worry about what others may think (Bergling, 2004). They spend a great deal of their time socializing with other gay couples through dinner parties, cocktail parties and some even travel together. For many, their gay friends had become an extension of their families (Berger, 1982).

When couples were asked the question of "What sort of things in life bring you pleasure?" there was a constant thread of simply having made it together as a gay couple despite all of the pressures from society to reform. They were very proud of the fact that their relationship had endured the test of time, considering that their relationships were not widely accepted by society. For many gay couples it was evident that their relationships with other gay friends had become an important aspect of their life (Berger, 1982). This was so because they could be a support for each other. For many of the retired interviewees, the art of travel was also an important feature of their relationship.

Traveling to different countries allowed them to experience different cultures and ways of living life. For example, consider this participant's comment:

We probably make an extraordinary effort to maintain contact with all our friends of long standing and new friends too, but we've know friends right here in Toronto for 25 years and we make an extra effort to keep in touch, to see one another and to entertain them. It's very important to us (Benjamin, 68 yrs).

Many gay couples realized from an early age the value of friendships and continue being a support to other gay couples. They all made efforts to keep in touch with friends of their own age group (Berger, 1982). For example, consider this respondent's comment:

For me the most important thing is being able to get together with friends, everything else is secondary I think. That's the main thing, to be amongst friends, because no matter what you have, if you cannot share it with your friends it's worthless really (Ronald, 62 yrs).

### **Retirement Communities in Toronto**

Toronto is a thriving multi - dimensional creative centre where people from all walks of life live side - by - side with new immigrants and less affluent groups with whom their children share the same schools. It is a city with true intermixing of people and cultures (Florida, 2002). However, when it comes to retirement living, our elderly are choosing to be among people who share the same cultural background.

As previously mentioned, these "minority - based" retirement communities were originally established for so - called marginal groups: Villa Charities (for the Italian

community), Baycrest Centre (for the Jewish community) and most recently the Yee Hong Centre (for the Chinese community). There were reasons why these retirement communities were built for these diverse groups. As new immigrants to Canada they found themselves unable to speak the English language. Their culture, customs and foods were also very different from "mainstream" society and as a result felt a desire to mature with people of similar ethnic backgrounds. In 1918, the Toronto Jewish Old Folks Home opened in downtown Toronto. In the 1950s, the Italian community had a dream of building a retirement community to serve primarily the Italian community and created Villa Charities which began the conception of Villa Colombo (Ariemma, 1996).

Fortunately, these pre - war and post - war Italian Canadians shared the vision of building a home for the aged. The Villa Colombo project united the old and the new immigrants, and transcended regional allegiances and *campanilismo*, which means an expression of loyalty to one's home town, (derived from *campanile*, the church bell tower) Italian immigrants that settled in Toronto tended to come from southern Italy and they share a sense of unity with members from the same town (Ariemma, 1996).

The Yee Hong Community Wellness Foundation established itself in 1990. They maintain a mandate to provide leadership and vision in developing culturally and linguistically appropriate services for seniors of Chinese origin.

Specialized retirement villages are not just a Toronto based idea. The Guardian, a retirement organization out of the United States, believes that taking care of residential needs of elderly members of ethnic, religious and sexual orientation minorities is set to be one of the fastest-growing issues in care politics over the next few decades (Guardian, 2003). It would seem that this will apply to our aging population in Canada too due to



the fact that we are a very multicultural society, especially in Toronto where Caucasians make up approximately 48 percent of the population (Statistics Canada, 2004). Charity Age Concern, also an American organization, believes councils and housing associations must design retirement communities that meet the cultural needs of older people from ethnic minorities to stop them from being isolated from their families and communities. Furthermore, they argue that government needs to provide more resources to recognize the cultural needs of elderly members of minority groups. Otherwise these minority groups will provide housing for themselves. Just as the Italian, Jewish and Chinese communities have provided for its elderly so will other minority groups such as the gay community.

### **What can we do to understand the needs of gay men?**

An understanding of the history and struggles of older gay men is necessary in order to understand what life was like for them when they were growing up (Tully, 2000). The educational system that educate future healthcare workers should include “gay based” curriculums in community colleges and universities that will provide these future care givers, nurses, doctors and social workers with a foundation to help better understand the circumstances which shaped and formed this current cohort of elderly gay men (Brown et al, 1997). The baby boomer generation of gay men will most likely be more outspoken in terms of their wants and needs as they enter into retirement (Rainbow Vision’s Properties, 2004). Future generations such as “Generation X and Y” will hopefully have

equality at all levels by the time they reach retirement age. It is critical that society be compassionate, supportive, understanding and inclusive of elderly gay mens' needs.

I wanted to find out if the participants were able to be "out" at work and surprisingly, many were not able to live "open" lives at work. Most of the retired interviewees were "in the closet" during their working years and this is similar with other research (Berger, 1982; Bergling, 2004). Many of my participants said that if a colleague were to have asked them if they were gay, that they would have answered truthfully. However, even today many younger generations of gay men do not discuss their sexuality at work either (Garnets & Kimmel, 2003). There are many reasons for not wanting to be "out of the closet" at work, including fear of not being promoted, being labeled and judged. Consider these comments:

I never made a point of being gay-that would have been too much (Enzo, 62 yrs).

They suspected at work but I didn't come out and say that I was gay. I was never asked and I never had to say one way or the other (Joseph, 66 yrs).

No. Actually, it was never discussed. I've never come out in a formal way (Albert, 65 yrs).

No I was not open. I'm sure people knew but I had to be very discrete (Frank, 57 yrs).

I haven't made a big point of it at work, it hasn't come up and I haven't gone up and down the halls saying, "I'm gay" but most people know about "it" (Robert, 62 yrs).

I've never screamed "it" from the roof tops but I have been able to live the majority of my life as a gay man (Bruce, 66 yrs).

No. I think I spent most of my time hiding it (Thomas, 67 yrs).

Gay men who are 85 years old are likely to view the world much differently than gay men who came out during the tumultuous period in 1969 that saw the "Stonewall

Riots” in New York City. These men would currently be in their late 50s and early 60s. The older cohort may harbor internalized homophobia and an unwillingness to be particularly open about their sexual orientation (Berger, 1982) whereas the baby boomer cohort may be more open with their sexual orientation, due to the fact that their generation fought for issues dealing with human rights. Many of these interviewees of the latter age group were insistent that they would not tolerate inequality, especially in terms of retirement living.

### **Living arrangements**

According to at least one study conducted by Senior Action in a Gay Environment (SAGE), about 65 percent of gay seniors live alone. This is nearly twice the rate of heterosexuals aged 65 years and older. While nearly 50 percent of the elderly population live with life partners, this is true for only 20 percent of gay men. Furthermore 90 percent of gay seniors have no children, compared with only 20 percent of all seniors (SAGE, 2002).

Interestingly, many of the gay couples within my research were in long-term relationships. I am not implying that longevity of a relationship implies a “successful” partnership. However, the vast majority of my participants appeared to be very happy and proud of their same-sex partnerships. For example, consider this comment:

A home and a house are different. A house is empty. A home has somebody there that loves you. You want to spend time together. It's the smells of the baking, the small talk and just being close and wanted. That brings comfort and satisfaction (Darren, 47 yrs).

The following is a sampling of successful long – term relationships. Bruce and Phillip celebrated their 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary; Albert and Enzo celebrated 14 years together; Edwin and Paul celebrated 37 years together; Bruno and Laird have been together for 33 years; Darren and Scott celebrated 31 years together; Frank and Jack have been together for 25 years; Ronald and Thomas have been together for 34 years; Harold and Robert have been together for 21 years and Darren and Richard have been together for 29 years.

The interviewees I met with talked of their long-standing friendships with other gay couples whom they had known for many years. Older gays have a tendency to socialize with persons their own age although they seem to have some younger friends (Bergling, 2004). Gay men who are friends with younger gay men are significantly less likely to fear aging and death. Evidently, socializing with young people helped them to keep up with new ideas and to “stay young” (Bergling, 2004). Many gay men prefer to enjoy small gatherings and tend to shy away from bars. The bars did not play a significant role in their lives when they were younger and they still do not play an important part now that they are older (Tully, 2000).

### **Health issues**

Very little is known about the health care needs of elderly gay men. One of the key reasons for this ignorance is the failure of many provincial and national based health surveys to access sexual orientation information (Sum Quad Sum Foundation, 1997). It

is illegal in Canada to ask about whether one is gay or lesbian. However, there could be ways of finding out who is gay by adding "same sex partner" to the marital status question on many government forms. This would give gay men a choice to be "out." Currently, there are no choices. The Gay and Lesbian Medical Association and the Center for the Gay Lesbian Bisexual and Transgender (GLBT) Health at Columbia University have identified a number of major structural concerns related to GLBT health:

- The lack of a coordinated public health infrastructure to support and direct funded initiatives on GLBT health
- Institutional barriers to quality health services, such as denial of benefits to same-sex spouses by insurers and employers
- Barriers to communication between health care providers and the GLBT consumers (Brown et al., 1997)

Older Lesbians in Valued Environments, (OLIVE) in Toronto, reported in August 2003 that health, housing providers and all levels of government need to be aware that lesbians continue to experience overt and covert forms of discrimination, related to their sexual identity. The same thing applies to elderly gay men. To properly address this discrimination health and care providers need to become more sensitive to the issues faced by older gay men. OLIVE identified the following recommendations:

- Provide training and education to service providers on lesbian specific psychosocial and health issues
- Ensure policies, procedures and printed materials are lesbian-positive. Encourage, develop and implement lesbian specific community based services

- Develop and implement more in-home health care and home/housing support services
- Designate lesbian beds, units, floors in seniors' residences and long-term care facilities
- Ensure more supportive, adaptable, safe, secure and environmentally sound housing.

Again, these recommendations made by OLIVE would also apply to elderly gay men. Studies document discrimination and bias against elderly gay men in health care settings. Stereotyping and inadequate education can cause health care workers to ignore known preventative care procedures or treatment needs of gay and lesbian patients that may lead them to feel even further marginalized (Cahill et al, 2000; Kitchen, 2003; Ross et al, 2003; Sum Quad Sum Foundation, 1997)

Treatment approaches that depend on group therapy or support groups may be problematic for gays concerned that disclosure of sexual orientation may result in peer disapproval. In the United States, many instances of discrimination following disclosure of sexual orientation have been reported in nursing homes and retirement communities (Cahill et at, 2000).

Research conducted by the Canadian Press with Leger Marketing (2001) shows that attitudes and tolerance to homosexuality in general are rapidly improving. Those who tend to hold the most negative attitudes towards gays and the gay community are over 65 and older retirees.

### **What is growing gray like for gay men?**

Many young and middle-aged gay men seem to hold to the stereotype that they will live out their mature years in loneliness and isolation. Research provides evidence however, that elderly gay men tend to live the last decades of their lives as they lived the middle decades, they are active members of the community and have developed long-lasting friendships and many are in committed relationships (Berger, 1982; Lee, 1983; Garnets & Kimmel, 2003). New forms of relationships in old age can include living independently but continuing intimate relationships with one partner (Bergling, 2004). Furthermore, friendships seem to provide a major source of life satisfaction for many older cohort of gay men (Berger, 1982). Studies show that gay men seem to experience "accelerated aging," that is, experiencing themselves as old, at an earlier age, than their chronological age (Brown et al., 1997). However, other researchers reject this theory of accelerated gay aging. John Lee (1983) argues that if gay men tend to feel older at any given age, it is because they are usually single men. Similar to those from comparable heterosexual subcultures (e.g., those who frequent singles' bars), some gay men put greater emphasis on cosmetic appearance, but no more than heterosexual singles (Lee, 1983). However, not all gay men frequent singles' bars nor do heterosexual men.

Douglas Kimmel argues that many gay men are able to cope with aging better than heterosexual men because gays are more prepared for aging (Garnets & Kimmel, 2003). Generally speaking, gay men have had to take more responsibility for their own needs earlier in life than many heterosexual married men. Gay men not only manage their careers but the domestic duties of maintaining their homes as well. He also suggests that gay male lives may be less disrupted by life - cycle changes than heterosexual men's

lives, such as role changes that ensue after the death of a spouse or when children leave home. In general, gays may be able to cope better with aging than heterosexual men (Garnets & Kimmel, 2003).

During my research I asked the interviewees if, "they were afraid of aging" and naturally their answers varied. However, there seemed to be a common thread of acceptance with all of the interviewees. They had reached the point in their lives where they realized that as they looked into the mirror, that apart from cosmetic surgery, there was nothing they could do to stop the wrinkles. Growing old was a reason to celebrate life. As they looked back at the reflection in the mirror and saw their image, it was proof that they had survived. I am not surprised that many of the gay respondents did not want to relive their youth. With age brought confidence, knowledge and experience and this was similar to other studies such as Berger, 1982 and Lee, 1983. Most of them seemed to have a very healthy perspective on aging, living and growing older and simply seized each and every day. Consider the following comments:

I find that there's a beauty in peoples' faces as they get older...I find that there is beauty in something that ages. I mean why do people buy antiques? Because they're battered and they've been loved for many years and I feel that's the way the human body is (Edwin, 62 yrs).

I think if you're healthy and happy that's all you can be. Getting old is not a bad thing or a good thing but just something that all of us go through (Albert, 48 yrs).

Learning is what makes me feel young. When I stop learning then I know I'm old. It has nothing to do with the wrinkles on my face (Darren, 65yrs).

The gay community in Toronto and other Canadian cities does not have the opportunity to take advantage of the knowledge and leadership skills of older people and younger gays do not have role models of successful gay aging to counter the myths about the "horrors" of being gay and gray (Berger, 1982). I think that this is true of many



younger gay individuals. They fear aging because they fear what the future brings- questioning if they will find love, happiness and see their dreams become a reality. It was refreshing and reassuring to see that these gay men had enjoyed their youth, middle age and were now living their retirement years to the fullest. There also seemed to be a sense of youthfulness to their approach to life, they had a certain kind of sensitivity and perhaps this is why they were aging with dignity.

### **What is ageism?**

It is critical for designers to have an understanding of ageism. Ageism is the devaluing of, exclusion of, or discrimination against people because of their age (Cahill et al, 2000). Like racism, classism and homophobia, it is systematic; and operates across gay and lesbian culture to enforce and value that what is old as less attractive, less important, less useful, less worthy of attention and resources (Cahill et al. 2000; Kitchen, 2003). Ageism has long been recognized in Canadian society in general as well as within the gay community. Unfortunately, just as "straight" society worships youth, so does gay culture. Older gay adults are often segregated from the younger members of the gay community (Bergling, 2004). Because of their age, few opportunities for intergenerational exchange often exist. As is the case with younger heterosexuals, younger gay men tend to isolate themselves from their older counterparts. Ageism within the gay community encourages isolation already reinforced by "straight" society. Thus, the aging gay community becomes even further cast out (Berger, 1982; Bergling, 2004).

### How to build the dream?

I sought the advice of an architect from Dunlop Architects Inc. and an interior designer from the Interior Design Collaborative Inc. because I wanted to inquire about how they would approach designing a gay retirement community if they were approached by a client to design one. The reason for choosing these firms is because they are considered experts in their field. Dunlop Architects is a full service architectural firm that was established in 1953 and they are recognised as a leader in the design of acute and long - term care facilities. The Interior Design Collaborative Inc., IDCI, was founded in 1989. They are an interior design consulting firm that is dedicated to creating environments that are innovative, functional and cost effective. The Interior Design Collaborative is owned by Dunlop Architects with whom they can offer clients the benefit of a fully integrated architectural and interior design service.

Both of these professionals have been practicing architecture and interior design for many years and are at the "senior" level. They were extremely knowledgeable, friendly and very down to earth. As we discussed the notion of a gay retirement community, I immediately felt a sense of calm, because I realized that they would have approached the "problem" of where to start in a similar fashion as to what I had done.

In terms of retirement living it was suggested that you have to know your client and therefore they would have to conduct interviews with members of the gay community in order to establish what their needs and wants would be in terms of the design of a retirement community.

They both talked about how elderly heterosexual couples with money generally do not stay in Canada during the winter months and asked me if I thought a wealthy gay

couple would stay in Canada during the winter months? Interestingly during my interviews I found that seven same - sex couples enjoyed getting away during the winter months and that three couples owned properties outside of Canada in places such as the United States, Mexico and Italy. However, there are many financially well – off gay men who enjoy being in Toronto during the fall and winter because that is when the ballet, opera and theatre come to life. Consider this participant's comment:

The stimulation in the winter months is incredible, just look to great metropolises like New York, the winter is the prime time to be in town. It's when the opera, ballet, and symphony are at its climax (Scott, 62 yrs).

There was also the issue of people who want to remain independent for as long as possible. Those that do have money may not want to go into a retirement community and instead buy into condominiums, because many are one level and they allow the occupant to age at home for as long as possible. This is something that became apparent during my interviews. Almost half of the participants were living in condominiums and the reason had to do with lifestyle. Many of them liked the sense of freedom that condo living gave them. A condominium does not have the same responsibilities that caring for a house does. Home ownership requires yard maintenance and constant uptake in terms of house repairs. We also discussed the diversity within the gay community itself and the unique challenges that would arise in trying to build a retirement community that would meet the needs and wants of everyone with the gay community.

