

IT'S ALL

INSIDE Multifamily Interior Merchandising

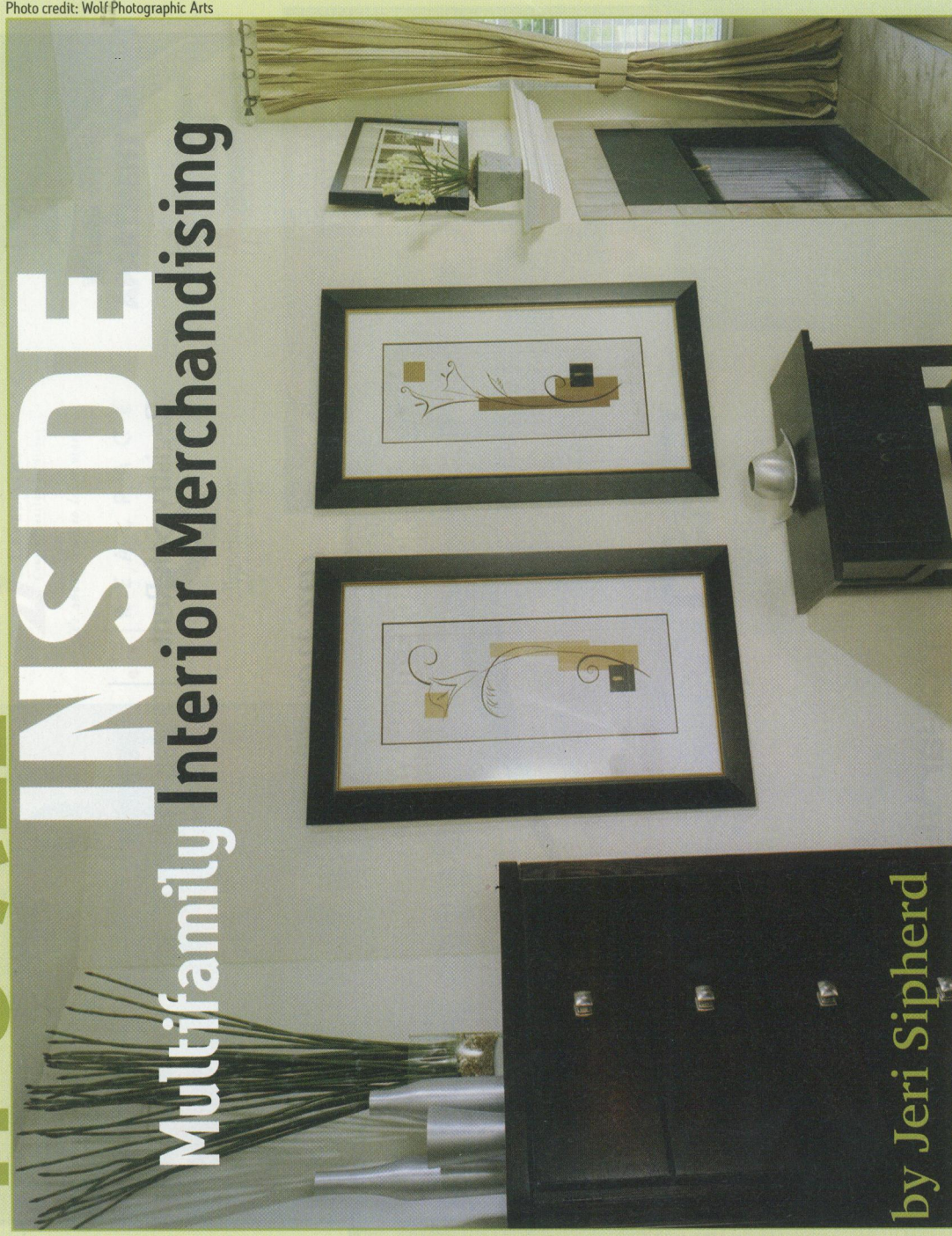


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by Jeri Sipherd

Every prospective resident is looking for a sense of belonging. Getting a resident to believe he or she belongs at your community can be accomplished by the right design. This occurs when the design thought process is based on lifestyle and environment.

