

## RETIREMENT



**A TOUCH OF MAGIC**  
The Tovertafel in action, right; left, a control panel at Auriens, developed by Nasa, which can detect if a resident falls over; below, Hampshire Lakes



# Tech built for outer space, and retirees

*Exciting innovations are allowing downsizers to live in safer and more engaging environments,*  
reports **Jane Slade**

**I**magine a bed that knows when you have woken up, or a floor that understands if you have fallen. Technology has transformed everyone's lives, but it is retirement communities that particularly benefit from highly advanced technology emerging from such places as the Nasa laboratories.

At Auriens, a super-luxurious development in Chelsea where prices start from £3million, there is a feature that started life helping space explorers. Radar technology, developed by scientists at Nasa, analyses the movement of residents, detects falls and alerts a member of staff or family when something may be wrong.

As well as the Bugatti stairlifts, homeowners at Auriens are offered kitchens with motorised cabinets that can be lowered by remote control. Rooms are fitted with circadian lighting, a Nobel Prize-winning system that mimics natural sunlight, designed to combat SAD (Seasonal Affective Disorder) suffered by many during the long dark winter months.

While this is at the high end of retirement tech, solutions such as these are becoming increasingly widespread, especially as older people become more connected online.

An Ofcom survey in June 2017 found that record numbers of older people are now "plugged into" smart and

social technology, with 44 per cent of over-75s going online, half engaging with social media and a quarter of this age group using tablets.

To cater to these residents, Audley installs superfast broadband as standard in all its developments. At its new site, Nightingale Place near Clapham Common in south London, there are programmable security fobs to access apartments, room sensors and pressure pads in bedrooms that can tell when people have risen from bed. When completed next year, it will have 94 one, two and three-bedroom flats as well as a restaurant, pool and health club.

Jenny Hyde, 77, moved to Anchor's Hampshire Lakes retirement village in Yateley in January 2016. A high-speed internet connection was a must-have, she says: "I use it constantly for sending emails to my friends who don't live locally, downloading my newspaper, booking theatre tickets or a trip abroad and as part of my voluntary work as a school governor, which involves online training courses and assessments."

Christopher Goddard, chairman of housebuilder Renaissance Retirement, recognises the importance of providing high-speed broadband to residents. "As a developer it is our responsibility for our homes to be built in a way that ensures advanced services are available to all our owners," he said. "We supply the infrastructure that allows them to purchase the internet package that best suits their needs."

Keith Diment, 81, was in IT for 30 years and depends on a good broadband connection for his wide range of online activities, including banking, consuming news, communicating with



family and designing websites. Diment, who is married to Jenny, 78, lives in Renaissance Retirement's Fleur-de-Lis development in Wantage, Oxfordshire. "I spend quite a lot of time sitting in front of my computer and would hate to be without a good broadband connection," he says.

A strong network isn't just needed to connect residents to the world wide web; it can also connect objects to each other.

The "internet of things", emerging technology that links household items such as heating and kitchen appliances, is now making life easier for older people.

Home management systems from brands such as Nest and Hive can control heat settings throughout the whole house if it is difficult for the homeowner to move around.

These can be programmed to turn on and off at various times of day and can even be managed remotely. Along these lines,



## TOP TECH FOR RETIREES

**PILL REMINDER PRO**  
This phone app sends you notifications telling you what medication to take and when.

**LUMOSITY**  
An app with brain-training exercises to improve memory and problem solving skills.

**POCKET PHYSIO**  
This app, which was developed by Care UK, has advice and physiotherapy exercises.



**NEST**  
Control your heating and lights from a single app. £219, John Lewis ([johnlewis.com](http://johnlewis.com))



**HIVE CAMERA**  
This allows you to see who is at your doorstep, increasing security. £189, John Lewis ([johnlewis.com](http://johnlewis.com))



**GPS TRACKER**  
Acts as an alarm and can take emergency calls with its own number. £124.99, Unforgettable ([unforgettable.org](http://unforgettable.org))



**LOGGED ON**  
Keith and Jenny Diment, left; an Amazon Echo, above; Battersea Place resident Susie Balfour with HUR trainer Rob Whistlecroft, above right

luxury retirement operator Brio Retirement Living is equipping owners with a dedicated control system called My Home Up. It adjusts temperature and ventilation, and offers communication with on-site staff, as well as family and friends.

Such technology can also help keep people healthy. Some retirement providers are looking into how devices that listen to spoken commands and respond, such as the Amazon Echo and its virtual assistant Alexa, can benefit older people who may react more positively to hearing a friendly voice.

Technology can also help with physio, building strength and getting people exercising. Life-Care Residences, which operates Battersea Place in London, has introduced its owners to a hi-tech cloud-based fitness programme called HUR SmartTouch. Developed in Finland for the over-70s, it offers exercises that benefit the legs, shoulders, arms and back. Owners log on to machines with a HUR SmartTouch wristband, which sets the seat to the right height and the machine to the correct resistance.

"While it's still early days, the response has been overwhelming," says Rob Whistlecroft from HUR SmartTouch. He says that more than 30 per cent of owners at Battersea Place now undertake strength training using the programme.

"I've seen so many success stories," he adds. "One participant, for example, is 167 per cent stronger than she was last year. But that's just the start of her transformation - the real change is in her confidence in herself and the ease at which she can be active in her day-to-day life."

At Hampshire Lakes, an award-winning Dutch innovation renowned for its cutting-edge approach to dementia care is transforming the lives of those in Willow Gardens, its on-site care

home. The Tovertafel, which translates as "magic table", is a series of interactive light games that are projected on to a table to create stimulating activities for people with dementia.

It has been designed to encourage instinctive participation, invite engagement and inspire a level of physical and social activity rarely seen in people living with later stages of dementia.

The visual "moving image" games can be played independently or in groups. They have been researched and designed alongside people living with dementia as part of a six-year PhD research project so that they exactly match their needs.

"We are very pleased with the way the trials are going, and from a care point of view there is no doubt it helps those living with dementia," says Rob Martin, Anchor's head of care quality. "One of the most delightful things to see is the total joy it brings to residents playing the simplest of games with their grandkids when they come to visit."

It isn't just developers and operators installing state-of-the-art gadgetry to enhance retirees' health and ease of life. Keith Bailey, 71, a retired telecommunications director, has turned his two-bedroom cottage at St Elphin's Park, an Audley retirement village in Derbyshire, into a techie haven.

He has fitted remote-controlled



lights, and smart plugs that allow him to turn on the electric blanket, printer and bedroom light from the comfort of his armchair.

He's also installed a solar-powered motion-sensor light on the front door, which illuminates the lock, and sensors in the kitchen and bathroom that turn the lights on when anyone enters the room.

"Motion-sensitive lighting is good for people who can't find a light switch in the dark, and also if they are carrying food from the kitchen - it means they don't have to find a free hand to turn the light off," he says.

"Retirement operators should install smart plugs in all their properties. It saves bending down behind the sofa if the plugs are in awkward positions, which can be dangerous."

While systems such as the Tovertafel may be beyond the price range of your typical downsizer, retirement technology doesn't have to be cost-prohibitive. Bailey says: "It only costs about £25 for a set of three smart plugs and a remote."

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