Were interior designers dealing with issues of equality and inclusiveness? Apparently, our multi – cultural society is having an impact on how spaces were traditionally designed in the past and I was happy to hear that these issues were being addressed. During my interview the architect and the interior designer talked about the

challenge of designing a prayer room in hospitals. Canada is a very multi – cultural society and not everyone will worship a cross in a prayer room. As a result, the prayer room had to be designed in a manner that allowed for all inhabitants to feel inclusive. They incorporated “hide - away” crosses for Christians that could be put away when not in use so the prayer room could also be used by other groups such as Muslims if need be.

As we discussed issues of retirement communities for gay men, they began to recognize the fact that they had never really given much thought to the wants and needs of elderly gay men. I think they felt truly embarrassed because they immediately saw the importance in the research that I was conducting. This revelation only further enhanced my desire to continue with my investigation. I realized how critical this research is needed so that interior designers would know what to plan for in terms of gay retirement communities.

It was reassuring to find out that they both felt very strongly that there was a need for a gay retirement community and that they would have started as I had done, which was getting to know my client. They stated that this research is critical because it gives interior designers a “road map” and an understanding of the unique needs of the gay community. For example, consider the interior designers comment on creating environments that are truly caring:

As you age you should be in an environment where people are understanding and supportive and non-judgmental. That sort of environment is not only healthy but the best, because they and can just be themselves (personal interview, 2003).

I also recently had the opportunity to correspond with Professor Benjamin Gianni in the Faculty of Architecture at Carleton University in Ottawa. He has researched

spatial and social structure of gay communities<sup>1</sup> and confirmed my findings of the following: Gay men are particularly sensitive to their surroundings and like to live within easy access to urban social and cultural infrastructure. Professor Gianni mentioned that, “older gay men tend to entertain at home and are often avid collectors of things – many of which they like to display. Older gay men enjoy contact (social and otherwise) with younger men. A male looking for a gay retirement community is likely of above average means and education.”<sup>2</sup> He concluded that a gay retirement home could help to bring together the gay retirement community in a similar manner that the church does for heterosexuals.<sup>2</sup>

### Summary

Many of the participants in my research discussed the notion of a retirement community and how the environment would have to be different than a heterosexual retirement community. People in general feel comfortable in their own surroundings and do not want to admit to the fact that they are aging and perhaps one day may be unable to care for themselves (Ariemma, 1996). Unfortunately, many people simply end up in a long-term care environment when they realize that they can no longer care manage the house and themselves (Cahill et al, 2000). Many of the respondents, especially those who were-

*Footnote: 1.* House Rules exh. Cat. Published as *Assemblage 24* (August 1994). Project statement published as Benjamin Gianni et al., *Queering (Single Family) Space*, Site 26 (1995), pp.66-67 and House Rules exh. Cat. Published as *Assemblage 24* (September 1994). Benjamin Gianni et al., *Playing it Straight*, (1994), pp.34-37 Boston: MIT Press

*Footnote: 2.* Personal correspondence with Professor Benjamin Gianni on July 12, 2004

living in large houses realized that one day they may have to consider downsizing because they realized that with age, the house eventually would be difficult to maintain. Many of these gay people were having conversations with friends about the possibility of buying a triplex so that they could live together as they age. In doing so, they could hire outside help as needed so that they could age with dignity and respect. Yet, others talked about how it would be wonderful to have options available such as gay retirement communities.

As mentioned previously, the issue of not having children to rely on for support continually arose in the interviews. As well many interviewees mentioned how friends played a vital and active role in their lives. This was similar to Berger's findings. In terms of retirement living, many respondents expressed this fear of being isolated with other aging "queens." They wanted to be in an environment that would have a variety of elderly gay men of different age groups - 50s, 60s and beyond. If there was just one age group, many participants feared the environment would become static with a bunch of elderly men "waiting for God." Perhaps this fear was simply accelerated aging without the mental stimulation of interacting with younger cohorts? During the interviews the respondents began to consider the alternative, which was existing "heterocentric" retirement communities and they began to discuss how a gay retirement community would differ from what is out there now and this vision of a gay model began to evolve. A theme began to emerge and many of the interviewees talked about a retirement community that would act as a vehicle to pull younger cohorts of the gay population to it; that an event or a destination place within the retirement community would somehow draw people into it, and allow for interaction and socialization to take place. Whether it

is an art gallery that features the works of struggling gay artists or a restaurant that serves not only patrons, but the retirement community too. Therefore, the gay retirement community needs to have strong ties to the gay community in general. I expand on this concept further in Chapter Four.

It is evident that gay retirement communities are critical in order for gay men to age with dignity and respect. This chapter has provided interior designers with an understanding of who their clients are so that they may design a retirement community that is not only appealing, functional and welcoming but a place for gay men to call home.

## Chapter 3

### Queer space - what does home mean?

#### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to examine what the notion of home means for gay men. Homes fulfill different needs for everyone and they do much more than merely provide shelter for humans. Home is an expression of self, acting as a stage that tells a story of the occupant's life. The concept of home, to some people, is a vessel of memories; to others it is a place where they can let down their guard and be themselves. Do gay men experience the notion of home differently from a heterosexuals perception of home or are they similar? I make reference to Clare Cooper Marcus's book, *House as a Mirror of Self: Exploring the Deeper Meaning of Home* to help the reader understand what the concept of home means to people in general. This chapter will also examine the concept of queer space and makes reference to Michel Foucault and Griselda Pollock. It asks the question: "Are gay men able to be themselves in public spaces or do they feel most comfortable in the sphere of private spaces such as home?" I will discuss the perception of Queer Space, what it is, how it started and where it is going. This chapter also explores whether or not Queer Space is disappearing as we become more of a global society, or is Queer Space simply vanishing as gays gain equality? Finally this chapter discusses what design elements are required for a gay retirement community and more specifically what gay men desire in terms of the privacy of their homes. This chapter discusses some common themes from my research interviews in defining what design



elements are required for a gay friendly retirement community. As gays continue towards inclusion and equality, this information will be useful for interior designers so that they may know what to prepare for when designing gay retirement communities.

### **It's all about having a home**

Home becomes a sacred place for many (Bachelard, 1994; Buttimer, 1980; Young, 1998). Home acquires special meaning not only as a result of special events that transpired within its walls, this notion of a vessel of memories (Marcus, 1995), but also as a living museum of the occupants' lives where treasured artifacts and identity-defining personal possessions are stored and displayed (Belk, 1992; Boschetti, 1995; Rubinstein, 1989). By surrounding themselves with such physical clues to the events of their lives, these gay couples, like others, make their places meaningful. The proudly displayed crystal purchased on a fondly remembered anniversary, the Empire mantel clock purchased in Paris or the porcelain figurine that was inherited from a long-time friend. The transformation of the space within a home into a gallery of the occupants' lives, contribute to imbuing the space with personal significance (Rowels, 1981). Viewing each artifact or memento can resurrect the occupants' consciousness, the events and, by extension, the places, of their lives. This process can transform space that to an outsider might seem mundane into a vibrant repository of meaning (Gittel & Vidal, 1998). Which is why our homes are personal, they act as extensions of how we perceive ourselves. Consider this notion of home:

A house fulfills many needs: a place of self-expression, a vessel of memories, a refuge from the outside world, a cocoon where we can feel nurtured and let down our guard (Marcus, 1995:4).

This was particularly true with all of the respondents who partook in my study.

The varied notions of home stirred up many emotions. For some people home meant living in Toronto, the love of a spouse; that without a partner to share it with, home was merely a house. Yet for many others, home became a refuge from the outside world, a place where they could let down their guard.

For me personally, home stirs up many emotional feelings. I was born and raised in Calgary, Alberta; and for me home has always been the landscape of the Calgary skyline with the Rocky Mountains acting as a backdrop, almost framing the architecture. Home is the smells of my mother baking cookies, bread and pies...my father in the garden, planting, weeding, watering and nurturing. My parents' home, warm, inviting, clean, organized and filled with love. I moved to Toronto 14 years ago to pursue my degree in Interior Design. I ended up meeting my partner of 13 years and establishing our home in Toronto. Our home is a symbol of our relationship. It represents who we are and where we are in our life and it is filled with past, present and future dreams, goals and plans together. Every object in our home is associated with warm memories. I vividly remember having a poster framed that I gave him for our first Christmas together. Every time I look at it I feel proud because after all these years my heart remains his. It brings me great joy when I look around the house, these possessions and objects reaffirm that we are achieving our goals. I realized how very much I missed our home when I moved to Winnipeg to work on my course work at the University of Manitoba in 2002. That was one of the most difficult things I had ever done, on many different levels. I

longed for my partner, our dog Greta, our home and my garden. When I thought of home, my heart would ache. I even tried to set up my bedroom in my Winnipeg apartment so that my bed was orientated the same way as our bed back home in Toronto. At night I would fall asleep dreaming of home.

People in general find objects and possessions meaningful especially when they are associated with those of significant others. I recall many years ago when my mother's sister, my godmother, passed away. I was given an ABBA record that she enjoyed listening to. I have held on to that possession for years and it remains dear to my heart. Twenty-five years later when I hear *Take a Chance on Me*, I find myself thinking of her. This reflects what two social researchers, McClelland and McCarthy, concluded: The greater the control we exercise over an object or an environment, the more closely allied with the self it becomes (Marcus, 1995).

According to McClelland and McCarthy, where we live becomes a kind of stage set onto which our self-image is projected via moveable objects. The house interior for most people-unlike the structure itself-is rarely wholly fixed or finished. Like the exploration of the self, the arrangement of the domestic interior is often in the process of becoming (Marcus, 1995: 59).

Our homes tend to change and evolve over time just as we continue to grow. Nothing stays the same in the world; things constantly move, change, as with nature a flower will bud, bloom and die. Upon starting this research I wanted to investigate the notion of home. I suspected that gay men may perceive home differently than heterosexuals do. During the analysis component of my research, I began to find themes and patterns developing. I began to think of what Shakespeare wrote, "all the world's a stage and all the men and women merely players."<sup>1</sup>

*Footnote: 1.* William Shakespeare saw the world as a large theatre and this was a common theme in his plays.

All of the participants had created these elaborate and themed environments. It was obvious that great care to details had been taken into consideration in terms of choosing the “right” colours, materials and furnishings. The rooms reflected not only their owners’ positions in life, but also their beings and where they wanted to be in terms of their own lives. I can vividly recall all of the rooms in which my interviews took place in; these intricate sets, as I sat there listening to their stories. Every object in the room was carefully placed and all of the paintings on the walls were hung with great attention to detail. The objects within them communicate in the same way - both as mirrors of what is, and as suggestions of what might be (Marcus, 1995:62). The rooms to me seemed to be theatrical, a living stage, if you will, where all of the guests and hosts were a part of the performance. Consider this perspective on objects and identity:

George Herbert Mead proposed that physical objects play a central role in the development and maintenance of our self-identity. The objects with which we surround ourselves in that most familiar and stable environment-the home-are particularly salient expressions of self. The more we are able to touch those objects, the more we gain reassurance of their reality, a reassurance and a level of relating not gained from sight alone (Marcus, 1995, 63)

To try and shed some truth to Mead’s theory I asked the participants of my study, “In terms of your home, is the style and colour scheme important to you and why?” Interestingly, the answers varied widely, but again there seemed to be an underlying theme as to why the interviewees had decorated their houses the way in which they had. There was a strong connection to this notion of object as self. Home had become an extension of the self or in most situations, extensions of selves. Their homes represented their commitment to each other.

With age, we tend to increasingly value objects that evoke the past (Marcus, 1995). This is particularly true of objects that act as heirlooms, when they are passed on

they are fondly protected. All of the participants in my study had possessed objects that were passed down. Consider these comments regarding why the style and colour scheme of the rooms were important to my participants:

The home we have allows us to show off the antiques we've acquired over the years. The colours are important, because they enable us to show off our art (Benjamin, 69 yrs).

I like to be surrounded by things that I like, for example, the paintings on the walls, furniture and fresh cut flowers (Edward, 62 yrs).

They like things in their place and they like people to come in and see that you have a nice place to live. So yes I think the comfort of your home and how it is, is very important to me (Frank, 60 yrs).

Home then becomes a committed process where people develop meaningful environments. Most individuals play an active role in creating the places of their lives. This is particularly the case when creating personal space or transforming a "house" into a "home" by instilling it with meaning. Dwellings are transformed from simple structures to an environment that is suffused with the warmth of relationships and experiences (Young, 1998). For example, consider Kimberly Dovey's notion of home:

Home is a schema of relationships that bring order, integrity and meaning to experience in place – a series of connections between person and world (Dovey, 1985:43).

My research asked the participants if they felt that, "Private space allowed you to feel more comfortable than a public space?" Not surprisingly, all 23 interviewees felt most comfortable in the privacy of their own homes. Home allowed them to put down their guard and to just say whatever was on their mind without having to deal with any repercussions. In the public sphere many of the participants felt that they had to watch what they said in the company of heterosexuals. With their gay friends they felt most

comfortable and had no inhibitions about being themselves. For example, consider these comments:

You have to watch your conversation. Gay people have developed their own language to a certain extent. For example, I know of many gays who've been out a while and they begin to take on the female gender, "she said" instead of "he said", so you have to be careful in "straight" company (Darren, 53 yrs).

You have to be careful about what you say, especially if you don't want them to know you're gay and you don't want to tell them so you create walls (Roger, 63 yrs).

As mentioned earlier many of my participants' same-sex relationships had spanned many decades. Benjamin and Philip are soon to be celebrating their 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary. They live in an upscale condominium in mid-town Toronto. Their favorite way of socializing is through the art of a dinner party, which was true of many of the participants. This couple enjoyed socializing with their friends, many of whom are gay and most are similar in age. It was evident that their home was designed for entertaining. When they bought the condominium they were the first owners and had the opportunity to upgrade features. They decided to redesign the kitchen with the assistance of an interior designer. The new kitchen is much larger and is much more efficient than what would have been built. It has ample counter space and is the perfect layout for entertaining large dinner parties, something they do at least a couple of times a week. There is also a sense of formality to the rooms. The dining room has a beautiful china cabinet that was filled with lovely china and crystal (this was similar to all participants; many had their china proudly displayed in glass cases). Benjamin and Philip's dining room can seat up to ten people comfortably. Albeit, they usually only entertain six people at a time these days. Entertaining larger groups requires a lot more energy and time. The living room itself is

an eclectic mix of Regency and Empire furniture with attractive fabrics that were perfectly matched. The walls above the custom designed sofa are adorned with Middle Eastern art that was collected largely through their travels (please refer to picture on the following page). They had one of the bedrooms adjacent the terrace converted into a den, and had beautiful custom oak bookcases installed in the room to showcase their books and artifacts. They modified the layout of the condominium to suit their lifestyle. This was common to all of the participants who modified the rooms within their homes to satisfy their lifestyle.

My research included the question, "What does the concept of home mean to you?" Naturally the answers varied considerably from person to person however there was a common theme of home reflecting the inhabitant's personality and a place where you could be yourself. For example, consider these interviewees comments:

Home means comfortable, secure and someone to come home to (Bruno, 68 yrs).

A place that is filled with my own things and something that expresses my personality, and of course having someone to come home too. It's a place that you go back to and feel comfortable (Philip, 63 yrs).

Safety and allows you to be your self whatever that may mean and there are no guards (Edward, 62 yrs).

Home means security and safety from the outside world (Richard, 67 yrs).

Were I'm most comfortable, where the things around me are mine or ours (Darryl, 65 yrs).

### Home is also a living museum

It became obvious to me why gays would identify with a more relaxed environment such as the privacy of home or the home of friends, for it is in the confines of home that gay men are able to let down their guard. All of the respondents enjoyed being in their homes and all of them had created interiors that not only protected them from the undesirable -

Figure 14

Image of the walls adorned with pictures from their travels.





elements of the outside world such as homophobia but that also protected their same-sex relationships as well. For example, consider these participants' comments regarding home:

I guess at home you still feel more relaxed than out in public (Enzo, 62 yrs).

Yes I feel more comfortable in my home (Joseph, 67 yrs).

The concept of home meant different things for the participants but a common theme began to emerge. Many of the respondents talked about the home being comfortable and secure and filled with personal possessions and expressive in terms of personalities that occupy the space. Many of the respondents mentioned home meant sharing it with a loved one, their partners, something to come home to. Home was also equated to something owned. For example, consider this comment:

It's a place that you go back to and feel comfortable. As soon as you close the door it's your environment, it's extremely important for your morale (Philip, 63 yrs).

Home, apart from being a mere shelter, becomes a key element in the relationship between an individual and his environment. Home is a schema of relationships that brings order, integrity and meaning to experience and place. It is a series of connections between person and the world (Marcus, 1995). It becomes a part of your life and it reflects where you have been. It is filled with things that you like and memories. For example, consider these comments from my research:

If I look around this room, the paintings are a part of our life. It brings us back in time. When I look at that lamp on the table, I immediately, think back to when Laird bought it (Bruno, 69 yrs).

