

# NEWS Release



## Touchmark at Coffee Creek

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### **High-contrast tones just a few of the tips** **INTERIOR DECORATING FOR SENIORS —** **MORE THAN JUST A COLOR PALATE**

EDMOND, Okla. — Interior decorating for retiring seniors isn't about their favorite color. It's about color contrast, rounded edges on furniture and no-pile carpet.

Lavenders, baby blue and mint green all go to gray to the older eye, said Pat Hennings, an international expert on designing interiors for special needs populations. The importance of color not only involves personal taste, but also provides visual cues.

For example, color can help distinguish the wall of a bedroom vs. the door.

“As we age, our ability to distinguish tints of cool colors, for example, fade,” said Hennings.

“Plaid goes to black, as does hunter green and dark purple.”

Therefore, the pleasure derived from color is lost. Colors in impressionistic art, such as in Monet's 'Water Lilies,' run together. The aquas, blues, greens and pinky pinks become the same value of color, she said.

The aging eye doesn't open as wide to let as much light in. The yellowing of the cornea makes images appear as if you were looking through the bottom of a root-beer bottle or as if everything is tobacco stained.

The older eye needs two-and-a-half to three times more light than a 20-year-old. Large windows are important in homes, but also color contrast helps to distinguish doors and window

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treatments from walls.

Pat Hennings lives in Fresno, Calif., but she is on contract with Touchmark at Coffee Creek retirement community in north Edmond to decorate the newly opened model homes in the Parkview neighborhood and the three-story Grandview retirement apartments, set to open early next year.

Parkview will have 56 homes for active adults. With the accompanying Grandview, the \$30 million project was the largest commercial building permit let last year in Edmond.

Earlier this year, Touchmark Living Centers received first place in the 2005 Best of Seniors Housing Design and Marketing Awards at the National Home Builders' show.

“Touchmark’s two model homes are decorated each in furniture, art, accessories, carpet and window coverings to coordinate with the beautiful homes,” said Marilyn Kreidler, Touchmark executive director.

Hennings, a national speaker and judge of many national architectural contests, has a doctoral degree with an interdisciplinary study in design for special populations. Her master’s degree is in architecture and interior design, and she is a designer with 30 years of experience. Her specialty is in geriatric architecture and interior design.

At 64, she can speak from experience concerning barriers to mobility and sight. Four years ago, she was debilitated with a spinal-cord injury. In her last year of college, she was totally immobile for a year as spinal meningitis placed her in a six-week coma. She had to relearn her balance and other gross motor skills.

“I’m not using this black/bronze tone just because I like it,” she says as she adjusts a bathroom hand towel in one of the Touchmark model homes. “It’s really high contrast.”

A lot of environments are designed for children, and are small and crowded for younger

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families, she said. But they are not designed for those who are pregnant, for retirees and for the obese populations.

**Tips for interior design for retirees:**

- **WINDOWS:** Need to be extra wide. The aging eye needs a great deal more light — for mental as well as physical health. The eye is clouded by cataracts and that makes your environment look tobacco stained, for example.
- **COLORS:** They provide visual cues, a way of finding your way around. For example, street addresses on the outside of a building should be in contrasting colors. The path of travel, if colored tile, should enhance direction. A very high percentage of the male population is color blind to red and green, which turn to khaki tones.
- **FURNITURE:** Arm chairs and end tables need to have rounded corners. The older skin becomes thinner and is easily bruised. Bedposts should be rounded for easy-grab when rising from the bed to stand.
- **CARPET:** It should not be high pile. If it's plush, seniors cannot move their feet.
- **SPACE PLANNING:** It should allow for freedom of movement to get around. If you create crowding, that causes people to fall.