

MUSTREAD

Building for Boomers: Guide to Design and Construction

Judy Schriener and Mike Kephardt
McGraw-Hill Construction
2 Penn Plaza, New York, NY 10121;
www.construction.com.
2010. 304 pages. \$59.95, hardcover.

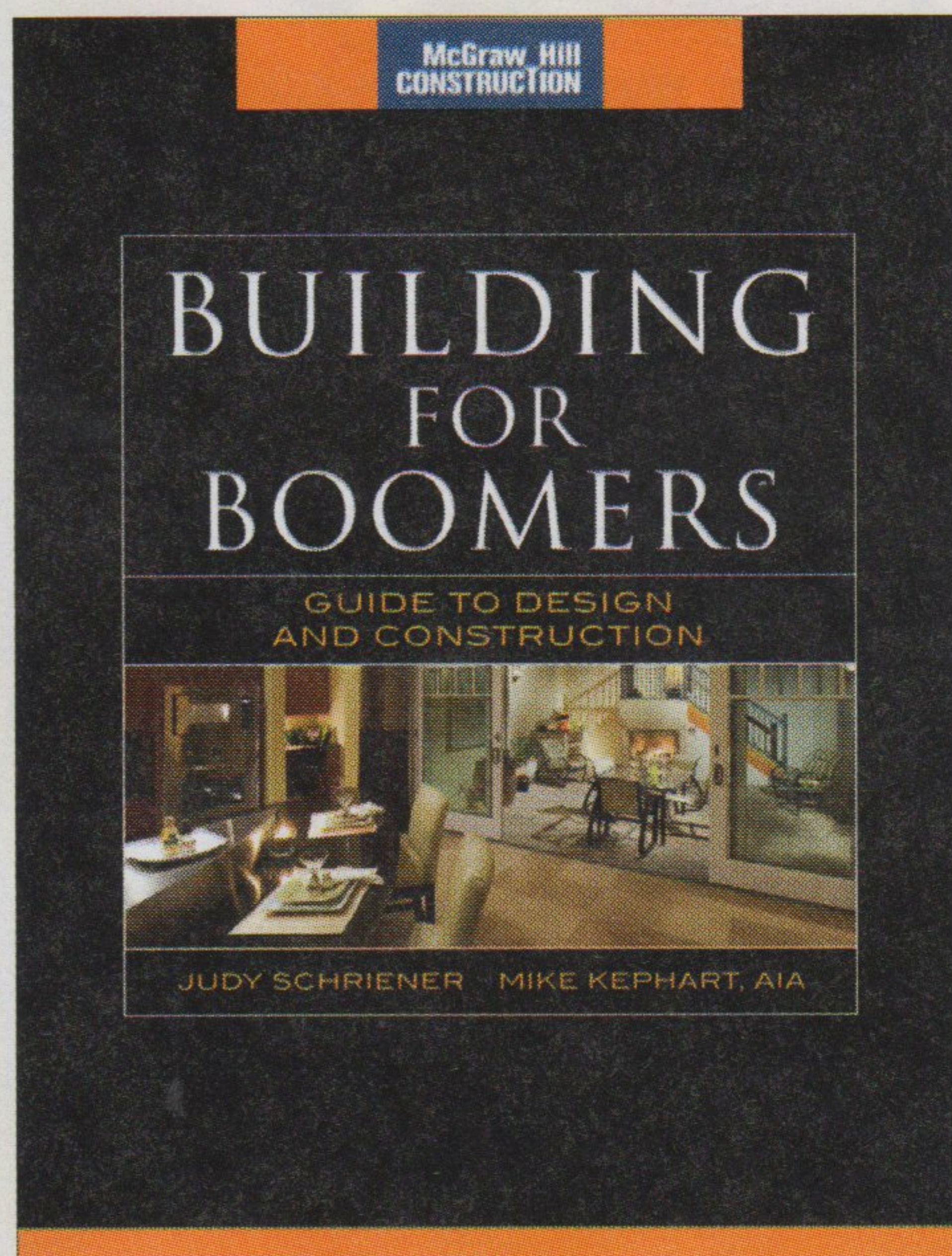
Billed as a resource for architects, builders, developers, and others for meeting the housing requirements and expectations of aging boomers in the United States, *Building for Boomers* is thoughtful and thorough. Reading Judy Schriener's and Mike Kephardt's accessible and engaging text is like taking a class from a couple of terrific teachers on two favorite topics: the baby boom generation and the design of housing for seniors.