Home is having a partner and being loved...the love is accepting of who you are for what you are (Laird, 53 yrs).

It's the things you do together as a couple that make house a home (Roger, 62 yrs).

The lamp itself is not important, but the memories that are attached to the lamp are important. The home becomes a documentation of the inhabitants' life (Belk, 1992; Marcus, 1995). As with all of my participants there was this notion of living museum, in that everything that they owned in the house has a memory or a story to tell. However, is this different from what heterosexuals want in a home? I do believe that because of being marginalized, many gays, including myself, feel most comfortable in the comforts of home. Home is a special place where one is able to totally unwind and to lock out the outside world. It is a cocoon of warmth, love and comfort. The possessions that make up our home were purchased together or given as gifts from family and friends. However, I have discovered that the notion of home for gay people equates similar emotions and connotations for heterosexuals.

### **Queer Space – what is it?**

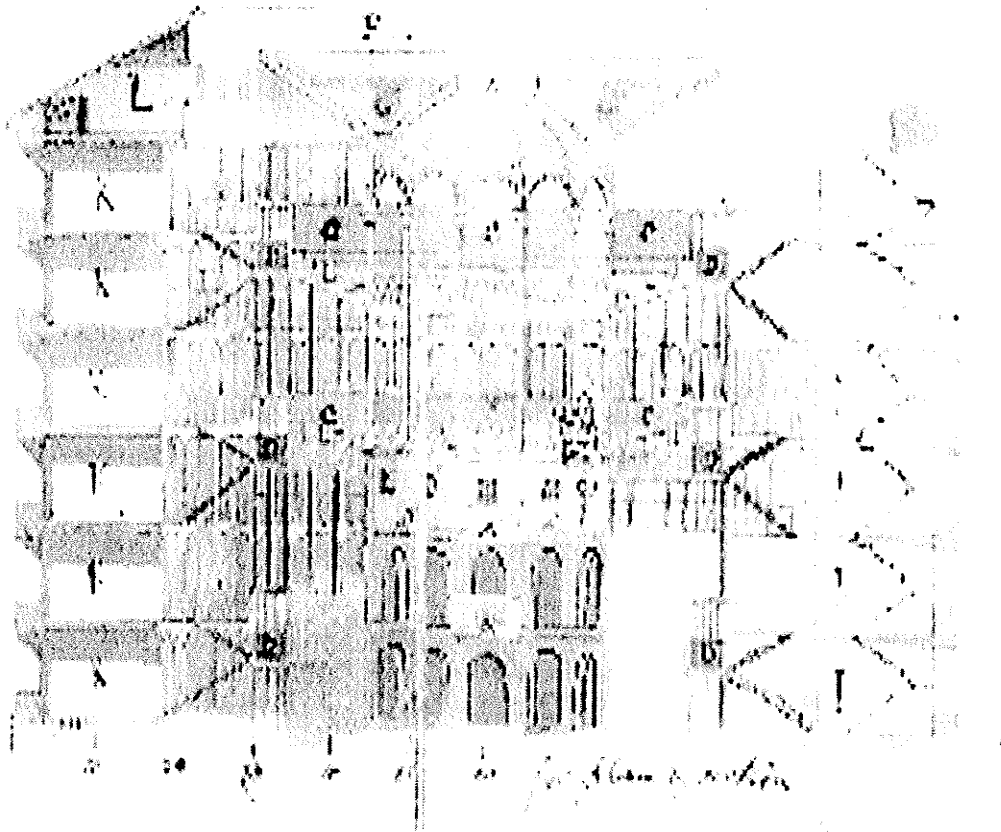
What is queer space and how did it arise? Do gay men recognize queer spaces and interact differently in them than in the heterosexual domain? I would argue that gay men feel most at ease in a queer space and that depending on the circumstances, they will “blend” into the dominant landscape, undetected if required. Why? Gay men have been segregated and cut off from mainstream society for millennia. Many older gay men have had to live their lives “in the closet” so to speak, or in some cases living a double life, that

is getting married and having children to project an “image” of being heterosexual. Why? In most cases this happens because of a deep fear of coming to terms with their own sexuality (Berger, 1982; Bergling, 2004; Sum Quad Sum Foundation, 1997).

Michel Foucault in his book, *Discipline and Punish: The Book of the Prison*, looks at the way in which overt control through fear was used in pre-modern times through public executions and torture has generally given way to covert, psychological controls. Foucault compares modern society with Jeremy Bentham's “Panopticon.” The design concept of the Panopticon is to allow an observer to observe (opticon) all prisoners (pan), without the prisoners being able to tell if they were being observed or not; this design of prisons then, in which a few guards can watch over many prisoners while themselves remaining unseen, this Foucault terms “The Gaze.” He also remarks that since the birth of the prison system, prison has frequently been considered the only solution for criminal behavior. The gaze however, is much more than this. Griselda Pollock, in her essay *Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity*, discusses the notion of repression that western bourgeoisie European women experienced in the eighteenth century. Women were literally confined to the home. Women who wanted to “stroll” the streets and window shop had to be accompanied by chaperones or husbands. Women were symbols of trophies and possessions of their husbands. The man was the dominant voice in the family because he went to work and provided for the family. Women's duties were to take care of the home and children and to prepare meals for the husband. The husband had the freedom to come and go as he pleased. Not only was the house his domain, but the city streets were his too. Consider this perspective on this notion of the flaneur:

Figure 15

Illustration of the Panopticon courtesy University College London Library



The flaneur symbolized the passive stroller, the man in the crowd.... The flaneur symbolizes the privilege or freedom to move about the public arenas of the city observing never interacting, consuming the sights through a controlling but rarely acknowledged gaze, directed as much at other people as at the goods for sale. (Pollock, 1988:67).

The world was a very different place for women during the eighteenth century when white European men dominated. Women, children and servants were seen as secondary. The public sphere was exclusive to the decision makers, leaders and elite and the private domain of home was allocated for women, children and servants.

This analogy to prison life and the hardships of eighteenth century bourgeoisie women may seem odd to the reader. However, like the prisoner who feels trapped and living in the public domain with minimal privacy; or women in the eighteenth century who wanted to be a part of the social collective, the same was, and to some extent remains true for gay men today. Many elderly gay men survived in the heterosexual domain by keeping their sexuality a secret, as with the prisoner who feels trapped, gay men feel trapped in the heterosexual domain. As with Pollock's essay, most gay men continue to be confined to home, through no choice of their own.

In the public sphere gays seek each other out through the "gaze." This ability to detect other gays is not something that is new, unique or that has been recently discovered. It is something that spans across all cultures and it is a universal "language" or "signal" that identifies "us" and it is used primarily for survival purposes. One aspect of the "gaze" is referred to as "cruising" by many gay men. Just as European bourgeoisie men had the opportunity to look and move about the city as they pleased, so did gay men. However, their gaze was, and continues to be set upon males. The "gaze" has survived and protected gay men for centuries and to a large extent continues to do so today.

Due to the oppression of gays, queer theory developed and came about largely through Feminism, and theorists such as Pollock are inspiring a new generation of activists to encourage society to consider the needs of the gay community when designing environments. In time this will forge better alliances and allow for a more sustainable habitation of environments that encourage interaction and communication between heterosexuals and gays. Queer theory is helping to make sense of complex experiences and problems between these groups such as the need to ensure that the built environment

is welcoming of all members of society otherwise gays feels left out and pushed to the side (Ingram, Bouthillette, Retter, 1997). For example, consider Weisman's comment regarding oppression:

Those who hold power in society simply feel free to continue to displace the tragedies of oppression and exploitation from one locust group to another (Agrest, Conway & Weisman, 1996:275)

Therefore, "good" interior design ensures that environments are welcoming to all members of society and should reflect the cultural mosaic that make up cities. For example, I will reflect back to Chapter Two and my interview with Dina of Dunlop Architects and Dana of the Interior Design Collaborative. When Dina and Dana were designing health care facilities they had to consider the cultural mosaic of all members of society when designing worship rooms. Therefore they incorporated foldable crosses so that the room was available to all religious denominations, not just Christians. Their structures not only met local building codes, but also abided by the Human Rights Code, so that the built environment was welcoming to all members of society. They are designing interior environments that are truly inclusive to all Canadians.

### **Queer Space is changing**

Foucault foresaw a desanctification of space, in which old boundaries would become scrambled (Ingram, Bouthillette, Retter, 1997). I believe that Foucault envisioned that spaces have become blurred because of globalization, human rights, technology and the fast pace of urban cities. As minorities begin to become a part of the social fabric their

spaces or “ghettos” begin to crumble, albeit, gays still do not have the same equality. Therefore, queer space is necessary. It remains deliberately active, stable and subversive towards the dominant heterosexual culture. Queer space continues to need “straight” people to establish its difference in order to exist. As gay rights continue to emerge, so will queer spaces. Architectural historian Beatriz Colomina, has observed, “The private is...now more public” (Colomina, 1994:8). This manifesto is stressing opposition to how private spaces are marked. We are living in a society where people go onto talk shows such as *Oprah* and “spill their guts” without feeling ashamed or embarrassed. This sort of shift in attitudes regarding public/private has come about because partially because of technology and instant communication. It is also having an impact in the world of interior design where space makers are playing with the notion of the “public is private” and I shall touch on this theme again. Consider the Feminist adage “the personal is political.”

In North America, the “hetero - centric” domestic house is defined by the suburban home. Programming intrinsic to the home’s configuration presupposes and encourages heterosexual activity. The ideal interior is reinforced by domestic examples such as *The Brady Bunch*. Gender roles, within the space, are prescribed by proximities programmed into the house itself, as well as by media simulations surrounding the user. The master bedroom or the master en - suite, is set apart from smaller bedrooms, orchestrating a hierarchy in terms of age, sexuality and ownership. The prescribed domestic duties of wives as cooks and “homemakers” provide architects and designers with a blueprint of the chronological order of interior spaces in suburban homes. Rooms such as kitchens, family rooms and laundry rooms are marketed, and the overall design of

the house is planned to allow for traditional families to live together (Gutman, 1972).

The suburban home has shifted greatly since the days of *The Brady Bunch*, but nevertheless, planning adjacencies remain critical for the sale of homes even today.

However, the homes of gays do not necessarily mirror these characteristics. Gays reinterpret them, constructing new spaces as the occupants re-define the parameters for domesticity and play on this notion of “private is public.”

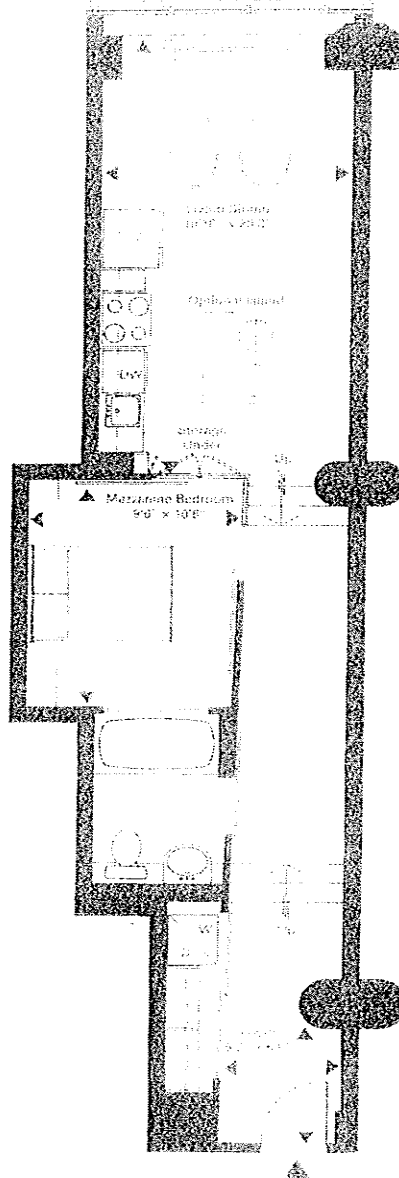
During my professional career as a practicing interior designer I had the opportunity to work for Cecconi Simone Inc. I was there for approximately three years and was involved in the conceptual development of designing floor plans for residential lofts. I recall one floor plan in particular, which was a very long and narrow space with high ceilings. It felt very much like a bowling alley. The design team was trying to recreate a very contemporary “feel.” The floors were polished concrete, except for sleeping quarters, and the ceiling was left “raw” with exposed HVAC, heating and cooling. This model suite really caused quite the stir and really challenged issues of privacy. Upon entering the suite the bathroom was to the left and one had to walk up three steps onto a platform. From this raised level one had access to the bedroom through a sliding “barn door” and the bedroom had access to the sunken bathtub, via sliding glass doors. While standing in the privacy of bathroom, one could see through to the bedroom, and vice versa. If the barn doors were open in the bedroom, one could see through to the kitchen beyond and the living area. We were not only challenging mainstream architecture and what the “norm” was in terms of residential floor plans for loft living, but we were creating a “lifestyle”, an environment where the occupant was not



intimidated to live in an environment where one took part in this notion of the “gaze” or “private is public.”

Figure 16

Floor plan of model suite. From standing in bathroom, one has full view through the bedroom, kitchen and beyond.



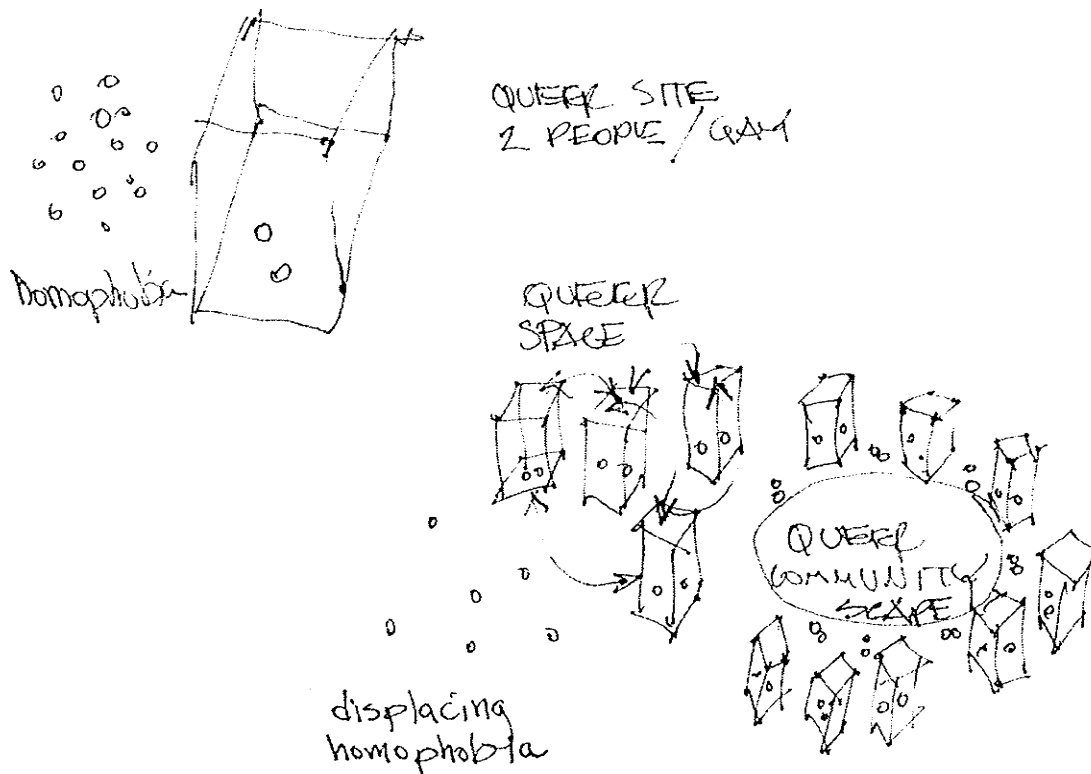
### **Queer Space is also a reaction against the dominant culture**

Queer space then is a reaction against homophobia. Queer space is an environment that attracts gays, allows for self-expression and an exchange of ideas. It also projects a resistance to the homophobia within society. These spaces are derived from individualized experiences. What we know, how we feel and where we fit into society has implications for how we interact and socialize with other people, and defines our perceptions of community. While ideologies have a great impact on cultural imagery in ways that influence individual development and perspectives, it is the experience of places that are essentially individual and subjective. This perspective makes the notion of mapping critical in order to make sense of the changes that occur both in cultural and physical environments (Marcus, 1995). For gay minorities, more careful recognition and use of such maps may be key to survival. Thus, any new built environment of queer space must function to counter homophobia until we have gained equality and will in turn alter the use of space for some heterosexuals. Even today a huge amount of public funds are invested in design and management decisions that make some interiors inaccessible or uncomfortable for gays. For example, spaces that are geared towards traditional family values, such as churches, hotels, retirement communities and long-term care facilities. I would argue that as long as there are forms of oppression, gay men will avoid existing retirement communities at all costs. My research has proved that there is a strong desire for gay retirement communities. Future generations of gays may not have to worry about growing old in gay retirement communities albeit, this will be apparent only when gays begin to feel a sense of equality and acceptance and when people begin to design inclusive spaces by dealing with issues such as respect, diversity and tolerance.

