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## Arthur “Chuck” Oakes III, CAPS

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### *Residential Enhancements that add “Snap & Sizzle, Pop & Wow”*



We're living longer, or shall I say, “enduring” for a greater length of time! Due to medical advances, yes, we are surviving longer, however, some conditions and ailments are becoming more prevalent as a result of these advances. Some retirement communities are fabulous, if you can afford to be there. However, I believe there should be more options for us, as we age. Options which preserve personal dignity and respect. Here are some techniques I have used in the development of “sensory supportive spaces”.

As a child, I spent three years living outside of Los Angeles, where I was exposed to many cultures, including those, which embrace nature and respect for elders. I now incorporate many of these early impressions into my philosophies and residential enhancements. About five years ago, my parents decided to stay in place and do the best they can where they were. Consequently, I set out to evaluate and enhance what I lovingly refer to as “*The Oakes Homestead*” with safety, security and enjoyment in mind.

Consider some of these ideas— to create *Sensory Supportive Spaces*

1. **Water features** reduce stress and blood pressure while cleaning the air! In addition to adding ions to the air, they also add humidity, great for indoor plants and our sinuses!
2. **Soothing music and nature sounds** can reduce stress and anxiety, even during Sundowners Syndrome! (“The demon of darkness”)
3. **Aromas** can also affect our moods and can promote wellness. We have used lavender in the hospital and at home to enhance the air. Try it on pillows to help get to sleep.
4. Handrails, grab bars and similar devices can often be made from oak and stained to blend into the home, rather than looking like a healthcare facility!
5. My Mom had Age-Related Macular Degeneration; hence the use of color throughout the home was important. Out of every window was a “*point of color*”, a “*celebration of color*”. Also, Dad’s Memorial Garden (he died in 2006), complete with 5 ft sailboat statue, can be seen from various vantage points around the house...even from Mom’s wheelchair!
6. **Miniature railroad trains**, of all sizes, can be used to stimulate and enhance memory recall for dementia and just be fun for everyone! Some of the trains can actually be ridden!  
(Great for visiting grandchildren—see insert)

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Until recently, I was working on a miniature railroad that would run along the wall in Mom’s bedroom.

7. **Lighting** can be supportive, decorative, directive or entertaining. We used directed lighting to focus Mom’s limited vision towards her commode in her bedroom at night. As her abilities declined, the light changed from manual to automatic.



8. **Creative cuisine** can be challenging! To prepare and serve nutritious meals that our elders will taste and hopefully, enjoy, can be difficult. Remember that taste buds also age; try various spices to enhance the mealtime experience. Consider adding vanilla, or other extracts with ice cream to supplements, such as Ensure, Boost or your own milkshakes. It kicks it up a notch!

**In summary,** This is merely a sample of some of things you can consider for your home. I encourage you to think out of your box and be creative as you support your aging loved ones. They are *treasures* to be cherished and respected. Design a supportive living space that utilizes all the senses.



***Chuck Oakes*** is a ***Certified Aging in Place Specialist***, author, speaker and consultant on aging matters for companies and families. He’s a member of two committees at the United Nations and an advocate for seniors. His book, ***MAKING YOUR HOME SENIOR-FRIENDLY***, explores creative ways to design a “sensory supportive space” with universal appeal. For information on his products, services and programs, call 860-644-1128, visit [www.chuckoakes.com](http://www.chuckoakes.com), or email [Chuck@chuckoakes.com](mailto:Chuck@chuckoakes.com).