

By John Stephany



Home Improvement Planning Tips for Self Sufficient Living

According to a recent AARP survey, the vast majority of mid life and older Americans want to remain living independently in their own homes and communities for as long as possible. The survey found that seven in 10 of those who are able to make changes to their homes have made at least one modification to make it easier for them to get around. Additionally, 85 percent of those polled said they have already made simple changes to their homes such as installing levered door knobs, safety bars in showers and hand rails on both side of staircases.

As the population ages, more and more homeowners are remodeling their homes with the intention to live in them as long as possible or making their homes functional for an aging parent. There are several ideas available to help make your home accessible to aging or disabled family members. It may be as simple as installing levered faucets in kitchen and bathroom sinks or as major as widening doors and adding ramps to accommodate walkers and wheelchairs.

Quite often, when planning a home remodel, my customers take into consideration an aging parent and/or what designs might benefit a self-sufficient lifestyle as they age.

Living on the ground floor is a possibility everyone should plan for. A ground floor plan that converts easily into a full time living quarters is ideal. A living room can become a full time master bedroom with the addition of doors and converting a half bath into a full bath by adding a wheelchair accessible shower stall or a door accessible bathtub.

The best new trend in kitchen design is called Universal Design. Universal Design has nothing to do with fashion and everything to do with function. It's about making a kitchen adapt to all the people in the household that use it. Universal Design has grown from the efforts to accommodate the disabled but it doesn't mean lowering every counter to wheel chair height. Instead, it might mean lowering a section of counter and raising another so an older and younger person can prepare meals simultaneously. The idea is to create a kitchen that suits as many different people with different needs as possible. For example, a knee space under a sink or a cook top allows access to a wheel chair. The same knee space can be used with a stool for an able bodied person to sit while working, avoiding back strain and fatigue.

Too often, poor lighting makes a kitchen hard to use. Many kitchens have ample ambient or surrounding light but not enough task lighting can be the cause of eye strain and headaches. Under cabinet lighting like fluorescent, low voltage incandescent or halogen can solve that problem.

It is also important to take into consideration the height of appliances and storage cabinets. A built-in microwave can be



placed at a level accessible to everyone. Some manufacturers have new designs such as Sharps Microwave Drawer that provides a solution to accessibility. Many refrigerators and dishwashers are now also available with drawers. In the case of storage areas the prime reaching is between the waist and the shoulder, up to an arms length away. If possible, pantry cabinets or a full pantry work best to gain access to normally hard to reach items.

These concepts have worked so well, the National Kitchen and Bath Association recently revised its design guidelines mainly to incorporate Universal Design. They recognize the ability to care for aging parents or remain in one's own home for as long as possible is a top priority for many people.

Here in Huntington Beach, we are fortunate to have support for our seniors such as the Michael E. Rogers Senior Center and the Senior Outreach Center offering a multitude of senior services. Their transportation program provides door-to-door service to medical appointments, shopping centers, and any other locations in Huntington Beach. These types of services along with careful home improvement planning make Huntington Beach the perfect city to work, play and plan for a lifetime of self-sufficient living. **HB**

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