The following sketch illustrates the “evolution” of the gay community.

Figure 17

Sketch of the gay community; where it started, where it is and where it's going.



Brad Ross, a City of Toronto spokesperson indicates his stand on the gay community:

The world sees Toronto as a city that embraces all people, regardless of language, religion, or sexuality, and that's exactly what we are. If the gay and lesbian communities want to come and celebrate their lives here, we're more than happy to welcome them Adrangi, S. (2003, June 28). Gay couples wed with pride. *The Globe and Mail*, pp. A5.

This tolerance and inclusion is the sort of forward thinking that is necessary in order for equal rights to continue moving forward and for gay minorities to become a part of the cultural mosaic of Canada.

### **What is desired in a gay retirement community?**

If I sell my house and went into a condo where would I go? ...there are the condos down in the gay village, and I'm thinking, maybe that is the spot to be? Maybe it's a livelier spot to be living in when you're retired (Edwin, 63 yrs).

With the background synopsis of the “struggles” that gays have endured in Chapter 2 and having discussed the notions of home and what queer space is in this Chapter, I would argue that this alone indicates a strong desire for a gay “friendly” retirement community. *What design features should be incorporated into the retirement communities that will make gays feel comfortable?* This information will summarize what design elements are required for the private suites within the retirement community. Unfortunately, homophobia remains active and there have been numerous reports of how elderly gays are being shunned in “normal” retirement communities (GLARP, 2003). Gay retirement homes offer safety in numbers. “It is not so much a family of blood, but a family of choice that we are looking to take care of us,” says Joy Silver, president of Rainbow Vision Properties. As previously mentioned in Chapter 2, Rainbow Vision Properties is currently building a gay retirement community in New Mexico.

The research participants generally believed that a gay retirement community would be different than a heterosexual retirement community. However, about 75 percent of interview participants said that they were not entirely convinced that the design itself would differ from a heterosexual retirement community. Some felt that good design would speak for itself and be reflected in the end result. Albeit, all of the participants believed that gay men have different interests from heterosexual men and women, and therefore the functions within the space would be different, that the programming would differ, the recreational and social activities would differ and that in itself would have an impact on the overall design. All of the participants believed that because gays are creative then the retirement community itself would be better designed, and filled with “exquisite” objects. It would be a place that is warm, inviting and allows people to interact with each other and at the same time gives them their own privacy.

Due to the fact that many gay couples would not have any children to rely on for support they have to rely on their own economic resources and their friendships. These are recurring themes that have a huge impact on how gays socialize and therefore have direct consequences on the overall end-result of the retirement community planned.

Based on information gathered in my interviews there was this desire to give back to the community. Approximately half of the participants wanted to be role models for younger gays. Many of their friends had passed on because of the AIDS crisis of the 1980s and that consequently, there was a lack of older people in the community to look up to (Bergling, 2004). The interviewees talked of maybe giving back by volunteering their time for example, by providing art classes, baking, gardening, preparing income tax and tutoring children. I asked the participants: “Tell me in what ways do you think a gay

retirement community would differ from a heterosexual retirement community?"

Consider these answers to the question:

A gay retirement community would not be so obsessed with families...there would be no children or grandchildren visiting...the "straight" retirement community would have much more families visiting (Edward, 62 yrs).

People will want to visit us because they want to. In that sense, I think that it will probably be more inviting (Albert, 49 yrs).

Gay couples...are quite independent on their own...we're more open...I think we have quite a different approach to retirement...I think a lot of gay people are more youthful in their approach to living. I know a lot of people who are quite well advanced but they can sure kick up their heels (Edwin, 63 yrs).

A gay retirement community would have a larger proportion of elderly gay men who are single; this is based on the current research by (Cahill et al, 2000; Kitchen, 2003). However, there are countless gay couples who are "out there", but unfortunately, because of homophobia are afraid to self - identify, and remain "hidden."

Many of the participants desired a living arrangement that would include some sort of social activities and some personal care later on when they were less capable of looking after themselves. They expressed the idea of living in a gay friendly community where there was a combination of retirement and access to long - term care. Knowing that the long - term care aspect of aging was made available to them when they required it, made them feel more relaxed. It became evident that these men were afraid of the last stage of their lives and wanted to ensure that there was some sort of plan was made available to them so they could continue to their final stage. This concept of aging in place was something that all of the participants desired. For example, ponder these comments:

I think a good design would be an environment that is designed so that you have your own independence, your own privacy, like condo living or apartment

living...So that as you continue to age, and if your health deteriorates you can move onto a next level of care, and what would be ideal is to be in the same complex (Frank, 60 yrs).

The palliative care aspect of this home comes as an adjunct of the home itself. It would be nice to know that the place would incorporate the well and the not so well could be there together (Bruno, 68 yrs).

However, much research has been conducted on aging and most people like the idea of having long - term care available, but not in the same building. The major reason being that most people who are retired are very much alive and active in the community. Long - term care is usually for very frail seniors with debilitating diseases such as Alzheimers and Parkinson's. They usually require 24 - hour nursing care and supervision. Therefore, long - term care facilities are generally located on the same site as the retirement community, but not in the same building. The Yee Hong Centre was wonderful in terms of conceptual design because its long - term care unit was on the same site but in a separate building. The Community Centre acted as a hub to draw not only residents of the retirement community and long - term care facility to it, but the Chinese community too.

### **Building our dream**

The idea of the gay retirement village, regardless of how it evolves, is definitely a wave for the future, suggests clinical worker Paul Smith. I am certain that as gay men become more comfortable with being gay identified, out in the larger community, there will be more and more enclaves emerging (Bergling, 2004).

Issues of privacy were the most important item to all interview participants in terms of the design of the gay – friendly retirement community. For example, consider this perspective regarding issues of privacy:

It is critical that retirement communities consider issues of privacy for all members of the community. Therefore, the units themselves will have to incorporate all of the features that a “regular” condominium would include. The layouts could start with a 600 square foot (Sq. Ft.) bachelor apartment with private sleeping area, small kitchen, living area with patio access and bathroom; a 900 Sq. Ft. one bedroom with kitchen, dining/living with patio access and bathroom; and a 1200 Sq. Ft. two bedroom with kitchen, dining room, living room with patio access and two bathrooms. All of the units would also accommodate hook-ups for a washer and dryer. All of the units would have the option of having a walk in shower instead of a bathtub. The showers are ideal for persons in wheelchairs. The variety in terms of square footages would give the potential occupant a choice in terms of desired unit, because the size of the unit will depend on what stage they are at in their lives. If one partner should pass on, at least the surviving spouse would have the opportunity to downsize into a smaller unit if preferred or necessary.

Approximately half of the participants were interested in having the retirement community geared to income, so that we are not creating a retirement community exclusively for the rich. Most retirement communities are not geared to income, they are generally privately owned and operated and for seniors who are able to pay for their own care, as previously mentioned in Chapter 2. However, it was clear that the majority of gay men in my research wanted the retirement community to be inclusive to all members of the community. For example, consider these comments:



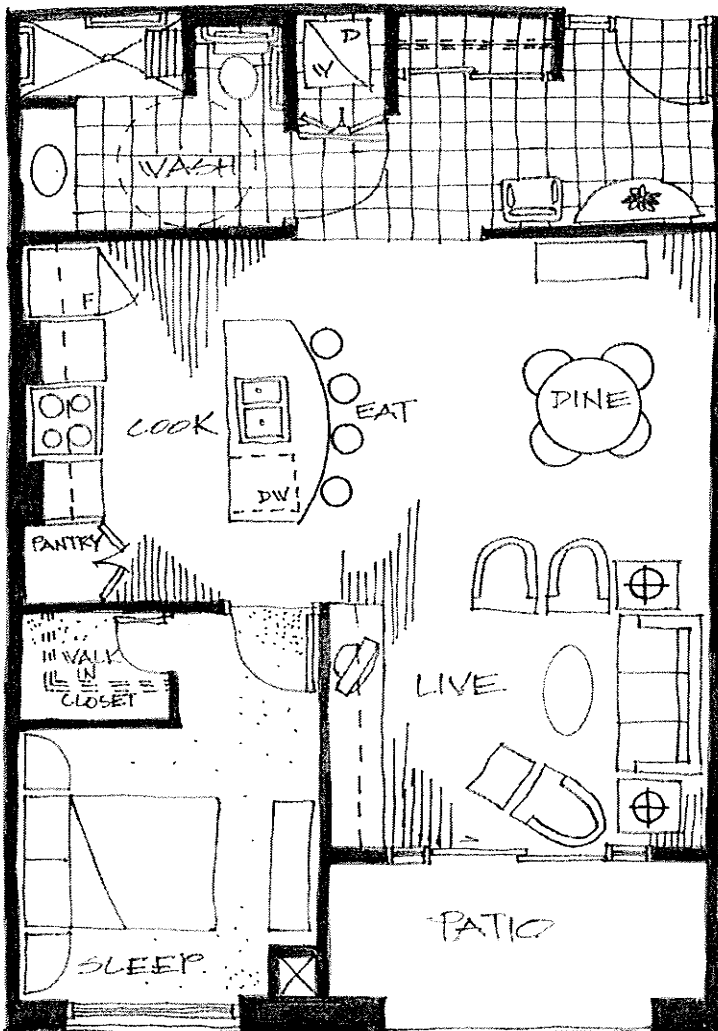
The retirement community should definitely be geared to income, but proof of income levels should be mandatory (Thomas, 68 yrs).

In its own way the gay community has always been far more egalitarian and democratic than other groups...different layers would coexist a lot more easily in a gay positive environment (Harold, 62 yrs).

Yes and no...if you look at all the other retirement homes they strike a rate and that's it, you either pay or you don't (Enzo, 62 yrs).

Figure 18

Example of a typical floor plan of a one - bedroom unit with optional shower



A - EXAMPLE OF A 1-BEDROOM SUITE  
300 SQ. FT. N.T.S.

Interestingly pets play an important role in many of these peoples' lives and therefore it was critical that the building allow for pets. I remember walking into Ronald's apartment to conduct my interview and I remember this playful kitten named Alex darting through the apartment. Ronald had recently adopted the kitten and it was obvious that he was very attached to him. He would talk to Alex as if there was another person in the room. Apparently, Ronald gets the occasional visitor, but the companionship of the kitten had brought him great pleasure. Prior to Alex, Ronald used to spend a lot of time on his computer trying to maintain contact with his friends in the outside world. Even though this is a programming aspect to the retirement community, it is still critical to mention. There are no gay retirement communities that exist in Canada as of 2004.

I also wanted to find out what my "clients" wanted in terms of their private units. As mentioned previously, all of the interviewees wanted their own independence and privacy, so a kitchen was a must. They wanted to be able to provide their own breakfast and lunch and make an event out of dinner. Dinner is when they wanted to go to the common dining room to eat, drink and socialize. It was critical that the overall design of the retirement community have a residential feel, anything institutional was undesirable. They wanted their private units to feel like a residential condominium. They wanted the finishes to have a residential feel to them such as ceramic tiles in the entrance and bathroom, hardwood flooring in the living room and carpet in the bedroom. A washroom with grab bars was also seen as desirable, or having the supports within the wall so that they could be installed when required. They also wanted access to a small private patio.

Many of the participants enjoyed gardening and being able to sit on the patio and get fresh air was viewed as an important design feature. In terms of electrical devices, all switches should be installed at 36" above finished floor (AFF) and electrical duplex outlets installed at 24" AFF so that the participants do not have to bend over to plug in electrical appliances. I asked the question: "What interior design elements would be important to you and why?" Consider these comments from my participants:

Big windows for sun and light and a big enough space to accommodate a reasonable stereo and TV with sounds around system, therefore, sound proofing will be important so we don't disturb other residents (Edward, 62 yrs).

Wall space would also be important for art (Albert, 49 yrs).

We would just get a one bedroom with a kitchen (Scott, 57 yrs).

A one bedroom and of course all on one level...a kitchen would be important because as long as I am able to I would like to cook my own meals. A small balcony...is important (Darryl, 65 yrs).

I would like to have a two bedroom with a cooking facility (Benjamin, 69 yrs).

A separate sitting area or living room...bedroom, bathroom...kitchen (Walter, 55 yrs).

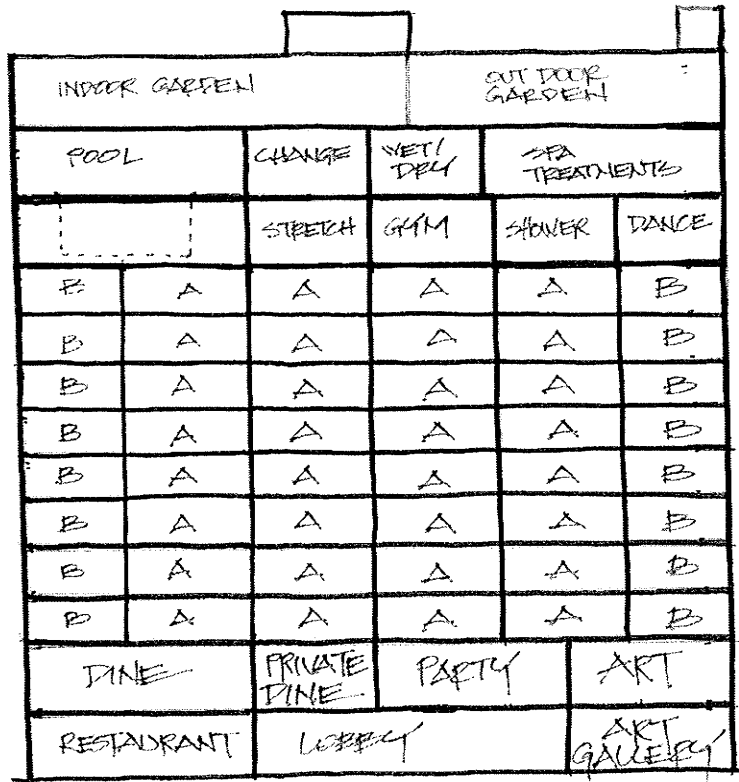
I would want two bedrooms, bathroom...living room, dining room and a kitchen (Robert, 51 yrs).

If the retirement community was built on a large vacant piece of land down near The Distillery (a creative, trendy artistic community with cafes, restaurants, furniture stores and art galleries) district in Toronto, then the participants wanted the retirement community to be designed as an adult condominium type building. The building itself would be reminiscent of a hotel, with comfortable and elegant sofas and sitting areas in the lobby with a grand piano and gas fireplace as a focal point. The seating could be arranged to allow for interaction and socialization. The ground floor would also have a

24-hour concierge, mail room and an internet cafe. There would also be leased space to allow for a rotating art gallery that would feature the works of “struggling” gay artists as well as a restaurant. This would be beneficial in terms of generating revenue for the retirement community. The restaurant would also give the retirement community the option to order meals. The second floor could accommodate shared services such as a main dining room, private party room with links to a kitchen servery for catered events and two private dining rooms that each seat 10 comfortably; for special occasions that would have to be reserved a few weeks in advance. This floor would also allow for a party room, as well as a studio space for painting, drawing and sculpting, a library; featuring gay themed books and a movie room with wide screen television and comfortable chairs and a multi - purpose room. The third to tenth floor would accommodate the private retirement residences. Each of these floors would have a guest - suite available for out of town visitors. The eleventh floor would accommodate a stretch room for exercises, gym with weight machine, treadmill and cross – trainer machines, change room and showers, dance room and lounge. The twelve floor would house an indoor swimming pool and whirlpool with terrace and sauna, spa treatments and lounge with terrace. The roof - top would have an indoor formal garden with pond and seating and outdoor garden. I expand on the model further in Chapter Four.

Figure 19

Conceptual section of gay retirement community



SECTION

N.T.S.

My research led me to inquire whether or not the location of the facility would matter. Responses to interview questions suggest that location of the retirement community was the most important factor for gay men. Many interviewees were concerned in that they did not want the retirement community to be isolated or cut off from the activities of the city. Approximately 75 percent of the respondents wanted the retirement community to have some sort of connection to the 519 Community Centre in Toronto's gay village. This was desired because as mentioned earlier, many gay people

do not have “traditional” families to rely on as they age, and they wanted to maintain a connection to the gay community. However, many Canadian cities do not have a gay community centre and therefore the retirement community itself will have to incorporate some sort of venue within it to draw the community to it. Most of the respondents were retired professionals and some wanted the opportunity to continue working in the community on a part - time capacity. Approximately 85 percent of the respondents are actively involved in the arts community in Toronto and many wanted the facility to be located in an area, ideally close to public transit, so that they could still attend theatre, opera and concerts, ideally downtown. Many of the participants in my research did not live in the gay ghetto and therefore about 50 percent of them were interested in living in areas that are accepting of gays, such as Toronto’s new gay friendly west village which includes the following areas, The Annex, Davenport and Bloor West Village. Electronic reference retrieved by Toronto Digital Queeries. (2003, September 1). Retrieved October 25, 2003, from [http://digitalqueeries.905host.net/files/edarchive2003\\_07.htm](http://digitalqueeries.905host.net/files/edarchive2003_07.htm) database. These areas are good examples of where space is shared and gays, lesbians and society at large live in a more gentrified environment that is protected from homophobia. If gay retirement communities were set up in other Canadian cities, they would most likely be located in more trendy areas such as Ottawa’s Glebe, Winnipeg’s Osborne Village, Edmonton’s Strathcona or Vancouver’s Yaletown districts.

