

## Real estate agents live vicarious existence

By MIKE WENNERGREN  
NYT Regional Newspapers

SANTA BARBARA, Calif. — Teresa McWilliams got shot at, Mary French was confronted by a lion, Joanne Stoltz got hit up for a ride, and H. Edward Heron became a reluctant tour guide.

Strange things happen when you're a real estate agent. You deal with personality types A through Z, and you often deal with them in their homes, which is personally revealing — and sometimes physically revealing, too.

Despite phoning in advance and banging loudly on doors, real estate agents often catch someone in the buff or in a compromising situation. Usually it's accidental, but agents have sometimes suspected it was intentional. For Kathy Hughes, co-owner of a local brokerage firm, it was casual.

Although Hughes had made an appointment to show two men a home, no one answered the door when she got there. So Hughes let herself in, gave the clients a tour of the house and then showed them the back yard, where they found four young people who didn't want their tans spoiled by bathing suit marks.

"There was like one guy and three gals, and they're all sprawled out in the back yard," Hughes said. "They just said, 'Come on out.'"

Her clients, however, were not that adventurous.

"They were just blown away," she said. "They turned around and ran — bolted out the front door."

Catching people in flagrante delicto is not so rare that it's noteworthy — unless, of course, one of the active participants is married to someone else... someone you know. Realtor Cyndee Eliassen was showing a supposedly vacant home to the wife of a local government official when they heard a voice in the bedroom.

"Imagine my surprise when I hear this 'Just a minute' coming from the back room," Eliassen said. "And here this man and this woman come scrambling out."

The woman was the wife of a prominent physician and the man was a nurse. The homeowner had neglected to tell Eliassen that he had authorized them to use the house for their trysts.

On another occasion, Eliassen had some clients from Los Angeles who were looking at houses in the wealthy suburb of Montecito. They were very particular about what they wanted.

"The yard had to be real private. The bedroom had to be real private," she said. "It took us a couple of days until we found out the guys were filmmakers — 'special' filmmakers — and they wanted the house for sets."

Teresa McWilliams, owner of a Montecito real estate office, felt as if she was on a movie set once — a Western set. She was taking a client on a tour of 80 acres of vacant land when they started taking gunfire.

"So we hide behind a rock," she said. "The bullets were going 'ping, ping.' It was like a cowboy movie, a bad cowboy movie."

They knew the gunslinger was the owner of the adjoining property, so after he stopped shooting they went to a telephone and called the sheriff's office. Two deputies came out, and McWilliams went with them onto the man's property, where they were greeted by two German shepherds and a pair of Doberman pinschers.

Terrified, McWilliams jumped on one deputy's back while they repelled the dogs with Mace. At first, the dogs' owner denied he had shot at McWilliams, but after the deputies found a recently fired gun, he confessed.

He said he was tired of people coming around, but he promised not to shoot at them anymore if McWilliams agreed not to press charges. She agreed.

Agent Mary French would have preferred four dogs. Once, while touring a house alone, French opened a basement door.

"A lion came leaping over a bunch of storage boxes," she said. "It was like slow motion. I didn't expect anything like that."

The house's owner was nonchalant when French confronted her about it.

"She said it was old and toothless and just wanted to say hello," French said.

Keys, or the lack thereof, often create problems for real estate agents. Many have locked themselves inside homes. But being locked out can cause even bigger problems.

McWilliams once brought a pair of  
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"A Retiree's Dream Apartment," at left, has been planned by Gainesville decorator Donna Cohen to reflect the tastes and needs of today's seniors. Plenty of light, comfortable furniture and clear walking areas are designed to help ensure a tenant's safety. Several Atrium residents gather, below, in the center courtyard of the retirement community.

Photos by BRENDA BAWEK

# A change of pace

*'Dream Apartment' designed to meet needs of retirees*

By BROOKE LANGE  
Sun correspondent

It's time for a change. Many young people feel that way as they progress through the various phases of a busy and active life. Generally, though, the older people get the less receptive they are to upheaval. Especially when it comes to their homes.

But now times are changing for the elderly, too. Gone is the unswerving allegiance to family antiques, dark rugs and heavy draperies — at least in Florida. For many retirees, the move south is a chance to start over in more ways than one, and savvy seniors are literally seeing the light.

"More and more older people are moving out of their old homes and starting their lives over by redecorating in bright, lively colors," said Gainesville interior designer Donna Cohen. "It's amazing how they throw out almost everything to start over and make a brand new home."

To help these newly aware consumers make informed home furnishings choices, The Atrium, a rental retirement community in Gainesville, is sponsoring "A Retiree's Dream Apartment." Designed by Cohen's

firm, Donna Cohen Interiors, this special model will be open to the public through next Sunday. Admission is free, according to Pam Simmons, Atrium assistant administrator, but a \$2 donation is being requested to benefit Gainesville's Ronald McDonald House, a home for critically ill children and their families who are being treated at Shands Hospital.

Showcasing contemporary design and color schemes while stressing safety features available in today's age-sensitive housing, the mod-

peting sets the tone, which is picked up by window valances, a floral sofa and dusty blue-green chairs in the living room. A terra-cotta mirror and end table with a clay base shaped like a column add a warm contrast to the otherwise cool tones.

