



*NEXT*  
LEVEL  
DINING

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# INNOVATIVE TRENDS SHAPING THE FUTURE OF SENIOR LIVING DINING

Eating, drinking and being merry are the heart and soul of our living experience. Across all ages and cultures, we all enjoy breaking bread together. Whether you enjoy entertaining, meeting over a drink to exchange ideas, exchange stories or dine out, the dining experience is a quintessential component of the human experience and defines our species.

**T**he design and programming of space to support this activity are furthering the success of the senior living experience. The dining services environments, service and menus play a vital role in attracting future residents, enhancing the daily life experience of the residents, and fortifying operations and the delivery of care and services within each community.

The design of any food service venue is essential. Senior living providers are making the effort to move the dining experience to the *next level*, and the results are exciting. As an architect, I encourage all operators to put as much serious thought into the look and feel of their restaurant venues, the menus, the music they play and the attitude of their staff as they do any other aspect of the operation. Creating "experience-oriented" dining and entertainment venues can help boost your community's entertainment factor, leading to higher resident and family satisfaction.

Several of my clients have chosen to invest in and upgrade the dining experience in their newest communities and have achieved success in providing exciting, vibrant, fun, visually arresting spatial imagery along with tasty fares and libations. This trend is accelerating across the industry, and many providers have pushed the dining experience for their residents to the *next level!*

Foodservice designer Eric Smith, vice president of Design Studio at Trimark, has over 30 years of experience and designed numerous Assisted Living and Memory Care projects across California. He has truly become a leader in the evolution of senior living dining experiences. I sat down with Eric to discuss the latest trends in senior living dining venues.

Senior living trends are absolutely following the restaurant trends, according to Eric. Demonstration kitchens are

continuing to grow in popularity, and residents like to see the preparation of meals. We are seeing more cook lines visible in the dining room but located behind glass. Kitchens are being designed for a flexible or rotating menu. Exciting new menu items ranging from ethnic foods to fusion plates to comfort food are popular. Combi Ovens and steam/convection ovens increase moisture retention and shrinkage when roasting proteins.

California is mandating all-electric kitchens in new buildings. Gas kitchens may continue to operate, but new buildings will be required to be electric. There is a big difference between cooking with gas and electricity, and this will impact timing and food quality. Many appliances are comparable except the charcoal broiler.

Salad bars appear to be a casualty of COVID, and because food costs are very high, they are slow to return to service. Nevertheless, most people love the choices presented at the buffet. We are designing for flexibility and providing opportunities to offer multiple themes daily. We see dining room countertop designs that can heat and cool, and support a buffet programmed during holidays or special events.

Incognito induction warmers under the stone countertop are becoming more popular. The server places a metal ring down on the countertop and places the chafing dish right on top of it. They are not intended to cook but can keep food warm and at temperature for the duration needed. Dining room sideboards and countertops can also include a frosted plate under the counter, which transfers the cold through the stone countertop material. This allows you to place shallow or porcelain or nicely designed bowls or platters on top, and the countertop will keep food cool for up to an hour.

Eric explains that alcohol service has skyrocketed over the past 10 years. Now, craft cocktails are growing in popularity, and the senior living communities have responded. Residents can order a variety of libations, including hand-shaken margaritas, martinis and more sophisticated cocktails like Old Fashioneds, Side Cars and even The Bee's Knees.

The appliances that support mixologists have significantly advanced. Today, we see Insta-frost devices where a glass can be placed over a countertop appliance and frosted while the customer watches. Also, new ice makers dispense perfect 2" x 2" ice cubes.

Wine bars with resident liquor lockers in the dining room are still desirable. Pubs and sports bars are popping up all over. Visibility and ambient noise are considerations with these venues. Designers should seriously consider the location of the television and the associated sound system. The bar can open to the outside. Cheers, and here's to your health!

Outdoor lifestyle venues are becoming more popular. Outdoor kitchens with big barbecues can support a wonderful dining experience. They should be strategically located adjacent to the kitchen or bar for support. This can be used for a programmed meal, a private party or a family event.