### Summary

This chapter has looked at what the notion of home means to gay men. As previously mentioned, the idea of home fulfills different needs for different people. Just as we all experience life differently, we experience the home in another way and there is no correct or wrong way. The perception of home has a lot to do with our upbringings, how we were raised. We learn from our parents and we try to emulate our homes similar to the ones most familiar to us, our parents, or we will try and develop our own unique expression of what home means for “me.”

Some people are obsessed with their homes and try and create showcases, while others put minimal energy into them. Some have every object perfectly placed while others could not care less where an ornament sits. I find that even with the house that my partner and I share that it is never static it is always evolving and growing just as we are growing. This became true of all of the participants that I interviewed. Their homes were an expression of who they were and where they fit into the scheme of things. Did I conclude with gay men perceiving the notion of home differently than heterosexuals? No, I believe that the notion of home for gay people is very similar to heterosexuals. Albeit, due to discrimination, gay people are most likely to have better designed/decorated homes than heterosexuals' homes; because gays are marginalized, it is only in the safety of home where we can truly let our guard down and be gay. Therefore gay men create sanctuaries where they can retreat and unwind.

This chapter also touched upon the concept of queer space. This was necessary to give a theoretical perspective to the hardships that gay men have experienced. To help the reader understand: What is queer space? Is it changing? Where is it going? It

reaffirmed the answer to the question: “Are gay men able to be themselves in public spaces or do they feel most comfortable in the sphere of private spaces such as home?” In discussing queer space I also explored whether or not queer space is disappearing as gay men gain equality. Finally this chapter discussed what design elements are required for a gay retirement community. More specifically what gay men desire in terms of the privacy of their homes. It looked at some common themes from my research interviews in defining what design elements are necessary for a gay friendly retirement community. The next chapter examines what other ethnic minority groups have done in terms of providing housing for their elderly. More specifically, it examines the overall philosophy of the care communities of Villa Charities, Baycrest and the Yee Hong Centre and the types of amenities and services that these facilities provide to their elders. Chapter 4 further discusses the model for a gay retirement community and finally establishes some guidelines as to what is required to design a successful gay “friendly” retirement community.



## Chapter 4

### **If we build it will they come?**

#### **Introduction**

Chapter Three outlined the notion of home, queer space and discussed what gay men wanted in terms of their own private units within the gay - friendly retirement facility. As previously mentioned, the men in my research wanted to live in a retirement community that would also be welcoming to “gay - friendly” heterosexuals. Issues of privacy were extremely important to the participants as well as issues of independence. As a result, that is why the participants insist on having their own units. This final chapter examines what the Italian, Jewish and Chinese communities have done in terms of providing housing for their elderly. As mentioned earlier, my case studies refer to Baycrest, Villa Charities and the Yee Hong Centre. I shall explore the overall philosophy and design features that these retirement communities provided for their residents. This was helpful, because it gave me an insight in terms of design elements that I believed were critical components to the success of their facilities. I noticed a shared strong sense of community at each of these facilities during my site visits. This becomes one of the most important features that are critical to the success of a retirement villages that are culturally “sensitive.” These site visits also helped me to determine what design features would be important to incorporate into a gay retirement community.

This chapter also discusses the wants and needs of my research participants, and it is their voices that I want to share. My interviews were instrumental in terms of helping

me to decide which design features would be critical for a successful gay retirement community. Finally, this chapter provides guidelines that can be used by developers, architects and interior designers to help design successful retirement communities for gay men.

### **My exploration**

Last summer I visited several retirement communities in the greater Toronto area to try and get an understanding of what other culturally diverse groups had done in terms of providing communities for their elderly residents. The first on my list was Villa Charities, geared to the Italian community. I had heard many good things about the sense of community that Italians had established, and I wanted to experience it with my own senses. I was very impressed with the overall concept and realized the cultural importance of why the facility was established and how it continues to serve the Italian community.

A vast majority of the Italians that arrived in Canada in the 1950s were from Southern Italy, an area that was devastated after World War II. They were unable to speak the English language and their customs and food were important signifiers of who they were as a people. They had a dream in the 1950s to build Villa Colombo, and the dream became a reality in 1971 with the establishment of Villa Charities. Villa Colombo home for the aged opened in 1975. The interior design of the residence reflects Mediterranean culture with interior courtyard complete with a central fountain, café and

large arch shaped windows. The roof is also terra cotta, which adds to the Mediterranean ambience. The facility itself is woven into the Italian community through the community centre. Columbus Centre is situated on approximately 10 acres of parkland and provides a wide array of social, cultural and recreational services. Columbus Centre acts as a hub for the facility. Within it there is a fitness centre, art gallery, banquet hall, library and administrative offices. The physical space of the site includes, Villa Colombo home for the aged and two retirement communities Caboto Terrace and Casa Del Zotto. All of the facilities are under the umbrella of Villa Charities. All of the facilities still continue to serve the Italian community almost three decades later. For example, consider this comment:

Villa Colombo is a place to show who we are. There was a need for this community. There are issues of language, culture and food. Food is an important aspect of Italian culture. It's a birth of a new generation of Italian Canadians and its being comfortable with who and what you are. People feel comfortable with their own kind" (Ariemma, 1996).

The mission statement of Villa Colombo is: "To be the leader in providing the highest quality culturally sensitive services in long - term care for our community." Today, the facility remains unique in the care it provides to its residents and the community at large.

Caboto Terrace was built in 1984 and Casa Del Zotto opened its doors in 1991. These two modern high - rise retirement apartments are located in the parklands of the Villa Campus and provide comfortable and affordable housing to over 600 people. Both seniors and individuals with developmental disabilities are given the opportunity to live communally and independently. Both buildings provide an apartment style design, which includes a kitchen, combined living and dining room, bedroom and barrier free

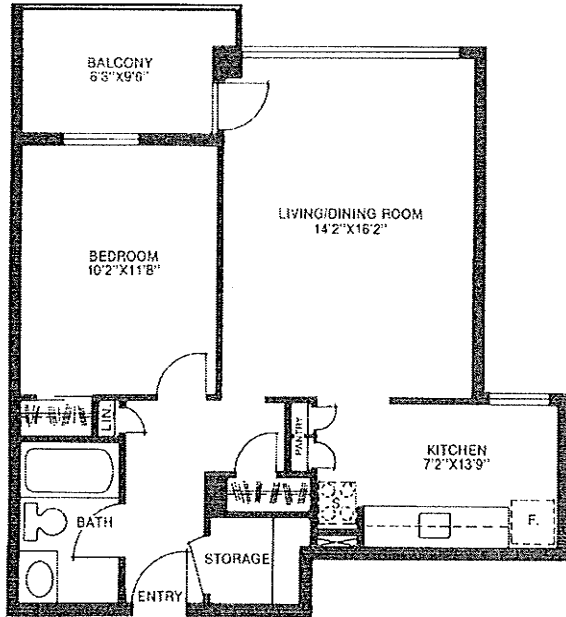
washroom. The building itself has a lounge, library, T.V. room and a games room, laundry room, parking and children's daycare on the ground floor primarily used for staff of Villa Charities. Casa Del Zotto also has a roof top garden for its residences. The buildings themselves are within walking distance to the Columbus Centre, St. Charles Roman Catholic Church, medical offices and pharmacy. It is also conveniently located near Yorkdale Shopping Centre, the Lawrence West Subway station and Northwestern General Hospital.

Caboto Terrace and Casa Del Zotto are by no means luxurious retirement communities. However, they definitely serve a purpose in allowing people the opportunity to age with dignity and respect. Caboto Terrace is beginning to show its age, however, the building itself is well maintained. Caboto Terrace offers three styles of one bedroom units and Casa Del Zotto provide one and two bedroom apartments. The suite layouts are not elaborate, yet they give the occupants privacy. What makes the retirement component of the facilities unique is the location. Villa Colombo, a facility that offers more levels of care if required, is located on the same site. The community centre, Columbus Centre is within walking distance to the retirement facility and they offer an array of activities that allow for interaction to occur. The residents of the retirement communities are able to enjoy a quality of life and yet maintain their independence.

It is obvious that Villa Colombo continues to serve a niche in greater Toronto. As a matter of fact, the Italian community is in the process of raising funds to build an Italian retirement community in Woodbridge, Ontario. Woodbridge is a community in North West Toronto and is predominately made up of younger Italian Canadian families. I have also provided floor plans of both buildings and a site plan of Villa Charities.

Figure 20

Typical Floor Plan for Caboto Terrace

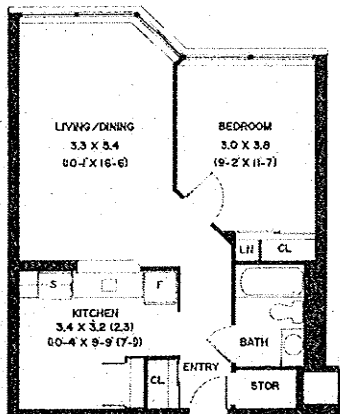


**SUITE 1B - 637 SQ.FT.**

Figure 21

Typical Floor Plan for Casa Del Zotto

MODELS

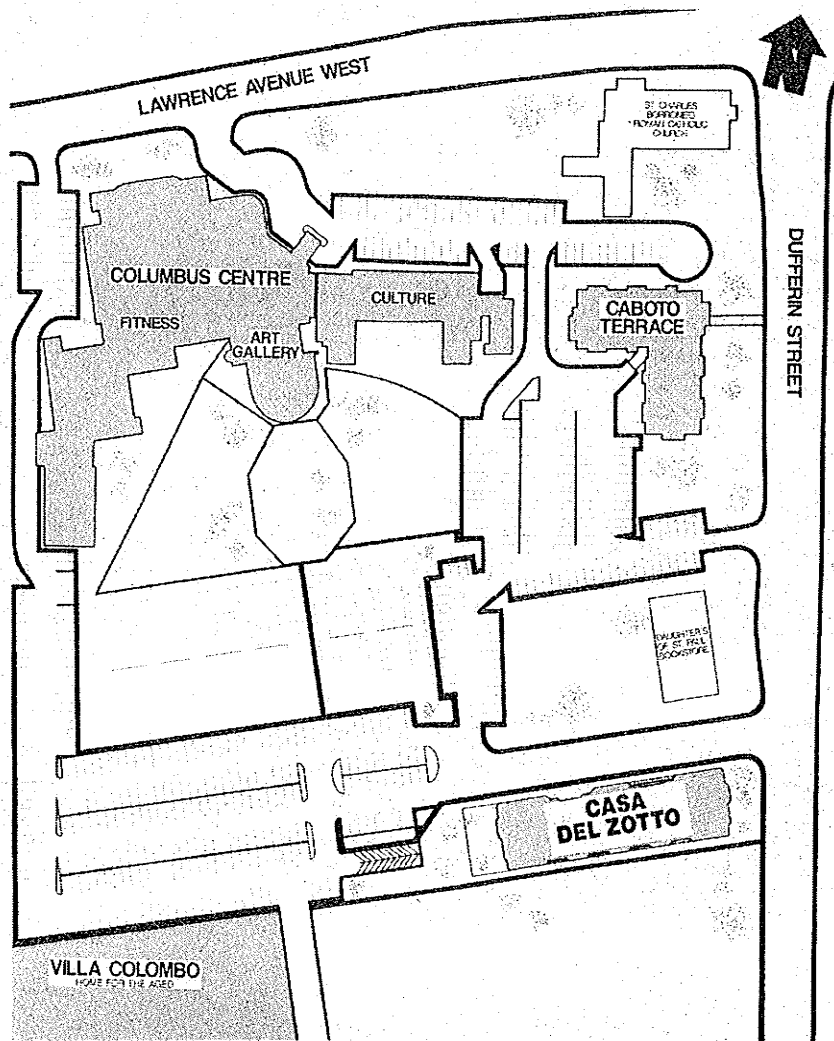


ONE BEDROOM 54.2 Sq. M. (583.4 Sq. Ft.)

Figure 22

Site Plan

SITE PLAN



The mission statement of Baycrest is to:

Enrich the quality of life of the elderly. This is accomplished by guided values and principles of Judaism, our mission is achieved by: Addressing the diverse needs of an aging population...Providing comprehensive and coordinated services through the development of relationships with a range of organizations and advancing knowledge of aging in cooperation with the University of Toronto and other academic centres (Baycrest, 2004).

The Baycrest Centre for Geriatric Care has been providing care for its elderly in Toronto for the last eighty - six years. They began in downtown Toronto in 1918 as the Toronto Jewish Old Folks Home. In 1954 they opened the Jewish Home for the Aged on Bathurst Street in Toronto and in 1959 the first day care program for the elderly was established. In 1968 Baycrest built a new Jewish Home for the Aged and in 1976 a seniors' apartment, Baycrest Terrace and community centre, the Wagman Centre was opened. In 1986 a new Baycrest Hospital was opened that has been providing expert geriatric care. In 1989 the Rotman Research Institute was established and brought top scientists to Baycrest. Finally, the Apotex Centre, Jewish Home for the Aged and The Louis and Leah Posluns Centre for Stroke and Cognition was opened in 2000.

The Apotex Centre, Jewish Home for the Aged and The Louis and Leah Posluns Centre for Stroke and Cognition, is a 472 - bed, long - term care facility, which provides a range of residential and specialized programs. The small, home - like settings provide flexible schedules for programs, meals and personal care, based on each resident's needs and preferences. Care is provided within the context of orthodox Jewish traditions. Each floor has 79 private rooms divided into six home units of 13 or 14 rooms. Two rooms per floor are available for shared accommodation and each home unit includes a living room,

bedrooms, an activity area, a kitchenette, a dining room, children's play area, and a bath room. There is also a 24-hour nursing care. Residents are grouped on home units according to their physical and cognitive abilities and their special needs. The design of the space is easily accessible for people who are wheelchair bound. The facilities offer a multi - disciplinary care approach by a team of professionals who include nurses, social workers, doctors, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, psychologists, and psychiatrists. There are also many volunteers who help and there is an on - site medical clinics' access to Baycrest Hospital's Concentrated Care Unit (CCU) and Step Down Unit (SDU), which provide acute care, special programs and services for Holocaust survivors and their families. This is coordinated by the Holocaust Survivors' Outreach Committee pastoral and cultural programs and includes two rabbis. On staff Family Advisory Council and family groups on each floor meet regularly to discuss concerns and contribute ideas regarding home programs and care residents. Council meets monthly and a resident representative is available to address client and family concerns.

In terms of eligibility the following criteria have to be met. It is geared for adults aged 65 and older who can no longer cope with the daily demands of independent living due to physical or cognitive impairment and for those seeking an orthodox Jewish environment.

The environment that I was most interested in was Baycrest Terrace. Baycrest Terrace is the Jewish retirement complex that is located on the Baycrest site. Baycrest Terrace is an eleven storey building that provides seniors with the privacy of independent apartment living, along with supportive services if needed. The retirement facility



provides residents with easy access to Baycrest's wide range of services, including the specialized geriatric programs of Baycrest Hospital. The Terrace also operates within the orthodox Jewish tradition.

Baycrest Terrace offers the following services to its residents. It has 159 bachelor suites, 22 one - bedroom suites and 21 one - bedroom couples' suites. Each unit features a fully equipped kitchen, bathroom with safety features such as grab bars, individual temperature controls, emergency buttons to summon medical assistance and weekly housekeeping services. There are also laundry facilities on each floor. In terms of food, one hot kosher meal is served daily in the central dining room.

The private units themselves are basic in terms of design. However, they are bright and clean. The ranges have controls at the front of the stove to prevent residents from burning themselves. They are also removing all of the bathroom tubs and installing easy accessible showers. As with Villa Charities retirement communities, Baycrest Terrace was beginning to show the attributes of its 1970s architecture, however, it is well maintained. It allows residents to age with "like - minded" individuals and to age with dignity.

There is also the on - site Health Centre, with registered nurse on duty 24 hours a day. Physicians are also available five days per week and may be seen by appointment. There are also social workers available for counseling and crisis intervention as needed. Therapeutic recreation provides a range of outings and services and there is access to the specialized out - patient, intensive care and clinic services of Baycrest Hospital. Baycrest Terrace residents also have free membership in the Wagman Centre, a community centre

for older adults on the Baycrest site. They provide a wide range of recreational, leisure, cultural programs, social contacts as well as educational opportunities and health promotion. Other amenities include a convenience store, dry cleaning and alterations depot, beauty and barber shop, banking service, arts and crafts and a shuttle bus service to Baycrest facilities, as well as, access to the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) and Community Bus Service. There are also religious and cultural services which include an on - site synagogue, for reform and orthodox and a rabbi on Baycrest staff, chaplains and centre - wide Kosher meals. Baycrest Terrace is geared to adults aged 70 and older and for those seeking a Jewish environment. I have provided typical floor plans of Baycrest Terrace suites.

