

Prince of Wales Apartments

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Project Information

EVALUATION SITE: Prince of Wales Apartments

COMMUNITY TYPE: Independent Retirement Living Facility
58 Independent Living Apartments

REGION: Europe, Malta, Mediterranean

ARCHITECT: Architecture Projects, Malta

OWNER: CareMalta Group, Ltd.

DATA POINTS:

Resident Room:	70 to 98 sq. meters (753 to 1,055 gsf)
Total Area:	140 sq. meters/apartment (1,507 gsf/apartment)
Total Area:	8,108 sq. meter (87,278 gsf)
Project Cost:	\$178.26/gsf
Occupancy:	31% as of June 2007

FIRST OCCUPANCY: December 2005

DATE OF EVALUATION: June 2007

EVALUATION TEAM: Tom Hauer, Mitch Green, AIA, Eleanor Alvarez, Agneta Morelli, M.Sc.,
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Introduction

Malta is a country consisting of a few rocky islands in the Mediterranean Sea just south of Italy. It is a country with little natural resources except the magnificent weather, gorgeous views of the Mediterranean and a strategic geographic location, but it is one of the most densely populated countries in the world and has a colorful and storied history. Over its history, many colonizing countries have claimed Malta as their own including the Greeks, Romans, Ottomans, French, and Italians and, until its independence in 1964, the British. To a large degree, it is this British influence that the Maltese have most readily assimilated into their native culture.

The Maltese culture is strongly religious anchored in the fact that St. Paul was shipwrecked on this island on his way to evangelize in Rome and that the crusaders chose this island as refuge when they were evicted from their unsuccessful attempt to reclaim the Holy Land. That strongly religious culture is imbued in the Maltese approach to elderly care as it is in so many other cultures around the world. The result is that traditionally the elder parents, who may have required health care, received it from their adult children in a residential setting, either their own home or that of the adult child.



In many cultures, this approach to elder care is difficult to modify and the introduction into that culture of a new model of care, and the built environment for that model, is quite slow to be accepted. Prince of Wales Residence is just such an attempt to bring an age restricted independent living retirement residence to the Island of Malta. However, this facility is approaching independent living in a somewhat different manner. While some of the apartments are rented the majority are sold with a transfer of deed, and the marketing has, at least initially, focused on the British population living on Malta.

Prince of Wales Residence is an understated contemporary design that brings structured congregate retirement living to the Sliema district on the north portion of Malta. It is situated in a tightly packed urban area surrounded by narrow streets, more aptly pathways or alleys, and about two or three blocks from the Mediterranean Sea. Although it is contemporary in design, the exterior color palette and style fits easily into the surrounding fabric of apartment buildings with small ground level shops. As one travels past either driving or walking, it is easy not to even notice the building in the milieu of brown stuccoed structures.

Once Prince of Wales Residence is discovered, it becomes clear, in every way, that it is a gem which prefers not to draw attention to itself, but to be comfortable and confident in what it is: a nicely appointed and well designed apartment residence primarily for financially secure European (primarily British) ex-patriots. Many of the residents are the widows of British servicemen who had been stationed on Malta and, as a couple, fell in love with the climate and less hectic pace of life. The unfortunate portion of this formula is that, with a stated purpose of introducing congregate retirement apartment living to the Maltese, Prince of Wales has in fact bypassed this target population and culture in favor of one which is all too familiar with this product.

Providing the design for the first elderly retirement residence in Malta is both a challenge and obligation. The residence must be inviting to the potential residents and, when they become residents, must be a new home for them within a community in which they have lived and enable them to continue with their activities in that community.

Designers' and Operators' Stated Objectives and Responses

Objective: Provide a new model of aged living that is visually and socially acceptable in Maltese culture.

Design Intent: This retirement apartment residence is the first of its kind in Malta and as such, is designed to be easily assimilated into the fabric of the community socially and architecturally in order to ease the success of the project.

Objective: Provide an architectural design that is distinctively Maltese but is also Western in its feel.

