BALANCING ACT



COURTESY OF THE NEWBURY OF PHILADELPHIA



The Newbury of Brookline blends historic preservation with modern senior living, converting a former college campus into a 159-unit community that fits seamlessly into its historic neighborhood

by Novid Parsi

LOCATED IN BROOKLINE, MASS., Newbury College, a private college founded in 1962, closed its doors in 2019 due to financial difficulties. The former campus is located near the big-city amenities of Boston while tucked within the quiet residential neighborhood of Fisher Hill, one of the largest intact Frederick Law Olmsted-designed subdivisions in the country. HYM Investment Group (Boston) saw an opportunity to convert the site to generate much-needed senior housing for a community where 20 percent of the population is between 60 and 84, according to a statement from HYM. That vision came to fruition when The Newbury of Brookline opened to residents in December 2024.

"Newbury of Brookline sits at the top of Fisher Hill, and it's surrounded by beautiful Colonial Revival homes," says Christopher Wingerberg, senior vice president of signature operations at Kisco Senior Living (Carlsbad, Calif.), the development's operator, which acquired Newbury's original manager, Balfour Senior Living, in 2023.

The former college's Mitton House, a Georgian Revival mansion built in 1896, was preserved and renovated to house independent living units and amenity spaces such as the Pheasant Lounge, with its intricately carved wood molding and stately central fireplace.



But the project also came with challenges. For starters, the site was only 3.87 acres. HYM wanted Newbury of Brookline to offer 159 units, including 81 independent living, 38 assisted living, and 40 memory care units. At the same time, the design team had to preserve the former college's Mitton House, a Georgian Revival mansion built in 1896, for amenity and residential spaces. Renovating the structure would help meet the ownership team's sustainability strategy (reducing embodied carbon by minimizing demolition and new construction) and aesthetic objectives (maintaining the historic property's architectural character).

"That's a lot of program to get on a site of that size," says Sargent Gardiner, partner at Robert A.M. Stern Architects (New York), which served as the design architect, with Finegold Alexander Architects (Boston) as the architect of record.

In effect, the design team had to meet competing goals: A new building would have to accommodate a large number of residential units and amenity spaces on a relatively small parcel, yet remain within the scale and look of the surrounding historic neighborhood. Plus, the team had to keep about 40 percent of the site as open space to meet Fisher Hill permit regulations, while also providing ample parking. To pull off this balancing act, the design team turned the project's challenges into opportunities.

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>
> *– Sargent Gardiner, Robert A.M. Stern Architects*

Neighborhood inspiration

For a new building that could fit 150-plus units while avoiding a massive, out-of-place tower, the design team drew inspiration from the central structure and flanking wings of Mitton House and neighborhood residences. The solution is an F-shaped, 190,000-square-foot new building rising to six floors at its center, then stepping down on either side to four then three floors as the F's lower stem and upper arm approach the residential streets. The shingled gambrel roofing, while emulating traditional Fisher Hill homes, also helps camouflage the building's large mass.

"It's important that the building is 6 stories at its center because our client needed a certain amount of programming to make the project economically viable," Gardiner says. While the six-floor central structure enables a greater density of units, the stepped-down massing "gives the building a pleasing domestic scale at the street level," he says.

The team took further advantage of the building's tall central height by placing the Skyline Lounge on the top floor, where residents enjoy views of Brookline and Boston. The tall wing in the middle of the new building also centralizes the offices, stairs, and elevators, including a service elevator that travels through the development's three kitchens. "The centralization of the staffing really helps" with resident care, Wingerberg says.

Addressing the residential units, the project team located the memory care residences and restaurant on the second level of the new building, while the assisted living residences and restaurant are on level three. In addition, care stations for nursing staff are located in the memory care and assisted living units' hallways, closer to the residents. The independent living residences are spread throughout the two buildings, and all the Mitton House residences are independent living.

Thanks to the unit density enabled by the six-floor central structure, the team could leave more of the small site as open space. The building's shape creates two courtyard areas: one beside Mitton House that serves as the main

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Opposite: The outdoor landscaping, by Verdant Landscape, emphasizes native and drought-tolerant species among the site's many preserved trees.

Left: The resident rooms feature traditional six-over-one windows that offer views of the community's generous open space.

Below: Even the indoor, solar-heated saltwater swimming pool area boasts detailed trim and paneling seen throughout the community.

arrival and departure area, and the other connecting two wings via a covered walkway. With the building's generous number of windows, including the new building's glass-encased solarium, "there's always a sense of the outside," Gardiner says, noting that many of the upper-floor independent living units have walkout terraces.