Figure 23

## Typical Bachelor Floor Plan

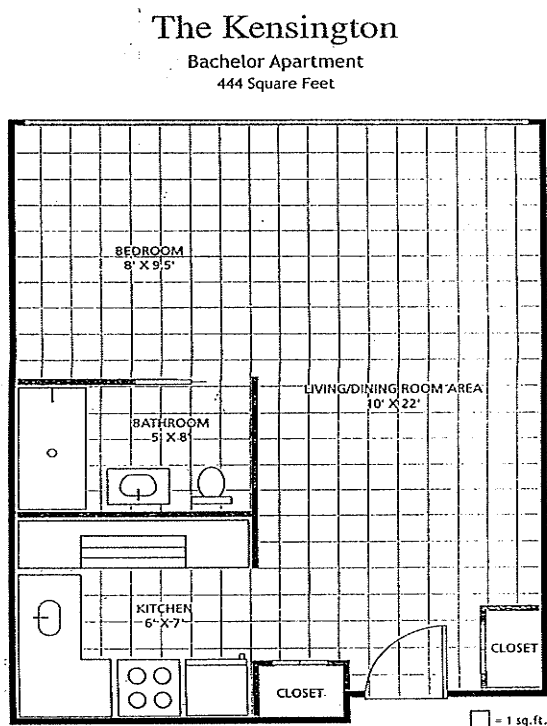
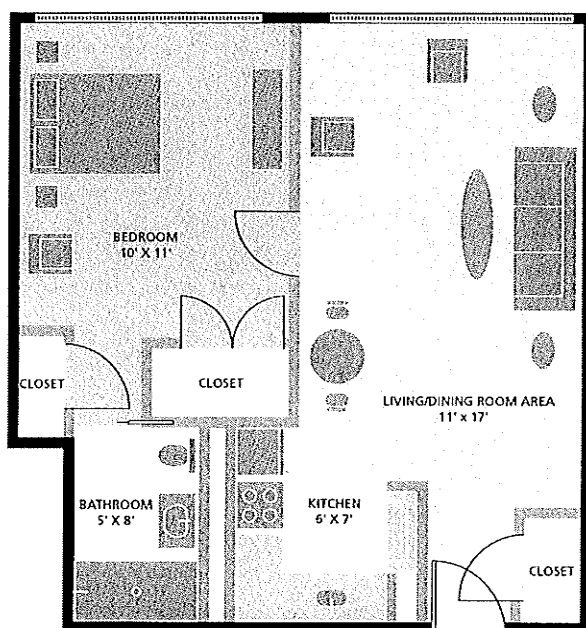


Figure 24

## Typical One Bedroom Floor Plan

## The Baldwin

One Bedroom  
574 Square Feet



The dream of respect and dignity for Chinese elders began more than 20 years ago when a young doctor witnessed the emotional suffering of Chinese seniors in English-speaking nursing homes in Toronto. Like the Italian and the Jewish communities, the elderly Chinese were living in unfamiliar surroundings and unable to express their concerns. They were feeling isolated in their final years and these seniors were withering away.

The mission of Yee Hong Centre is committed to being a centre of excellence that provides vision and leadership.

With strong roots in the Chinese community and our respect for seniors, we strive to develop quality services and facilitate community building to enable seniors of different backgrounds and needs to live their lives to the fullest and in the healthiest, most independent and dignified way (Yee Hong, 2004).

In 1987 the Yee Hong Centre began to take shape. With Dr. Wong as the driving force, a group of dedicated volunteers vowed to create an environment where seniors could be cared for with respect and dignity. It took them seven years of hard work to raise funds and to convince the Ontario government that seniors should receive culturally and linguistically appropriate services. In 1994, Yee Hong Centre for Geriatric Care officially opened and established its first caring Chinese community. The centre offers a continuum level of care where dependent and independent seniors alike can rely on a comprehensive range of culturally appropriate services.

Under the leadership of Dr. Wong, this core group of mostly immigrants from Hong Kong proved to be a formidable force in the field of geriatric care. In less than a decade, Yee Hong has built a number of caring communities and has built a reputation as a leader in the field of geriatric care, not only in Canada, but around the world. Hyped as an ideal model, Yee Hong has been visited and studied by over 500 delegations. These people are coming from as far away as China and other Asian countries. Yee Hong has been praised for two years in a row, by the Canadian Council on Health Services Accreditation as a provider of “stellar care.”

Over the years, Yee Hong has shared its experience or know how with delegations from Vancouver, Calgary and Ottawa as well as from major cities in China. In Hong Kong, Dr. Sir Harry Fang is currently building a replica of the Yee Hong model in Shenzhen. Board executives and administrators from St. James Settlement as well as those from the Haven of Hope Hospital have also visited Yee Hong and are using that model as basis for their operations.

Yee Hong intends to spread its model of care and share its best practices with senior care providers all over the world. In its most comprehensive and largest of three centres being built in the Greater Toronto Area, Yee Hong is planning a Training and Education Centre that will be equipped with a state of the art facility. The facility will include classrooms, mock resident rooms and large training areas. The Centre will offer future delegations complete training programs based on the Yee Hong model. The aim is to extend the Yee Hong experience to the other global communities where respect for seniors is a cultural tradition and custom.

Yee Hong believes in building caring communities where seniors can age in place. Similarly, the vision for gay retirement communities should be a model that fosters affordable housing and provides appropriate support, health and social services; which will enable gay seniors to live independently in their retirement homes for as long as possible.

Yee Hong Aw Chan Kam Chee Evergreen Manor in Scarborough, an area in east Toronto, was completed in 1993. It was granted the first Award of Excellence in 1997 by the Ontario Non - Profit Housing Association for its outstanding achievement in building

a caring community where seniors can continue to live an active lifestyle and are supported with personal support and homemaking services when circumstances require.

There are 130 units of seniors apartments with 112 one - bedroom units and 18 two - bedroom units. One - bedroom units range from 528 square feet (Sq. Ft.) to 581 Sq. Ft. while two - bedroom units range from 733 Sq. Ft. to 776 Sq. Ft. 26 units of three - bedroom townhouses of 1310 Sq. Ft. each. Each unit features a fully equipped kitchen, living, dining room, bedroom and bathroom. The apartment building has central heating and cooling and the townhouses have their own gas furnace in the basement, they are also air - conditioned. There are coin operated laundry facilities on each floor of the apartment building. The townhouses have plumbing and electrical hook - ups for a washing machine and dryer, to be provided by the tenant. Safety devices in the apartment include a non - motion detector in the living room, giving alarm to the management office if no motion is detected in the suite within a fifteen - hour period. There are also two emergency pull stations, one in the bedroom and the other in the washroom. There is a main lounge and activity room on the ground floor of the apartment building and on the second and fifth floor there is a sitting lounge, library and table - tennis room. The entire building is wheelchair accessible and there are twelve modified suites in the building to accommodate people who are wheelchair bound. There is also a supportive home program in place for people who require personal care, light housekeeping, meals on wheels and laundry.

Rent subsidies are also available which makes the facility affordable to many people. A total of 122 apartment units and 22 townhouse units are offered to people who

meet the requirement for Rent - Geared - to - Income assistance. For those successful applicants, thirty percent of their gross household income will be used for calculation of the subsidized rent. A total of eight apartment units and four townhouse units are designated as market rent units. The City of Toronto has established income ceiling levels; currently \$37,640 for an apartment unit and \$43,800 for townhouse units. Applicants whose total annual household income has exceeded the upper limit may apply for market rental units that currently cost \$963 for two - bedroom apartment unit and \$1,117 for three - bedroom townhouse unit. Potential applicants should be permanent, legal residents of Canada including Canadian citizens and landed immigrants of at least 59 years of age.

Figure 25

Model of Site Plan of the facility

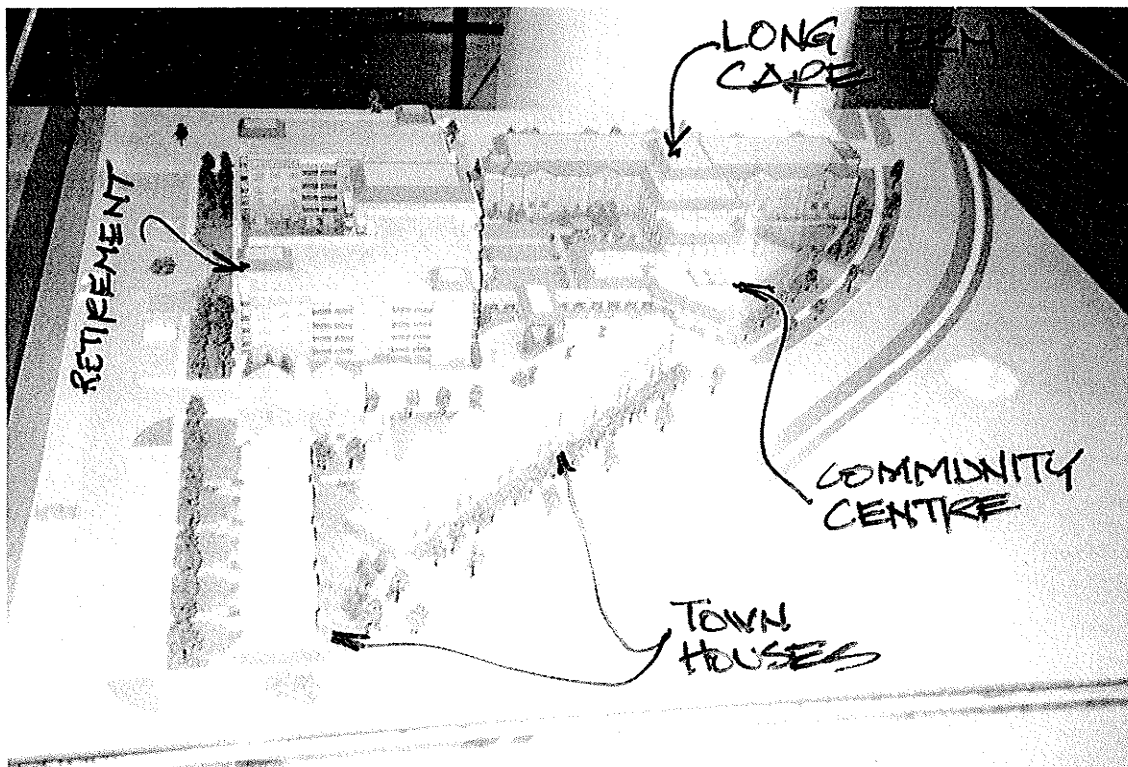


Figure 26

## Entrance to Yee Hong Community Centre



The Yee Hong centre acted as a magnet to pull the inhabitants of the retirement communities, the apartment building and townhouses to it, as well as the residents of the long – term care facility. The community centre provided a wide array of social programs and services similar to Columbus Centre and the Wagman Centre. It is a place where people gather to view art displays, partake in arts and crafts, Tai Chi or tea gatherings. It is where a major part of socialization takes place between people of the retirement community and the Chinese community in general.

The Italian, Jewish and Chinese communities built these facilities to initially protect their elders from discrimination, so that they could age with dignity and respect. Without these facilities, their elders may have experienced a forced assimilation into the Canadian landscape, and consequently felt a sense of defeat. These communities provide a safe and caring environment where people can grow older with others of similar



interests. These communities provided “safe - havens” so that their elders were able to maintain their traditions and customs. However, these caring facilities also depend on their families and the community for social support. By being involved in community activities they remain a part of the cultural thread in Canadian society.

### **Designing for dignity**

When we are a part of the process our sense of cultural, individual and community worth can blossom – in our own, as well as others’ eyes. Places we have shaped ourselves, we feel responsible for. We value and guard them (Day & Parnell, 2003:12).

Elements of the retirement facilities for the cultural minority groups discussed can be incorporated into the design philosophy of planned gay retirement communities. This would allow for the creation of a caring, nurturing and supportive community where gay men can age with dignity and respect in a creative atmosphere that allows for interaction and social activities and yet is respectful of privacy issues. In this environment we can support each other and act as role models to younger cohorts of the community; the opportunity to show that gays are creative, successful, compassionate, caring, giving and supportive. A gay retirement community that could be used as a template for future models of care throughout Canada. We will build a retirement community that shows leadership and provides evidence that members of the gay community are “stable”,

productive and hopeful of the future. How can this be achieved? As mentioned previously, by examining what other culturally diverse groups have done in terms of providing a sense of community for their elderly.

*What is the planning process that interior designers should consider when designing gay retirement communities?* Interior designers have to begin creating retirement communities that are caring, nurturing and supportive for gay men. During my interviews the notion of retirement / hotel kept re - appearing. The model that was most desired was a hotel like setting where optional services are provided for a set fee. These may include meal service, housekeeping, laundry, recreational, and social programs provided on individual basis. During my interviews, I observed that my participants like “nice” things and that they were avid collectors of things whether it was art, objects or wines. Therefore, the private units should allow for ample wall space to hang and display objects. It is critical that the overall interior design of the retirement community be warm, comfortable and inviting. All of my participants homes were coordinated in terms of décor and therefore, it is critical that the colours, materials and finishes of the common amenities be current and yet, that they not date themselves within six months. (Please refer to image number three in the Appendix B, as this was the “look” that was most desired by all of the participants). This was the ambience that would work best in terms of a gathering place such as a lobby. An environment such as this would make gays feel comfortable, as the room itself is contemporary, yet it has a sense of formality about it through the orderly placement of furnishings. The chairs are large and comfortable, yet have a contemporary look to them. The arrangement of the furniture would allow gays the opportunity to socialize in larger groups or in smaller

clusters. The interior colours, finishes and materials should be warm and inviting and the palate rich and sophisticated; yet not too trendy that it will be outdated in the near future.

As mentioned previously, all of the retirement communities that I researched had a community centre which acted as a hub for them. However, this concept will not be possible for gay retirement communities in smaller cities that do not have the population to support it. Therefore, it would be important to have the retirement community act as a destination place.

There were many ideas expressed in terms of what sort of services the retirement community would offer that would attract people to it, for example, a restaurant, art gallery, internet café, bank, bookstore, florist, gourmet food store, gym, spa, drycleaner, drugstore and post office to name just a few. However, a common theme began to emerge in that approximately 75 percent of the participants mentioned this idea of a restaurant, which was followed by an art gallery. These two services were deemed most appropriate, because they would allow for interaction to take place between different age groups and they would also help to generate revenue for the retirement community.

Many of the participants liked the idea of having a restaurant incorporated into the main floor so that they could order food and have it delivered to their own suites, if desired. The restaurant would also allow participants the opportunity to socialize with the community at large. As mentioned previously, many participants really liked the idea of a rotating art gallery that would feature the works of “struggling” gay artists. They felt that this would be a great cause because it would allow these young artists the opportunity to gain exposure and at the same time allow for interaction with younger and

older cohorts. A small percentage of sales would be collected to help with the operational costs of the gallery. The gallery would benefit both artist and resident.

### **Design elements to consider**

According to *Design for Aging: An Architect's Guide*, Joe J. Jordon, a planning consultant and architect developed a comprehensive set of rules to help guide interior designers of facilities for aging:

- Increase opportunities for individual choice: giving the resident the widest possible choice in terms of being independent
- Minimize dependence and encourage independence: The overall design should allow the resident to be able to do for oneself
- Compensate for sensory and perceptive changes: As we age we begin to require a longer reaction time to senses such as smelling and hearing therefore, the interior design should make allowances for longer reaction times is most desired
- Recognize the probability of decreases in physical mobility: Walking, gripping, pushing and pulling will become more difficult, the design should accommodate for these changes
- Improve orientation and comprehension: The circulation and spatial organization should be simple and care and attention to finishes that have a lot of patterns should be avoided

- Encourage social interaction: The interior design should encourage interaction and socialization
- Stimulate participation: The environment should allow for interaction to occur
- Reduce conflict and distraction: Ensure that the layout of activities does not overlap and cause disruptions among residents
- Provide a safe environment: Ensure that the interior design allows the residents to age safely
- Make activities and services accessible: Location is critical to ensure that outside services are easily accessible
- Improve aging's public image: The design of the facility can help to diminish stereotypes and allow the residents to age with dignity
- Plan for growth and change: The aging population will continue to grow therefore it is critical that the overall design ensure that it is flexible to allow for changes to occur

Because gay retirement communities are non-existent in Canada I have had to look at the "macro" to "micro" perspective by establishing the activities that would occur within common areas and determine how many units are going to be provided for and the various sizes. Other tasks required, following that, are to determine what common areas are required and the types of amenities desired, for example, central dining, private dining and party room. Ancillary services such as housekeeping, nursing office, maintenance, management and social workers office have to be provided for as well, and

these services could be allocated in the lower level or basement of the retirement community. Having the programming in place is critical information for the interior designer to have so that the planning phase can begin. I will provide the appropriate programming necessary so that interior designers can plan gay retirement communities.