Design Intent: On a very restrictive site, a comfortable and inviting retirement apartment building begins to set the standard for this model. The building is clearly Maltese in design, but with the apartment amenities required by contemporary retirees, either those native to the island or those who have chosen the island as a place to live.

Objective: Capitalize on the location of the project for the convenience of the resident in commercial and social amenities.

Design Intent: The building site is conveniently located amidst traditional stores and community amenities. The building design provides convenient vehicular and pedestrian protection for residents and visitors that allows them to be out of traffic when coming to the Residence.

Objective: Integrate the residence into the overall care system of the developer.

Design Intent: This development is a part of a continuum of care established by the developer across Malta. With the density of the urban fabric, these care continuum offerings are by necessity separated physically from one another but are a part of closely integrated program of care.

First Floor Plan



Field Observations: Meeting the Objectives

Objective: Provide a new model of aged living that is visually and socially acceptable in Maltese culture.

Field Observations: Without question, Prince of Wales Residence is the first model of retirement living in Malta. There is also no question that the development of this project was a significant gamble for the sponsor as there was no “track record” for the social or financial model. The developer, however, had significant experience in aged care as the owner and operator of a number of assisted living and nursing facilities in Malta and was quite familiar with the Western style care model from which this project emanates. The developer was very interested in expanding the continuum of care to include independent retirement living which, in turn, would support the assisted living and nursing already in place. Thus the inclusion of Prince of Wales effectively provides a continuing care retirement community (CCRC) without all components being on the same campus. On Malta, a small island at best, the distance between these components is not significant.

The building which houses Prince of Wales is truly a part of the visual fabric of the immediate community in which it resides. Although relatively very new, it appears as if it has been at this spot for the centuries that the surrounding buildings have been. It is indeed of Maltese origin in its design and should provide the residents with a level of comfort at not being overtly obvious to passersby. This, however, is a double-edged sword. As the building blends flawlessly with its environs, it also does not call attention to itself and is easily overlooked even for the visitor who may be purposefully trying to find it. In a situation which requires a somewhat elevated profile in order to introduce a new model of retirement living, a structure which too easily blends in with its neighbors can be a marketing detriment.

Upper Floor Plan



Objective: Provide an architectural design that is distinctively Maltese but is also Western in its feel.

Field Observations: The entry lobby and ground floor common spaces replicate a comfortable Western-style hotel in both building finishes and furnishings, but offer little warmth or a welcoming feel in their choice. During the time when the evaluation team was on the site, these public areas were not being utilized by residents. However, the functionality and economical use of these areas was evident and their design was compatible both with the remainder of the building and the site context of the building.

The Prince of Wales Residence provides apartment layouts that are comfortable in size but not ostentatiously extravagant. Each apartment is fully furnished by the sponsor with contemporary furnishings and the resident only needs to provide their own small decorative touches to make it their own home. While this provides consistency throughout the building, it removes some of the “homelike” feeling from the apartments as resident furniture, in all its variety, is non-existent.

These apartment furnishings, as are those in public and community spaces, is contemporary in design and has a distinctive “Mediterranean” feel to it. As most residents in Prince of Wales are ex-patriots, generally from the United Kingdom, both the furnishings and simple environmental design approach lends a sense of foreign exoticness to the building but is not so foreign as to be uncomfortable or overbearing.

Objective: Capitalize on the location of the project for the convenience of the resident in commercial and social amenities.

Field Observations: Malta is one of the densest concentrations of population in Europe and as such offers an urban European culture that includes small, street level shopping and services on almost every street. It is not difficult, in Sliema to leave one's residence and walk only a few blocks at most to purchase all one needs for the week, including fresh produce and other groceries. This is certainly true for the neighborhood surrounding Prince of Wales Residence.

Somewhat more difficult is maintaining the connections to community that residents may have established over their years of residency on Malta. As Prince of Wales is the first independent living residence on Malta, it is naturally remote from the homes of at least some of the residents who have chosen to live there. In addition, there are no readily noticeable community centers in the neighborhood. Thus the socialization of the residents would tend to be among themselves within the confines of the Prince of Wales building itself. While this is not altogether undesirable, the loss of connection from former friends and neighbors a resident experiences when moving into Prince of Wales may be traumatic, particularly if that is coupled with the recent loss of a spouse.