The most important issue in design and decorating for a future resident is the feeling the prospect has when he walks into the space. This feeling is the direct result of the proper selection of the furniture, fixtures, artwork, finishes, and when all the details fit together like a puzzle. The future resident has to feel a desire to become part of this environment.

The feeling of belonging is even more important when decorating to a single. For example, the Olive Garden

restaurant spent thousands of dollars developing the ad, "When you're here, you're family." It's important to understand this concept in marketing. We all want the feeling that we've made the right decision.

How often have we heard an adult turn to a child and ask "Do you like this place?" As designers and marketers, we want to cringe. What does a three-year-old know about apartments? The adult wants to feel that he or she is doing the very best for the family. The goal is to evoke the statement, "Wow, look at this, and this is how much a month? I can do this."

Know Your Prospect

Merchandise the space with the idea that the prospect will associate with the products selected. Square footage is the important factor that determines scale of the furnishings. But, be sure to keep in

mind the traffic flow. There needs to be enough room for the prospect to comfortably walk around the apartment.

Pay close attention to the prospect profile. Anticipate who the prospect is, what they expect, and what they deserve. Be completely realistic with your selections for a space. If the property is a high-rise, with limited elevator use, don't select a 96-inch sofa that you can't get into the apartment.

Start each project by discussing the prospect profile. For instance, generation Y renters are in a life stage of independence and individuality. They feel comfortable being themselves. Because they were raised with a video aesthetic, design a wall in their living area for all the equipment necessary for their lifestyle. In addition, artwork or fabrics that express high energy with bold colors should be used.

Generation X wants immediate access. This group is interested in quality, but is very price driven. Their concern is anything that saves time. They are loyal to their careers, but not necessarily to a job. Design using furniture that could easily be transported, such as a round unfinished table that can be purchased at many discount stores. By placing a floor length tablecloth over it, personal items could be stored completely out of sight.

Baby Boomers demand quality. They enjoy customization and individualization. Place monogrammed towels in the bathroom. Use a spa looking bath, but be mindful of value. This group is very grounded, and not interested in fads. A design trend for the Baby Boomer would be the "less is more" concept. Lots of stuff (also known as materialism) does not interest them. This group is more concerned with where they are going to put or store an item, than they are the item itself.

Seniors are the most diverse and dynamic group. Design should concentrate around health issues instead of age. It isn't how old they are, but how old they act. This group has more time to do everything. They have discovered the Internet, so designing a clubhouse with an Internet access area will be important. Also, this group is well traveled. So, interior design should consist of

globally selected accessories, showing an appreciation for the residents' experiences. An extremely important design element is the use of proper lighting. As we age, we need more light to see. An example in the kitchen is the light maple cabinets. They might not look so light to the senior. Cabinets with glass inserts in the doors are presented as a design element, when in reality, it is to help the resident see and remember where things are stored.