### **Guidelines for the private suites**

An individual's home allows that person to stay in touch with the person they were in the past...residents need to remain connected with others, but through windows, doorways, and porches that permit a choice of privacy (Leibrock, 2000:25)

Based on the participants' wants and needs, it became apparent that three sizes of private suites are necessary in order to provide choices to the residents. A gay couple may enter the retirement community together. However, one partner may require greater levels of care and need to be placed in long - term care. Having a choice in terms of suite sizes allows for the opportunity to downsize into a smaller unit.

- The 600 square foot (Sq. Ft.) bachelor suite would contain the following rooms: living area with access to outdoor patio, kitchen, separate sleeping area and bathroom and hook ups for a washer and dryer.
- The 900 Sq. Ft. one - bed room unit would have the following rooms: Combined living and dining room with outdoor patio access, kitchen, bedroom, bathroom and hook ups for a washer and dryer.

- The 1200 Sq. Ft. two - bed room would include: Living room with access to outdoor patio, dining room, kitchen, two bedrooms, two bathrooms and hook ups for a washer and dryer.

It is very important to have design of the apartment meet universal design details in terms of the private suites. All bathroom doors should open outward in case a resident should fall within the bathroom and jamb the door shut. Bathroom walls should be fitted with grab bars or at least have the necessary blocking in place for future installation. In two bedroom suites, it is a good idea to allow for a walk - in shower, in case one partner becomes wheelchair bound. Door sizes should be larger to allow for wheelchair access ideally 34 inch, (in) doors instead of 32 in doors should be specified, because this allows an additional 2 in for elbow room (Leibrock, 2000). An emergency call button should also be installed in the bathroom and bedroom. There should also be a room sensor installed in the living room which acts as a motion detector. If no movement is detected in the suite within a twelve hour time frame, then security is notified. All electrical outlets should be installed at 24" above finished floor (AFF) to allow for easy access. All lighting switches shall be installed at 36" AFF for ease of switching lights on and off. Each private suite should also have its own heating and cooling device to control room temperature. There should also ample wall space to allow for personalization of unit. Interior finishes should be warm and inviting for example, providing wood laminate flooring in the living room and wall to wall carpeting in bedrooms and non - slip ceramic tile in the bathroom. All backings on window coverings should have an off - white liner installed to ensure that the windows remain a consistent look from the exterior.

### **Guidelines for the building itself**

Based on the personal interviews it became apparent that the building itself would be a “U – shape” with a total of twelve floors and accommodate approximately 64 units.

Given that 20 percent of gay men are in relationships (Cahill et al, 2000), the building will allow for 16 two - bedroom units, 32 one - bedroom and 16 bachelor suites.

Approximately half of the ground floor will be reserved for commercial space that may contain an art gallery, internet café and a restaurant (as indicated) or medical practice staffed by gay healthcare experts, pharmacy, hair salon, dry cleaners, and gourmet food store.

The gay friendly retirement community would accommodate one meal per day in the common dining room; additional meals would be available on a “a la carte” basis. Weekly housekeeping would also be provided for and a fitness program would be offered to residents. Residents will also have access to the arts and crafts room where they could teach members of the retirement community; painting, ceramics and quilting.

The physical location of the gay - friendly retirement community is critical to the overall success of the facility. The building itself should be in an area that is accepting of gays. As previously mentioned; neighborhoods such as Toronto’s gay village, Bloor West Village or Distillery district, Ottawa’s Glebe, Winnipeg’s Osborne Village, Edmonton’s Strathcona, Calgary’s Kensington or Vancouver’s Yaletown neighborhoods are ideal locations. Access to public transit will also be a critical factor. Scheduled transportation to shopping, ballet, theatre and opera will be vital. As gays continue to age they may not have access to their cars and will have to rely on public transit more often to get around town. The retirement community should be within walking distance to a



bank, dry cleaners, grocery store, liquor store, medical offices, pharmacy and post office. If this is not possible then some of these amenities should be considered in the ground floor commercial space.

If the retirement community was located in Winnipeg then the scale of the retirement community would have to reflect the location. Winnipeg's gay population is much smaller than in a metropolis like Toronto. However, Osborne village would still be an ideal location to build a gay retirement community. As previously mentioned, gays like to live in areas that tend to be more upscale or in areas that are up - and - coming (Florida, 2003). Having lived in Osborne Village myself, I know that there are a lot of great amenities in the area that include a video store, two major drug stores, a post office, a grocery store, liquor store and many cafes and restaurants. Therefore, in terms of the commercial retail space on the main floor that generates revenue and acts as a "hub", an Art gallery, dry cleaners and upscale restaurant would suffice.

However, since my research focuses on gays in the greater Toronto area I will outline what the overall structure of the gay retirement community would entail. The ground floor would include, but not be limited to the following spaces: vestibule, entrance, 24 – hour concierge, mailroom, lobby with gas fireplace and grand piano, and an outdoor garden with fountain. Retail spaces would include a restaurant, art gallery and internet café. The auxiliary services would be located on the lower level or basement and would include physical examination room, general office, house keeping, maintenance and garbage and a recycling room. The lower level would accommodate underground parking with a car wash for residents. The second floor would include: kitchen, main dining room, terrace dining and two private dining rooms, party room with kitchenette,

studio, movie room and multi - purpose room. The third through tenth floor would accommodate the private residential suites and each floor would have a guest suite. The eleventh floor would house a stretching room, gym, dance room and lounge. The twelve floor would accommodate the swimming pool, whirlpool, wet and dry sauna, spa – treatments; facials, pedicures and manicures and lounge. The roof top would contain formal indoor gardens with fountain and an outdoor garden with seating. It would be critical to have at least five private suites totally wheelchair accessible with modified kitchens and bathroom. It is critical that the building itself be designed with issues of barrier free design in mind. The interior design would have to follow the local building codes and by – laws and all other applicable codes that govern health and safety regulations. I used data from the interviews to inspire the following ideations.

Figure 27

Conceptual plan of ground floor.

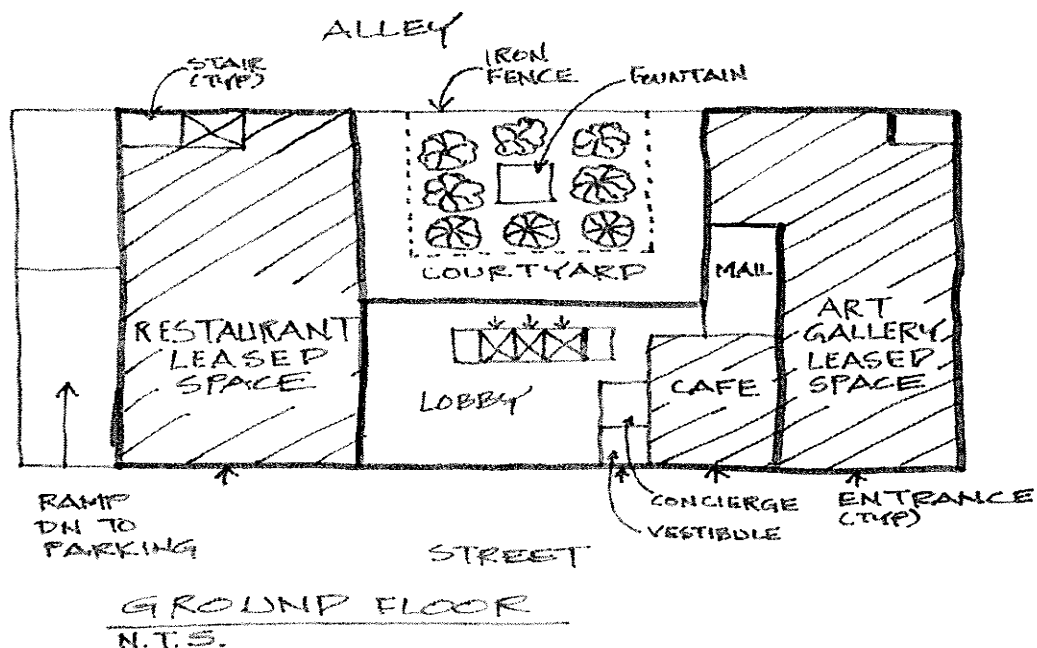


Figure 28

Conceptual plan of 2<sup>nd</sup> floor.

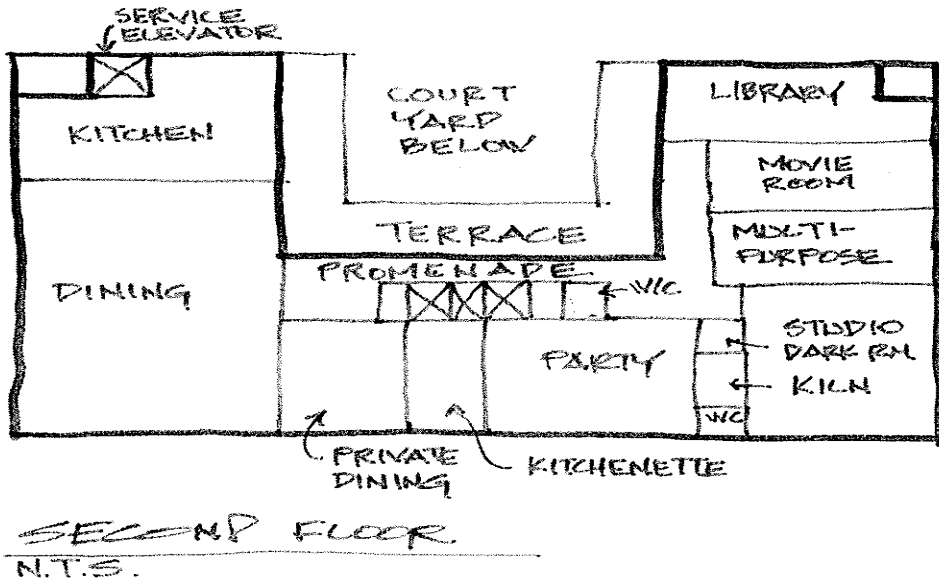


Figure 29

Conceptual plan of 3<sup>rd</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> floors.

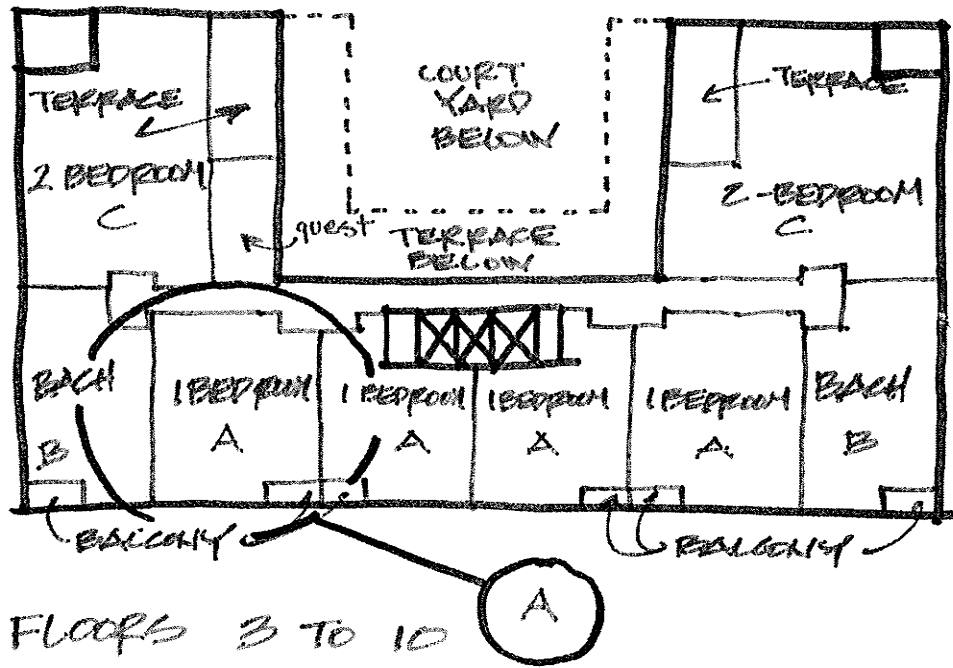
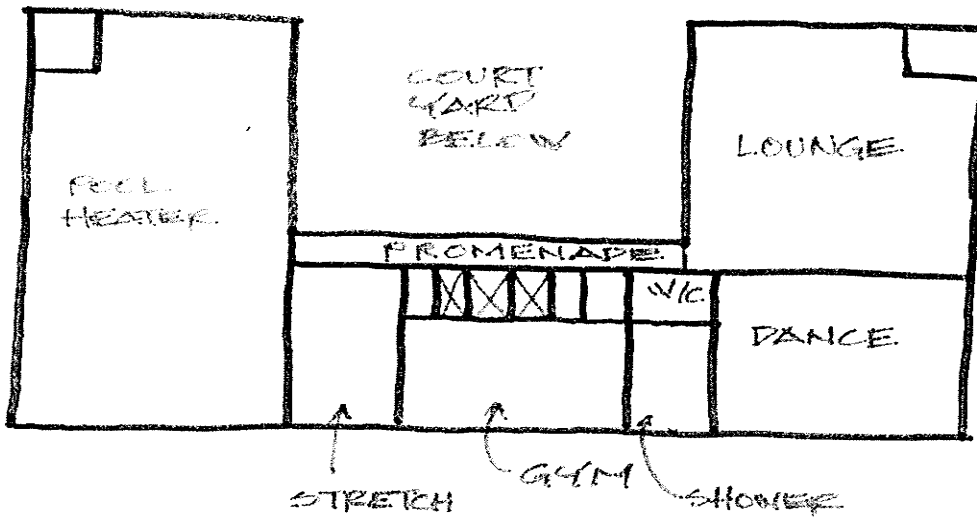


Figure 30

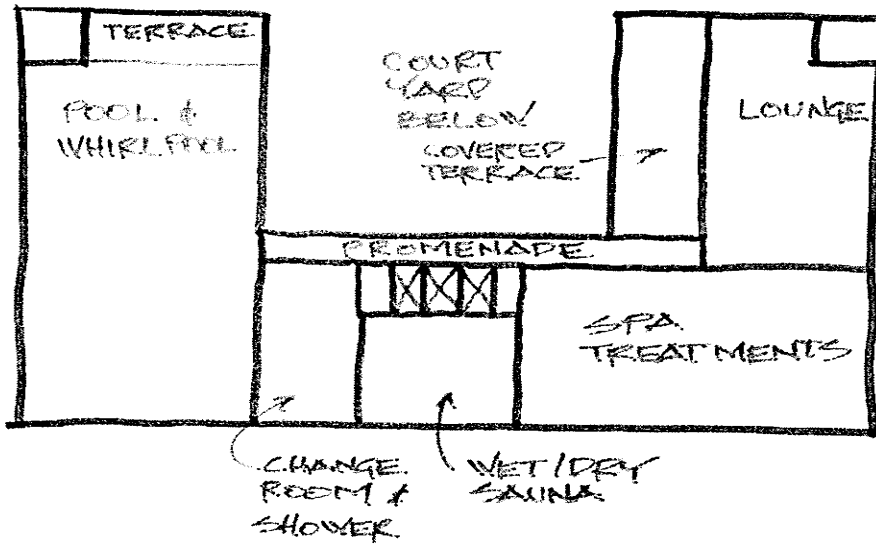
Conceptual plan of 11<sup>th</sup> floor.



11<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR.

Figure 31

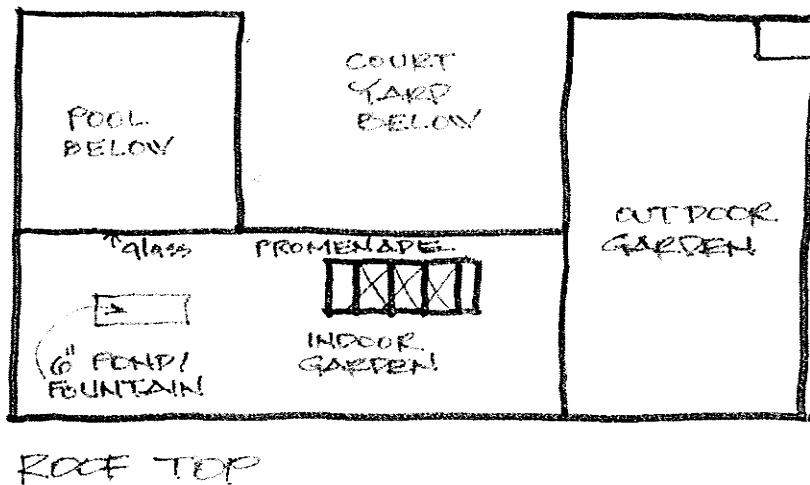
Conceptual plan of 12<sup>th</sup> floor



12<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR.