Setting the stage for the research, lessons learned, and case studies that form the core of the book, the authors explore the historical context that produced what they label the boomer nation, which they call "the most powerful demographic group our country has ever seen." Some 77 million total boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, have the economic clout to set a new, higher standard for evolving housing products and to create substantial opportunity for the designers, developers, and suppliers who are prepared to meet their needs.

The authors make it clear that boomers as "one big group—don't want one thing." The experiential glue that holds this diverse generation together is freedom. Boomers

have always had the freedom to choose, and as they enter the next phase of their lives, they are not going to give it up. Lifestyle options define them. Even the unexpected challenges presented by the recession that began in 2008, with the combined losses in the value of their 401(k) retirement funds and real estate, are not going to make them any less demanding when it comes to finding the right home for their version of retirement (or nonretirement).

An exploration of the wide range of options and amenities that



appeal to different segments of the boomer market is the heart of the book. Longtime architecture/engineering/construction journalist Schriener and architect Kephardt know the topic well from their years of experience in design and construction and writing about the industry. What they did not know, they have researched in depth, reaching out to experienced developers like Del Webb and Pulte Homes, marketers like Boomertising, and dozens of other specialists and organizations, including the Washington, D.C.-based groups

AARP and the National Association of Home Builders. The result is a rich compendium of case studies, definitions, checklists, and other valuable resources—all in one succinct, easy-to-understand, well-organized volume.

Commencing with a review of the types of neighborhoods that make sense for the "mature" boomer, the authors provide clear working definitions for a variety of terms: age-targeted, age-restricted, age-qualified. They also provide examples and explanations of how other neighborhoods—including urban downtowns, suburban city centers, traditional neighborhood developments, and transit-oriented developments—are attractive to boomers who have no desire to live in an age-segregated community. Among the interesting models on the rise is the university-affiliated retirement community, which the authors see as "ripe for development for boomers, who pride themselves on being lifelong learners, staying young, keeping active, and getting involved in athletic and cultural activities."

The book's direct approach and readable style make complex topics such as universal design, green building, and technology integration understandable. Providing clear guidelines and examples, the authors not only make the case for including these design concepts in a project, but also offer sound advice on how to sell them to potential boomer buyers.

Chapters on housing types—single family, townhouses, condominiums, and apartments—are full of detailed floor plans, lists of features and amenities, cost comparisons, and "dos and don'ts." Of equal importance, the authors explore boomers' changing perceptions of what they need and want as they consider moving to smaller homes or new locations or reconfiguring existing homes with everything

from elevators to accessory dwelling units. A step-by-step review of the design process and a recap of design options help put the comprehensive presentation of various neighborhoods and building types in perspective. With so many options available, the best place to start is with a return to the fundamentals.

"Clearly no single home offering will appeal to all 77 million boomers, given their diverse wants, needs, wealth, and cultural history," the authors write. "This gives you the opportunity to create a niche, a certain type of home or neighborhood to specialize in, rather than trying to build something that's satisfactory to a great number of people but not thrilling to very many." In the closing chapters, the

Providing clear guidelines and examples, the authors not only make the case for including these design concepts in a project, but also offer sound advice on how to sell them to potential boomer buyers.

authors look at current trends and the long view, suggesting questions to ask and steps to take to determine and develop a successful niche in the boomer market.

Having designed successful housing for seniors for many years, I was surprised by how much *Building for Boomers* taught me. It is not your father's senior living. The book is a must-read primer for anyone in development who sees an opportunity in housing a few of the many million of us—soon.

DAN WITHEE, founding partner of Los Angeles-based Withee Malcolm Architects, has been designing seniors' housing communities for over 20 years.