Color Is Everything

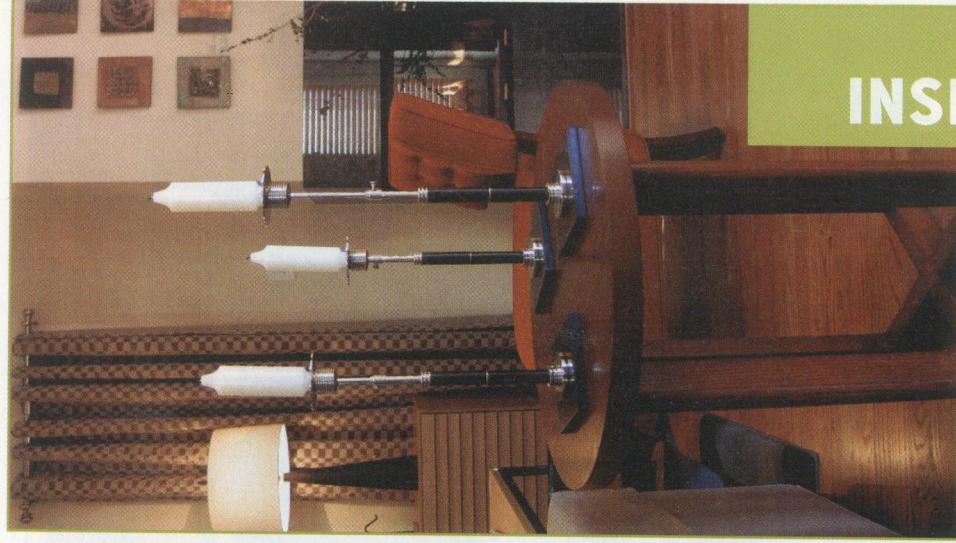
Pay very close attention to life trends. Avoid fads at all cost. Use color palettes that are the very latest, with a long life span. Understand the importance of correctly selecting the interior products that make up the interior design. We live in a very exciting, fun world of choices. Interior design should be as individual as the people who live in the units.

The emotional value of color can be used to uplift and inspire prospects. No matter what price point, color may be used to instill integrity, safety, and optimism. Typically, the brighter the color, the less expensive the object. Cars are a perfect example of this. The brighter the color, the less the car costs.

Therefore, the most fun design would be in the affordable community. Use more primary colors in fabrics and accessories. Try driving through the communities surrounding the location of your new project. Check out the colors of the cars parked in the lot. That will be your first key. If they purchased a colorful automobile, they will expect to see a colorful interior design in which to live.

Figure out what color to use when designing a market-rate community by paying attention to the clothes that people are buying. Spend a weekend day at the local department store and pay attention to the style and color of the clothes being bought. If they wear it, they will live in it. Furniture design typically follows fashion. This explains why so

Carreras Townhomes in Dallas, targeted generation Y renters by using artwork and fabrics that express high energy with bold colors. It's important to design a wall in their living area for all their video and electronic equipment.





When picking products for high-end communities remember it must be real. This client knows what they are looking at, and probably where it came from. This client will have state-of-the-art electronics. The dining area will have a round table to encourage a free flow of conversation, with comfortable, armed dining chairs, to encourage the family and guest to stay put after dining. The chairs in the living room also will serve as dining chairs. Be sure to change the fabric to signify the different living spaces. No matter what, keep function first and foremost. Use splashes of color, with rich, muted tones on the upholstery.

First Impressions

Whether it's a public space, or the most private space, good model merchandising will make the difference in the success of the project.

First impressions are lasting impressions. What is it they say about the first 10 seconds after you meet someone? It is almost that fast when a prospect walks into your facility. When designing a clubhouse, think of it the terms of a club.

When people go to "the Club," they go to be with their neighbors and friends. The same holds true with the clubhouse in an apartment complex. Design areas that encourage interaction of the residents. Use bulletin boards with a locking acrylic door that evokes the importance of the information placed on the board.

If this is a family facility, have an area for children with a built-in bookshelf. Offer books for every reading level, and be sure to use new books; they are the most inexpensive way to say to a parent, "We care about your children."

Design a place in your clubhouse where prospects can talk alone. This is an important decision they are making, encourage them to stay in the clubhouse and discuss what they've seen. The more time they spend at a community, the better they like it. How often do you drive into a complex and see the couple sitting in the car talking after the visit. This is a good sign, they don't want to leave. By giving the prospect a private place to talk, they don't have to leave until the lease is signed. **PHOTO**

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Photo credit: Doug Handal Photography

Coyote Ridge (above) in Carrollton, Texas, was designed to attract baby boomers. The use of round tables encourages free flow of conversation. When designing for high-end communities, such as Glenbridge Manors (below) in Cincinnati, it's important to use splashes of color, with rich, muted tones on the upholstery.

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