Residential Common Spaces that Really Work

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is this what comes to mind when you think “common space”?
what exactly does common space mean?
let's consider who are we designing for
what are they up to?
talking
surfing, texting, playing games... together
cooking
eating
What happens in college?

- Intellectual Development
- Psycho-Social Development
- Identity Development
Arthur Chickering: Seven Vectors to Adulthood

18 yrs

- Developing Competence
- Managing Emotions
- Moving through Autonomy to Interdependence
- Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships
- Establishing Identity
- Developing Purpose

25 yrs

- Developing Integrity
Massachusetts State College Building Authority

Residential Common Space Study

FINAL REPORT | SEPTEMBER 2006
What makes a Great Common Space

• Proximity, Visibility, & Openness
• Distribution & Variety
• Ownership & Personalization
• Optimally Sized
• Quality of Space
• Multiple Activities in One Space
Proximity, Visibility, & Openness
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Activity is visible from exterior and front desk
Proximity, Visibility, & Openness

...and activity is visible as the elevator doors open.

students have to pass the activity to get to their room.
Proximity, Visibility, & Openness

adjacent to the main stair...

but closed off with glass

not on the circulation route
Proximity, Visibility, & Openness

near the front desk...
but enclosed and isolated
Distribution & Variety
Distribution & Variety

community at a variety of scales: roommates floor mates house members
Distribution & Variety

floor lounges near stairs and elevators

...especially in large buildings & towers, where there is potential for anonymity and isolation
Distribution & Variety

spaces for one or two

...particularly in buildings that are predominantly double bedrooms
Ownership & Personalization
Ownership & Personalization

no-man’s land...

versus spaces that can be owned and personalized by a small group of students
Ownership & Personalization

g, exploring identity
Optimally Sized
Optimally Sized
compact enough to encourage interaction ... but generous enough for a range of activities

use furniture, lighting, & finishes to divide large spaces

not intimate

big & too small

big & undifferentiated
Quality of Space
Quality of Space - Furniture

indestructible and dated

too nice ... hotel lobby

juvenile and inflexible

cool ... but uncomfortable
Quality of Space - Furniture

individuals and groups

supports different activities

comfortable and moveable

lounging versus sitting
Quality of Space - Light

natural light is essential
... but students are nocturnal

• is there enough light to read?
• can the light level be adjusted?

historically appropriate
... but harsh

institutional and overlit

... but will this work at night?
Quality of Space - Acoustics

• is it quiet enough for a conversation?
• is it too quiet?
• does the noise from one activity overwhelm others?
Multiple Activities in One Space
Multiple Activities in One Space

- watch TV
- play pool
Multiple Activities in One Space

bake brownies

study
Multiple Activities in One Space

hang out

meet up
Multiple Activities in One Space

do laundry

snack...and exercise
Multiple Activities in One Space

single purpose rooms serve single purposes well...

...but others feel excluded and won’t join in

...interactions across social groups are less likely
Multiple Activities in One Space

multiple activity spaces...

...allow students to join spontaneously and engage at different levels

...break down barriers across social groups
Pulling it all Together
Putting it all together