Everyone loves the central hearth oven or pizza oven. However, with a hefty construction and installation cost, many providers offer pizza or other roasted items using Combi ovens. These appliances can offer similar quality without the expense.

Desserts and ice cream will never go out of style. We are still designing ice cream or gelato cases in grab-and-go markets. Some facilities even offer a small bakery that produces pies, cakes and other pastries.

Three projects notable for their *next level* dining experience have recently opened in Southern California: **Clearwater Newport Beach**, **Atria Newport Beach** and **The Hacienda at Mission San Luis Rey** in Oceanside. All of these share the common goal of creating excitement and savory delight among the residents and their guests.

**Atria at Newport Beach** has been open and operating since late 2021. Positioned upon a hillside overlooking Newport Harbor, it has capitalized upon the location. Here, we have maximized views from a cocktail lounge, bistro and outdoor dining terrace. Atria has positioned its themed venues, playing off the regional history and culture; the 1888 Bistro offers grab-and-go along with alfresco dining on the terrace. Vasco's Restaurant is the sit-down formal venue, and the Avalon Lounge Serves savory small plates along with various craft cocktails and fine wines residents may select from. .



**The Hacienda at San Luis Rey** is operated by **Watermark** and is located at the Mission San Luis Rey in Oceanside. Watermark has several branded dining venues, including The Mark, a formal and lovely dining venue for independent living residents. Taboon offers Mediterranean cuisine to independent living and Assisted Living residents, and Seasons is designed for Assisted Living residents, offering a warm and welcoming environment serving up farm-fresh cuisine and seasonal ingredients.



Each of these venues is lovely and exciting, but, in my opinion, Taboon is *next level*.

The interior design by Lisa Klang, Klang Interiors, is remarkable. The dining and gathering space is organized around a radial hearth oven and surrounding bar seating where residents can observe the preparation of various baked or roasted dishes. The hearth is a pizza oven on steroids. From an experiential and spatial imagery standpoint, the hearth is exciting, and it is fun to watch as the chefs prepare the various dishes. It is visually arresting in its design, and its presentation is absolutely stunning.

Another example of next level dining can be found at **Clearwater, Newport Beach**. This elegant and sophisticated restaurant has reinvented the traditional dining service spaces. Clearwater has a lovely formal dining room. In addition, Clearwater has reinvented the private dining room. This sometimes-underused space is now a centerpiece. The private dining room doubles as a wine cellar with a large harvest table, comfortable seating, sultry lighting and



a brick-barrel vaulted ceiling to reinforce the theme of elegance and sophistication. It also includes a glass-enclosed, climate-controlled wine-racking system. Wine storage defines the perimeter walls of the private dining room. The private dining room is now used for wine-tasting events and may also be used for small intimate dining parties, conference room space and family events, but experientially, this space is *next level*. It is truly spectacular.



An extraordinary example of outdoor entertaining and alfresco dining is here at **Clearwater, Newport Beach**. The designers have considered every detail and perfected the outdoor dining experience in an elegant, upscale open bar. The bar is open to the courtyard but covered from the sky, shading the dinners from the hot sun or

sheltering them from the moist coastal night sky. This premium amenity serves craft cocktails, wine, beer and tasty small bites prepared in the adjacent kitchen. Residents can also access their wine from the wine storage located just inside and behind the bar. There is a lovely fountain, manicured olive trees, suspended twinkling lights and even a chandelier, all reinforcing the elegant ambiance of this dining venue.

These exemplary projects enrich each resident's dining and entertaining experience. They all offer a delightful choice and alternative to the indoor fine dining room. Each of these projects has pushed the dining services in the senior living industry to the next level. ■

**Douglas Pancake is president of Douglas Pancake Architects.** He is credited with leading the evolution of senior housing and care design, and with enhancing the lifestyles and the well-being of thousands of seniors across the United States.



# REDEFINING DINING FOR OUR SENIORS

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