Objective: Integrate the residence into the overall care system of the developer.

Field Observations: CareMalta, the owner and sponsor of Prince of Wales has a long history of quality long term health care on Malta and certainly has undertaken this development as an extension of their continuum of care in the country. There is an arrangement between the facilities owned and managed by CareMalta to provide nursing care, either as home health care at Prince of Wales, or as residential care in one of their other facilities. This integration of care provision which includes independent living for the elderly is both logical and sensible and has been adequately accomplished with the inclusion of these retirement apartments.



Field Observations: Themes and Hypothesis

Creating Community

Within the confines of such a densely populated country it may be somewhat difficult to truly define what “community” is to its residents. Furthermore, when a new residence is constructed within this fabric of society, surrounded by both buildings and residents who have an established history, it is difficult to even discuss the “creation” of community. The fact is that the community where Prince of Wales Residence is located is a well established community and there may even be members of that community who view the construction of this retirement apartment as an “interloper” into their community. Residents of Prince of Wales are necessarily forced into becoming a part of the surrounding community where the building is located, and, when interviewed by the evaluation team, are not adverse to this prospect and, in fact, seemed to enjoy the vibrancy of the surrounding community.

Within the Prince of Wales Residence, there is also a community which is created, regardless of resident or development sponsor intent. Inclusion of spaces which promote social interaction serve to enhance the smaller community of the building residents. In the case of this retirement apartment building, there are only limited spaces included which might serve this purpose. These spaces include the very nicely appointed main lobby area on ground level along with the adjacent dining area, the two of which flow together. Also included on the second basement level is a small health spa frequented by the residents. This spa includes a pool which is only large enough for stationary pool exercises, as well as a limited amount of space for resident fitness exercising. While there were still a number of vacancies in the building at the time of the evaluation, it was evident that residents tended to avoid these spaces and either remain in their apartments or simply leave the building and enjoy the surrounding community for any social interaction.

Making a Home

The Prince of Wales development is breaking new ground as the first independent living retirement apartment building in Malta, and in that action, attempting to create “home” for residents who are also breaking new ground in their personal lives. These residents have moved into an apartment that is fully furnished exactly as their neighbor’s apartment and are only given the opportunity to make the apartment their “home” by bringing along in their move, smaller items that they may have collected over the term of their life that have significant meaning. The fact that a resident cannot bring favorite or meaningful pieces of furniture into their new homes can only distract from their feeling that this is truly a home.

However, the apartments are comfortable in both size and arrangement and each apartment has access to a small balcony or patio where residents can enjoy the wonderful Maltese climate. While there are full kitchens in each apartment, residents can choose meal plan options that accommodate their retirement schedule and lifestyle. And in the end, the residents who choose Prince of Wales do so with an open mind and an understanding of exactly what living situation in which they will be participating. They must fully understand that making Prince of Wales their own home will be as much, or more, a matter of attitude as opposed to built environmental design.



Environmental Therapy

Prince of Wales was certainly constructed in response to the perceived need for retirement apartments on Malta, but the residency requirement is such that the healthcare needs of the residents are very modest. Thus, this project is intended for older, independent adults who, at least at the time of their moving in, require no nursing needs or assistance with activities of daily living that cannot be attended to by themselves. The therapy which this environment may offer is simply a residence where they can feel secure, where their needs are easily met within the surrounding community and where they may be able to shed concerns about maintaining their own home. These are not necessarily minor issues and to the extent that this sort of freedom is desired, Prince of Wales succeeds.

Outdoor Environment

This development is in an urban area with very little open space adjacent to the site or even within short walking distance from the site. However, the design of Prince of Wales in a sort of “L” shaped building facing the two streets on which it corners provides an opportunity to exploit the void in that “L” shape for the benefit of the residents as open, exterior space. This open space provides, from the upper levels, views to the south toward an inlet of the Mediterranean Sea as well as gentle breezes and protection from the noise and activity of the streets.