Taking advantage of the site's declining slope at its north side, the building provides 40 ground-floor, covered parking spaces hidden behind lattice screens. "There's no unsightly parking garage on-site; it's just a natural part of the building," Gardiner says. Additional outdoor parking spaces sit behind the building.

Keeping the old with the new

Preserving Mitton House helped retain the project's connection with the Fisher Hill neighborhood—and, in the process, helped gain the community's buy-in. In 2020, voters approved a zoning change to convert the former campus into senior living. After demolition of some existing structures in 2021, construction broke ground in 2022. "Keeping the historic Mitton House spoke to our intention of preserving the charm and history of the Fisher Hill neighborhood," Wingerberg says. "I think the town was very appreciative of the fact that we were trying to fit the surrounding neighborhood."

But that appreciation was hard-earned: "Mitton House was a mess when we came to the project," Gardiner says, explaining that the building had been divided into small offices and dorm rooms for the college. The team carefully restored Mitton House elements such as extensive dark wood paneling, stone fireplace mantles, and wood windows.

The 20,000-square-foot Mitton House now offers the first-floor Pheasant Lounge as well as six residential units on the second and third floors. The units are served by a newly built elevator encased in a Georgian Revival-style tower that looks like a natural extension of the historic building.

While restoring Mitton House, the interior design team also took inspiration from it. "Mitton House's millwork inspired numerous millwork elements in the new building," says Jennifer Mortensen, senior designer at Pembrooke & Ives (New York), the interior design firm on the project. For example, Mitton House's traditional window and door casings are paired with wall paneling to signal the importance of its spaces, and that approach informed the trim application in the new building.

The new building's units, three dining areas, and even its indoor, solar-heated swimming pool area all boast detailed trim and woodwork, creating continuity between the old and new buildings. The main dining room incorporates



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The upscale amenities include an art deco-themed, pink-walled beauty salon with a glass chandelier.

a mix of applied panel molding and lattice detailing, referencing playful millwork designs that would have been common in homes built around the same period as Mitton House.

Offering both variety and consistency

Rather than a single, imposing mass, Newbury of Brookline's "very flexible vocabulary" of various styles such as Queen Anne and Georgian Revival, as Gardiner says, allows for a variety of spaces such as porches, terraces, bays, and covered walkways—similar to a series of houses.

That sense of domestic variety extends to the interior: With so many units and amenities fitting into a complex floor plan on a tight site, about 120 of the 159 units each have a distinct floor plan. That spatial variety delivers the added bonus of giving residents a homelike feeling. "Our members [residents] enjoy having a home with a unique layout," Wingerberg says.

Like the exterior, Newbury of Brookline's interior design by Pembrooke & Ives achieves aesthetic variety in line with the surrounding community. For instance, some units feature port windows that evoke the area's yacht clubs and nautical history—a theme also seen in Harbor Bar, which resembles the interior of an old merchant ship.

For all their variety, however, the units share an American-heritage style consistent with residents' former Colonial Revival homes in the affluent Fisher Hill neighborhood. For instance, traditional molding profiles for the door and window casings reinforce a familiar residential language. "Brookline homes quote Georgian Revival, Colonial Revival, and other popular Victorian styles, and that definitely translates to the Newbury's interiors," Mortensen says. "Our design goal was to create a space that allowed people to feel very comfortable and at ease coming from their beautiful private home into this new, beautiful residential community."

The numbers attest to Newbury's success: In December 2025, after one year of operation, the project exceeded expectations with 64 percent overall occupancy, Wingerberg says, including 95 percent occupancy for independent living, 35 percent for assisted living, and 28 percent for memory care.

Having aesthetic variety within a larger American Revival motif helps residents feel like they're in a space as special as their own home, Wingerberg says. "A lot of modern buildings reflect a simpler, minimalist design. The Newbury is very expressive and bold, and our residents appreciate that it's different from other senior living communities," he says. e/a

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project details

Project: The Newbury of Brookline

Location: Brookline, Mass.

Completion date: May 2024

Owner: Affiliates of Welltower and Kisco Senior Living

Total building area: 208,000 square feet

Total construction cost: Not disclosed

Cost/sq. ft.: Not disclosed

Architect: Robert A.M. Stern Architects

Executive architect: Finegold Alexander Architects

Landscape architect: Verdant Landscape Architecture

Interior designer: Pembrooke & Ives

General contractor: Dellbrook/JKS

Engineers: BLW Engineers, Inc. (MEP), L.A. Fuess Partners (structural engineer), Horsley Witten Group (civil engineer)

Project details are provided by the design team and not vetted by Environments for Aging.

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