Accessories such as multi-shaped vases and lamps, a color-coordinated wall hanging, contemporary flower arrangements and silk plants and trees also give the apartment a warm, lived-in look.

The bedroom features a Monet-inspired water lily-patterned bedspread in bright pastels, set off by white embroidered pillowcases and shams. The matching valance and beveled-glass shelves above the fabric-covered headboard continue the apartment's light and airy theme, and a wallpaper border of blue and dusty-mauve petunias adds a note of cheerfulness.

"They want more bright and lively colors," Cohen said. "It's real important for their surroundings to be cheerful and bright because it affects their mood. It's terrific to see them try new things they've never had before, like sheer drapes and valances. It's a whole new experience for them."

But there's more to the "Retiree's Dream Apartment" than coordinated color schemes, contemporary furniture and design trends.

The apartment features various safety elements that are offered in today's age-sensitive apartments, condominiums and retirement  
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"It's important for their surroundings to be cheerful and bright because it affects their mood."

DONNA COHEN

el apartment illustrates how retirees can live in comfort — and style.

Cohen donated her firm's services for the overall decorating, wallpaper and window treatments, and Furniture Country provided the furniture.

Soft and airy best describes the apartment's color scheme, which blends hues of peach, blue, cream, pink and green. Plush teal car-



Interior doors at the Atrium have lever handles, and baths come with special assist bars to make living a little easier for residents.

## Today's kitchens have a more polished appearance

By MERRIE SKINNER  
NYT Regional Newspapers

LEESBURG — Regardless of how they look on the outside, all kitchen cabinets are not created equal. Just take a close look beneath that varnished, painted or laminated exterior, or open a cupboard door and look at the shelves. You may be surprised at what you find.

Forty years ago, there was nothing mysterious about kitchen cabinets. A carpenter built them from solid wood or veneer over plywood, then installed them in the kitchen. Laminated counters were glued to a plywood base.

Today, modern kitchens often feature modular cabinets that are mass-produced with particleboard shelves and drawers. And counters are made from particleboard covered with a laminate such as Formica.

Only in upscale, costlier kitchens are you likely to find solid-wood cabinetry and counters that are made from tougher synthetic materials such as Corian.

Linda Geiger, office manager of Kirkland Cabinets in Clermont, says that customers usually order cabinets containing particleboard be-

cause they are cheaper than solid-wood models. Most of the company's customers spend between \$2,500 and \$3,500 for new kitchen cabinets and counters. They would have to spend a lot more if they ordered the same cabinets in solid wood, she said.

Cabinets containing particleboard are not necessarily bad, she said. Particleboard cabinetry with wood veneer or plastic laminate looks just as attractive as solid-wood models.

"The look is the same," she said. "You really can't see any difference."

Still, some customers demand solid wood, and are willing to pay the increased cost because they think they're getting better cabinets.

"There are some people who just flat out won't have anything that's particleboard," Geiger said.

Cabinets made from particleboard usually have solid wood doors and drawer fronts, with particleboard shelves, drawers and veneer-covered frames.

Annette Thorpe, secretary at Quality Custom Cabinet Design Inc. in Leesburg, also says that most of the company's customers in Lake Coun-  
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Armstrong World Industries



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# CHANGE

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communities. Special lighting, bathroom safety features, an emergency response system and non-slip flooring are just a few of the design considerations on display.

"Adequate lighting is the most important consideration in age-sensitive homes," said Otto Von Mering, director of the University of Florida Center for Gerontology Studies. "When the lighting is good, then there is less chance for bumping into things and falling."

As vision begins to fail, more light is needed to do the everyday things in life, Von Mering said. For example, when walking through a darkened house, a person can be bruised by bumping into sharp ob-

jects. For the young this is normally not a problem, but for the elderly — who bruise more easily and heal more slowly — minor mishaps in the home can lead to major medical problems, especially broken bones or wounds that become infected.

To combat this, the apartment is equipped with bright, non-glare lighting in the kitchen and baths. Kitchen counters and shelves have rounded edges instead of sharp corners, and doorways are wider for easy wheelchair access. The apartment doors also have levers instead of door-knobs for easier operation.

A pull cord in each bedroom and bathroom can alert the front desk in emergencies, and grab bars are close at hand in the shower, tub and toilet areas. There is also a shelf at the front door to hold packages while occupants pause to search for keys.

Scatter rugs are omitted, the toilet

seats are higher than normal, and the furniture is positioned for ease of entry and exit to help prevent falls.

"The opportunity to be careless is given to all of us," Von Mering said, "so these age-sensitive elements are really important to all of us."

The "Retiree's Dream Apartment," which opened to the public Saturday, will remain open from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. today, the Fourth of July, and next Saturday and Sunday; and also will be on view from 7 to 9 p.m. Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday.

The Atrium, 2431 NW 41 St., just behind Thornebrook Village Shopping Center, is also playing host to a senior art exhibit from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. today and next Saturday, with several musical presentations and special performances by pianist Frank Sullivan planned.

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