



Golden oldies

Retirement villages and developments resembling swish country clubs and five-star hotels are raising the bar to attract buyers who want to live longer, healthier and happier lives. Jane Slade investigates

With the competition hotting up to build more luxurious properties, developers are responding by creating grander schemes and country estates offering state-of-the-art spas, award-winning restaurants, pet parlours and chauffeur services.

Karen Mulville and Johnny Sandelson, co-founders of Auriens, set the bar two years ago launching one-bedroom apartments at its Chelsea development priced from £3 million.

Facilities will include a reading room designed by the Queen's nephew Lord Snowdon, gardens landscaped by RHS Chelsea Flower Show-winner Andy Sturgeon and a restaurant serving lobster and caviar.

That's on top of a 15-metre swimming pool and vitality pool heated to 38-degrees with a selection of water jets offering a hydrotherapy experience.

So confident is the couple of their high-end retirement model that they are developing another site in Kensington.

In the last two years there has been considerable growth in the number of newcomers keen to provide luxury homes for the baby boomer.

PegasusLife, which is building high-end schemes in such hotspots as London, Cheltenham and Sandbanks in Dorset is targeting discerning retirees at its stunning country estate in Kent.

Wildernesse House combines wow factor, elegance and opulence all the way from the main hall with its grand staircase and plush furnishings out to the extensive grounds of wildflower meadows, herb and vegetable gardens and orchard of fruit trees.

There are 23 one-and-two bedroom apartments in the main houses, some so vast they have ornate original fireplaces; and eight two-bedroom mews houses.

Luxury also underpins its Steepleton development of 113 one, two and three bed apartments in the Cotswolds, where the spa looks out over aquaculture gardens and has a herbal sauna, a salt-inhalation room.

A newer kid on the retirement block looking to shake up things up is Elysian Residences which is partnered with US retirement operator One Eighty.

Elysian has two developments under construction in the capital; The Landsby in Stanmore and The Oren in Hampstead. The art-deco Landsby will have a New York apartment-style entrance and double-height lobby.

"Retirees want a hospitality-led offering," argues American CEO Gavin Stein who is looking to create partnerships with golf clubs and leisure centres to maximise his developments' appeal.

Each Elysian scheme will have a hotel-style concierge desk, and exotic activities such as cookery masterclasses



held in a theatre-kitchen off the restaurant. There will also be golf simulators offering owners the opportunity to play on 21 of the world's top courses, as well as a pet parlour and chauffeur service.

Even the staff of retirement villages come with interesting credentials. The manager of Retirement Villages' flagship scheme, Charters Village in West Sussex, used to be a member of the Queen's Royal Household, working at Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle.

Nigel Walter assisted at Prince Andrew and Sarah Ferguson's wedding; attended royal state banquets and was on hand for the Queen's 60th birthday celebrations before moving on to work in four-and-five-star hotels.

Charters Village, nestled in the Surrey/West Sussex borders has a restaurant, spa and also a 60-bed nursing home in the grounds. But as Mr Walter acknowledges, his role is more about hospitality than solely focussing on care.

"I have helped organise 60th wedding anniversary parties at the village organising marquees and music and painted a chair like a throne for a special tea to mark the Queen's 90th birthday," he explains.

"Previously Retirement Villages just employed people with block management and care experience which is useful, but now they want people to create a community spirit and engage and stimulate residents in the life of the community," he adds. Indeed, his colleague Colin Foulger the manager of Retirement villages Cedars Village in Hertfordshire had a career with the John Lewis partnership before moving to Cedars 11 years ago, where his experience in customer service has proved invaluable.

Other retirement villages are making their mark in the

culinary world chasing Michelin stars.

The Redwood Bistro at Anchor's Bishopstoke Park retirement village in Hampshire was the first retirement village to be awarded an AA rosette for its cuisine just six months after opening. And in December last year high-end operator Audley Villages became the second, receiving an AA rosette at Blandys, its restaurant at Audley Inglewood, a stunning estate down the road from Highclere Castle in Berkshire.

"Today people can expect to retire in the kind of luxury that has never been available before," says Neil MacKichan of the retirement property website Retiremove.

"They are demanding higher quality service, fine dining, spas and excellent service. They are well-travelled and are used to high-end hotels and restaurants. Standards can only improve as accommodation offering luxurious facilities combined with staff experienced in hospitality and service is made available."

Audley's newest village Audley Redwood in Bristol has added style and luxury to the walls of its social spaces. A gallery of 20th century artworks has been installed to complement the Georgian heritage of the restored main houses.

Designers have picked some 28 pictures including watercolours, prints, oils acrylics and sculptures from the fine art collection at the Royal West of England Academy in Bristol. So owners can have something stylish to admire with their morning coffee.

www.auriens.com

www.audleyvillages.co.uk

www.elysianresidences.com

www.pegasuslife.co.uk

www.retirementvillages.co.uk