Each apartment also has a small balcony that allows for some connection to the exterior by residents. The upper floor has been designed to include not only larger apartments, but substantially larger terrace areas adequate for entertaining, and, of course, the best views. Given the density of the site and the density of the surrounding neighborhood, the design of Prince of Wales takes as much advantage of the outdoor environment as could be expected.

Regional and Cultural Design

One of the major objectives of the design was to compliment the surrounding aesthetic vernacular in order that the building would be a visual part of the community and, it is assumed, be more readily acceptable by the community and by elderly residents of Malta. While the design of the Prince of Wales is not one that is either controversial nor “cutting edge,” it does blend and compliment the neighboring buildings without being overwhelming. In addition, it contains many small contemporary details and finishes that speak both to the future and to providing a feeling of fitting in to the communities past.

Quality of Workplace and Physical Plant

Because this project is an independent retirement apartment, there are only a few staff members and they largely consist of, at the time of the evaluation, marketing personnel. During interviews with these staff, it was stated that the building, the location and the apartments tend to sell themselves, but the largest hurdle to overcome is the fact that this approach to retirement living is a new one to the Maltese culture making potential residents more reluctant to commit to living at Prince of Wales.

The building itself consists primarily of easily maintained and permanent finishes that are consistent with generally accepted design approaches on Malta. Maintenance of the facility’s public spaces is fairly easily accomplished by the minimal staff, however, staff also provides housekeeping services for the resident within their apartments. The building design provides a comfortable, if somewhat remote, staff lounge on the first basement level adjacent to the upper level of the health spa.

Operator Perspective

The owner of this project knowingly took a calculated risk in developing Prince of Wales Residence and relied on educating the Maltese regarding a Western style approach to retirement on the island. This risk was somewhat ameliorated by the large British population in the country who were familiar with this approach, thus the significant number of British residents in the building. Targeting this ex-patriot market may have been a wise move as it allows the time for the facility to penetrate the Maltese culture. Certainly, as Malta becomes a more vital part of the European Union and the adult children of Maltese elderly become more familiar with congregate retirement living for their parents, it will become more successful and could be viewed as an example of forward thinking. Combined with the higher levels of care provided by the owner in other locations, Prince of Wales has its foundation in sensible continuum of care for Malta.



General Project Information

Project Address:

Prince of Wales Residence
 Manwel Dimech Street
 Sliema, SLM 02
 Malta

Project Design Team:

Architect: Architecture Projects, Malta
 Contractor: Building Consultancy Services, Ltd., Malta

Project Status:

Completion date: December 2005

Occupancy levels:

At facility opening date: 5%
 At date of evaluation: 31%

Resident age (yrs):

At facility opening date average: 70
 June 2007 average: 72

Project Areas

Residential Facilities:

Project Element (Metric Units)	Apartments		
	No.	Typical Size (GSM)	Size Range (GSM)
One bedroom units	54	70	65-70
Two bedroom units	4	98	98
Total (all units)	58	5,964	GSM
Residents' social areas (lounges, dining and spaces)		214	GSM
Under building parking area		2,053	GSM
Total gross area		8,108	GSM
Total net usable area (area of apartments)		4,664	NSM
Overall gross/net factor (ratio of gross area/net useable area)		1.74	

Project Element (Imperial Units)	Apartments		
	No.	Typical Size (GSF)	Size Range (GSF)
One bedroom units	54	754	700-754
Two bedroom units	4	1,055	1,055
Total (all units)	58	64,196	GSF
Residents' social areas (lounges, dining and spaces)		2,303	GSF
Under building parking area		22,098	GSF
Total gross area		87,274	GSF
Total net usable area (area of apartments)		50,203	NSF
Overall gross/net factor (ratio of gross area/net useable area)		1.74	

Site and Parking

Site Location: Urban, Mediterranean

Site Size:

Square Meters: 1,250

Square feet: 13,454

Acres: 0.31

Parking:

Type of Parking For this facility	Residents	Staff	Visitors	Totals
Under building	48	0	0	48
Total	48	0	0	48

Construction Costs

Editor's note: No construction costs were provided to the evaluation team for this post-occupancy evaluation.