Figure 32

Conceptual plan of roof top



### Summary

This chapter has discussed some of the unique and special services that ethnic minority groups have undertaken in terms of providing housing and a sense of community for their elderly members who live in Toronto. There are many of these types of retirement communities in Toronto to choose from that include facilities for Japanese, Greek, Ukrainian communities and so forth. The three retirement communities that I studied were similar in that they were built as a result of cultural, language, religious and dietary requirements. These case studies were a critical and useful component to the conceptual development of a gay retirement community. Initially, I did not realize the similarities between these facilities and their mission to build a sense of community. I realized that

these retirement communities were anything but insular; that they were very much a part of the cultural diversity of Toronto. The residents of all the communities were indeed, very much a part of the community and by being with people with similar interests they were able to age with dignity. It became apparent that a gay retirement centre would serve a similar purpose. I am not trying to create an environment that isolates or cuts off gay men from the community. Quite the contrary, what the participants described to me was a community in which they wanted to be very much a part of. They did not want to grow old and be forgotten about. They all realized that they are aging and there is not a lot they can do about it, apart from plastic surgery. Just because they are aging and unable to take away the signs of time that were visible on their faces, they still believed that they could contribute and be a part of the social fabric. I couldn't agree more. Gay men have an important story to tell. They are like trees and give a community a sense of belonging and history. They help to ground our community and make it more stable. They give meaning to the past and present and they give hope to the future.

As an interior designer it was my job to capture these stories to ensure that their wants and desires were accurately recorded so that the gay community in Toronto could build a retirement community geared towards gay men. However, as previously discussed, this template could in theory be used in any Canadian city. The type of community that my interviewees envision is one that celebrates life. It will be a community that will allow gay men to be visible, throughout the community at large. These men want to be a part of the social fabric and want to continue to share their knowledge, whether that is through tutoring gay youth, gardening for younger gay couples or teaching someone to paint on a canvas. This community will allow our gay

elders to pass on their knowledge, their stories and their history. This is vital for the survival of the gay community so that we have a sense of our history. The environment will celebrate gay men, where they are at in this stage of their lives and give younger gays hope to the future. Most importantly, a gay friendly retirement community will ensure that gay men can age with dignity and respect.

## What can be done?

### Conclusion

This thesis dealt with subject matter that up until very recently was not even discussed. Gay men who are of retirement age today, at the time of this thesis, would not have imagined that they would have a need to age in a retirement community geared towards them. Up until very recently, I do not think that academics would have thought about the importance of building communities that are inclusive of the community at large, including gays.

Recently, the United Nations rated Canada fourth among the best countries in the world to live in. We followed Norway, Sweden and Australia. The Netherlands came in fifth. One of the reasons that Canada placed so high on the world stage is because of our astonishing human rights laws that protect people from overt forms of discrimination.

Retrieved July 28, 2004, from [http://www.pco-bcp.gc.ca/default.asp?Language=E&Page=pmarchive&Sub=Speeches&Doc=speeches19980122716\\_e.htm](http://www.pco-bcp.gc.ca/default.asp?Language=E&Page=pmarchive&Sub=Speeches&Doc=speeches19980122716_e.htm). Canadians are quite progressive in terms of their attitudes, and younger groups are generally much more accepting of gay lifestyle than older cohorts. Unfortunately, people who harbor homophobic views tend to be older people who are of retirement age or beyond. As a consequence, the gay minority group is often ostracized and marginalized. This intolerance has indicated a definite need for gay retirement communities in Canada in keeping with the proactive approach taken by three areas in the United States that offer gays the opportunity to age with dignity and respect.



Interior designers must adopt a critical perspective in order to understand the life experiences and social norms of this group in order to plan and design gay retirement communities that foster a sensitive environment where gay men can age with pride and esteem.

Further studies could include capturing the voices of gay men who are in their 30s and 40s. It would be interesting to discover what their fears are in terms of aging, and to specifically inquire about what they would desire in terms of retirement communities when they reach retirement age. Retirement communities in general will be much more pervasive as these groups age, because these facilities will be much more common and a part of our aging society. Younger cohorts' perspectives will change as they age as their needs and wants will change. It would be interesting to see if they believe that gay retirement communities would be necessary when they are of retirement age, or if the model will need to be explored again.

During my interviews, I asked the participants to tell me; "What differences do you see between a heterosexual retirement home and a retirement home geared for gay men?" I discovered that many of the interviewees felt that there would be a difference between gay and "straight" retirement communities. The most obvious difference is regarding visitors. As previously mentioned, many gays do not have children and thus they will most likely have friends, relatives - such as siblings, nieces, nephews or cousins visiting. It became apparent that the retirement community would need the community at large to be involved if this was going to be successful. Many of the participants talked about how when they were young they did not have role models, thus they wanted the opportunity to give back to the community. They wanted a retirement community that

would act as a hub to draw gay and gay – friendly heterosexuals to it, thus the model discussed in Chapter Four came into being.

As my research progressed, I realized that the scope of my investigation must be broadened to encompass issues other than retirement. Many of the couples that I interviewed realized that when they enter a gay retirement facility that they will not age at the same rate. One of the partners may require further levels of care as time progresses, which is why it is critical to ensure that the private units are designed to be barrier free. What would happen to the partner who requires more levels of care and where would he go? At the moment there are no gay long – term care facilities and as previously mentioned many gays who enter long – term care facilities tend to go back into the closet.

I reflect back to my case studies and noticed a pattern between Villa Charities, Baycrest Centre and Yee – Hong Centre in that the long – term care was separated in all three cases. I spoke with Lill Farb, who gave me a personal tour of the Baycrest site and she explained to me why they have retirement and long – term care separate. Apparently, people who live in retirement communities are generally healthy and able to take care of themselves. They require some care with cleaning, but they cook their own breakfast and lunch and are quite self - sufficient. People living in a retirement community do not like to see or be around others who require more levels of care. It makes them feel uneasy because they fear that they too could be there one day, and it frightens them and can cause anxiety and grief. Albeit, many of my research respondents said that they would feel safer knowing that as they age, and required more levels of care, that they would be more at ease knowing that they did not have to move and go into another level of care.

That long –term care should also somehow be provided for; that knowing it was there would allow them peace of mind.

Incorporating long – term care in to the retirement community may be the optimum solution in terms of ensuring that gay people can age in place, and have peace of mind. However, this solution would have its drawbacks as well, because retirement living is generally private and long – term care facilities are operated and owned by the provincial government. The overall design becomes a complicated procedure. Ensuring that the interior design of the retirement community feels residential and incorporating long – term care, where the guidelines become that much more rigorous and begins to feel somewhat institutional is a challenge. I discovered, during my series of interviews, that my research participants did not want to live in an institutional type of residence. They wanted the ceilings to be drywall with cornices and coffered ceilings and carpets to have borders and runners.

As previously mentioned, the design of long –term care is much more laborious because everything has to follow Ministry of Health guidelines. Because residents require more levels of care, they usually live in their bedrooms with a private washroom. The bedroom is usually furnished with special fabrics on the chair and the millwork is standard so that the design is consistent for all the units. There are usually drawers on gliders for ease of accessibility and plenty of storage for clothing and personal items. Many of the residents have their own televisions and there is a special area for it to sit within the millwork. The washroom is fitted with grab bars and the flooring is a non-slip finish. Usually the entrance into the private suite will have a “memory box” in which the resident can display their small personal possessions. These memory boxes become

critical for the residents, because when they are having a walk and if they happen to forget where their room is; when they see their familiar objects, they know they are home. Each floor plate also requires two residents' areas and a central nursing station. Each floor would also have a dining room and lounge. The materials and finishes also change in a long – term care facility. Generally, washrooms are linoleum and bedrooms are carpeted with an anti - microbial non – plush carpet for ease of cleaning. The furniture and finishes also have to meet strict fire codes, which is why fabrics are vinyl and chairs have krypton fabric, a material that meets fire safety codes. The entire floor plate would also have to be on an automatic sprinkler system, doors also have to meet fire safety codes and the overall design curtailing to local building codes.

Incorporating long – term care into the same building as the retirement community may have a direct impact on the ambience of the retirement community; largely due to local building codes. For example, my residents stressed the importance of having their own kitchens complete with stove, refrigerator, dishwasher and sinks. If a long - term care facility is incorporated into the same building, stoves in the private residential retirement communities will not be allowed; only microwaves are permitted. Therefore, further research should be conducted on how to successfully accommodate long – term care and retirement communities.

This research has provided a definite need for a gay retirement community and has also offered a set of guidelines that can be used to design retirement communities geared to gay men. However, it is obvious that further research is needed in terms of the long –term care aspect of aging. The model that I have provided for is geared for retirement living only. It is apparent that long – term care should also be planned for in

order to make a retirement community complete. Long – term care environments will ensure that gay men can continue to age with dignity and respect beyond retirement living.

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## Appendix A



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### RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of Study: Gay men desire retirement communities that are designed in a manner that allows them to age with dignity and respect.

Researcher: Raymond D. Dunning  
Master of Interior Design Candidate

Advisory Committee: Professor Susan Close, Advisor – Department of Interior Design  
(U of M)

Researcher's Address: 26 Northgate Drive  
Toronto, Ontario  
M3K 1K2

Email: ]

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you a basic idea of what the research is all about and what your participation will involve. If you require more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

#### Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the needs of elderly gay men, more specifically what happens to gay men when they enter into retirement communities? This study will be used to determine whether or not there is a need to have retirement communities that are geared to elderly gay men. If gay retirement communities are favored then space planners will need to have a greater understanding of who their client is and what those needs, concerns, wants and desires are in terms of the overall ambience of the retirement community.

Interviews will be used to obtain information from you and other study participants. The study will consist of a series of interviews with the directors of four existing retirement communities in the greater Toronto area, that were initially set up for distinctive minority groups. This information will be referenced with individual interviews of elderly gay men to see whether or not there is a relationship between the possible need to establish a retirement community geared for elderly gay men. Interviews will also be conducted of gay couples and single gay men to establish what their needs are in terms of aging and retirement living. Each interview will be guided by the same Interview Guide, (approved by the Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba), and each session will last no longer

than 2.0 hours. Each session will be audiotaped for the purposes of analysis, after which the tapes will be destroyed. The researcher would also like to take photographs of the rooms, but not of the inhabitants, in which the interview took place in order to recall what the interior environment looked like while transcribing the interview. Photographs will not be used in the thesis/publication arising. The photographs will be destroyed at the end of the research report.

#### Consent

No payment or reimbursement will be provided for any expenses related to taking part in this study. Information gathered in this research study will be published as a thesis for the Faculty of Architecture, however, your identity will not be revealed. If participants of the study refer to individuals by name or position, or in any way reveal the identity of someone, this information will remain confidential. Your decision to take part in the study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time. You are not waiving any of your legal rights by signing this consent form nor releasing the investigator from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to ask any questions about your rights as a participant. This research has been approved by the Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above named persons or the Human Ethics Secretariat at (204) 474-7122.

I have read this consent form. I have had the opportunity to discuss this research with Raymond D. Dunning. I have had my questions answered in a language I understand. The risks and benefits have been explained to me. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form after signing it. I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I may choose to withdraw at any time. I freely agree to participate in this research study. I understand that the information regarding my personal identity will be kept confidential. I authorize the inspection of any of my records with that relate to this study by the University of Manitoba Research Ethics Board for quality assurance purposes. By signing this consent form, I have not waived any of the legal rights that I have as a participant in a research study.

Participant Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Participant printed name \_\_\_\_\_

I, the undersigned, have fully explained the relevant details of this research study to participant named above and believe that the participant has understood and has knowingly given their consent.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B

### Image 1

Lewis, J. (2000). Kips Bay The Legend lives on. In, *Interior Design* September (pp.293). New York: Cahners Business Information.



**Image 2**

Lewis, J. (2000). Kips Bay The Legend lives on. In, *Interior Design* September (pp.296). New York: Cahners Business Information.





**Image 3**

Reynolds, K. (2001). Hospitality Facelift. In, *Interior Design March*(pp.S93). New York: Cahners Business Information.



## Image 4

Raymond Dunning, University of Manitoba, Faculty of Architecture, Master of Interior Design – Research Stream, Poster for Course 051.705 – Graduate Seminar.

# Windows on your World

Are interior designers considering the needs of diverse groups when planning retirement communities?

"It is absolutely necessary that aging does not imply re-entering the closet." 70 year old man

"I have had enough of living two lives during my working years. I just want to be me now! Isn't a lifetime program that could allow me to be me?" 65 year old woman

"Will my room and furniture be comfortable for me as a retiree?" 83 year old woman

IDEX NeoCon Canada September 18-19 2003  
The National Trade Center Exhibition Place Toronto Canada  
Conference speaker, Raymond Dunning September 19, 2003 10am-11am

Raymond Dunning, University of Manitoba, Faculty of Architecture, Master of Interior Design – Research Stream, Poster for Course 051.705 – Graduate Seminar, 2003

## Appendix C

### Interview Guide

**The University of Manitoba  
Faculty of Architecture  
Department of Interior Design**

*Revised November 4, 2003*

Please keep I mind that this information is confidential. I would appreciate it if you would not discuss this interview with other people. I will give you a copy of this interview so that you may add to it should feel that you did not express your self accurately. I will also keep your identities confidential by changing your names in the final write up of my report. There are no right or wrong answers.

1. What is your date of birth? Or if you would rather give an approximation: under 50, 51-54, 55-60, 60-64, 65-69, 70-74, 74-79, over 80.
2. Where were you born?
3. How would you describe your general health, compared to others your age?
4. What sort of physical activities do you partake in?
5. What is your highest level of education?
6. Are you employed?
7. What was/is your occupation while you were/are employed?
8. And how long were/have you been employed there?
9. Now that you are retired in what ways has your life changed?
10. Within the next 5 years do you expect your income to go a) go up b) go down or c) remain the same?
11. How do you get around town? Do you drive a car? Take public transit? Taxi service? Do you own a car?
12. What is your current housing situation i.e. do you own, rent?

13. How many square feet do you currently live in?
14. How much do you pay for monthly living expenses including food costs, clothing house hold costs, car etc.?
15. What is the approximate value of your home?
16. Is your home paid for? If retired and home is not paid, when do you expect it to have it paid?
17. Do you have other investments?
18. Do you think you will have enough money saved to retire comfortably?
19. Have you been able to live the majority of your life as an openly gay man?
20. Have you told your immediate family that you're gay?
21. Have you told close friends at work that you're gay?
22. Have you ever denied being gay?
23. Are you partnered?
24. How long have you been partnered?
25. Now that you are retired in what ways has your life changed?
26. Do you feel comfortable from a financial perspective?
27. What worries you the most with regards to aging?
28. What sort of things in life bring you pleasure?
29. Have you experience homophobia in the past? If yes does any one event stand out in your mind?
30. Do you worry about your safety?
31. Are most of your friends gay?
32. Do you socialize with "straight" people? If yes then what percentage are "straight"?

33. How do you socialize with your friends?
34. Do you socialize differently with your straight friends than with your gay friends?
35. Do you think that there are cultural differences in terms of acceptance of “the gay lifestyle”?
36. In which spaces are you able to be more “yourself” in a public space or a private space?
37. Tell me what the concept of “home” means to you?
38. Is the style and colour scheme of your home important to you and why?
39. Do you have any favorite rooms in your home and why?
40. What pieces of art or furniture are important to you and why?
41. Are there certain design features that you really like and why?
42. In terms of the décor of your home can you tell me what the overall design philosophy is?
43. Do you currently have external support with maintaining your home? (*Cleaning person, gardener etc.*)
44. Do pets play an important role in your life? Do they require any sort of support from outside the home?
45. Do you garden and if so why?
46. Have you ever visited a retirement home in the past? If so how was the experience? If you haven't visited a retirement home then tell me what you think a retirement community would look like?
47. Having visited a retirement home, let's say that you could be “design guru” what design features would you change?
48. What would make you move into a retirement home?
49. Imagine one day having to move into a retirement community. Can you tell me what thoughts come to your mind?
50. Would the location of the facility matter to you? (*Core, mid-town, rural*)

51. What issues of privacy would you be most concerned about in the retirement home?
52. There are no gay retirement homes in Toronto. Would you feel comfortable living in what is currently available?
53. Would you be interested in living in a retirement community built specifically for gay men or mixed with GLBT groups?
54. Imagine that you are a spider on the wall observing people interacting within a "straight" retirement home and a gay retirement home? What do you see? What do you hear? Are there any differences? Are there any similarities?
55. Who do you see visiting you in the retirement home?
56. Do you think it would be important to have the gay community to be supportive of the retirement community and if so how could "they" support it?
57. Do you think that the retirement home should be geared to income?
58. What sort of venues do you think would attract younger gay men to the retirement home to allow for interaction and socialization?
59. Do you and your partner require space to accommodate physical disabilities?
60. What size of floor plan would interest you most?
61. What common amenities within the building would be important to you and what special design features would you want the units to have?
62. How much do you think a facility such as this one would cost? And do you think you could afford to live in it?
63. Is there anything else you would like to add?
64. Let's say that one of these images represented "the look" of the lobby. Tell me which image you relate more to and why?  
(Image 1, Image 2 and Image 3).
65. I am going to show you a poster that I designed can you tell me what your thoughts are? Do you believe that these scenarios are real? How does it make you feel? (Image 4).

Is there anything else you would like to add? Thank you for your time