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SENIOR HOUSING GUIDE



MAKING A MOVE
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Making a move | Tips to downsizing a life's worth of stuff

The senior population is adding that demographic bulge known as the baby boomer to its ranks in record numbers.

Eight thousand people turn 65 every day. Out of 308,745,438 Americans, 14.5 percent of them are 65 and older, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

Wherever their dot on the age spectrum falls, seniors have one thing in common: downsizing. Many are trading in their large family homes for a condo, apartment, active adult or retirement community. They also have "stuff" in common — a lifelong accumulation of possessions.

The experts agree, "less is more." Go through the house and decide what to keep, give away, sell and donate. First focus on the things you absolutely cannot part with. Then look to family members to see if they want your china or furniture or art pieces. That granddaughter setting up her first apartment could use your sofa no doubt.

There is help to achieve your goal of a simple, sweet life. Many retirement communities have move-in coordinators/interior designers who can help you make these decisions and then arrange for the sale, donation or removal of unwanted items and even recommend reliable packers and movers. They also can aid in decorating your new place, giving tips on combining the old and the new.

Or you can hire a professional on your own to help you glide through the process.

Tips to transition

Leslie Stern of Leslie M. Stern Design, LTD, in Chicago, has been an interior designer for nearly 30 years, helping seniors to transition.

"I have assisted them into moving and downsizing to a smaller house, a condo, independent living or assisted living facility," she says.

The hardest part of downsizing, she adds, is getting clients to part with some of their furniture. "Many times they cannot separate from their belongings."

Stern begins by making a list of all of her client's existing furniture. She then creates a floor/furniture plan of the new interior and selects what is most appropriate for the move with the existing furniture.

"One can use existing furniture as long as it fits in the floor plan comfortably and functionally," she says.

If using existing pieces, Stern says to reupholster or refinish some of them in a different fabric, color or stain to give a whole new look.

To reflect this exciting change in your life, she also suggests acquiring a few new pieces of furniture or artwork to give your decor an exclamation point.

Smaller but nice

To make the most of smaller spaces, Stern says to begin with a color scheme that you can live with and design around. If you stay with just three colors for the whole space, the space will feel larger and less busy. Also, use small prints and solids for your fabrics. "You can incorporate a larger pattern on a focal point piece such as a rug or a key piece of furniture as in the living room sofa," she adds.

Stern says in working with seniors it is key to "create a safety conscious, functional and beautiful environment so they can live independently and safely in their new homes."