



Roger Wade Photography unless otherwise noted

UNIVERSAL DESIGN

DESIGN FOR LIFE

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No one has a crystal ball to predict the future, but if you plan your new home following the basics of universal design, you'll be prepared for the years ahead. Building a home from scratch means you can design it to be accessible and safe for your family and friends, no matter what their age or ability. An accessible home may also have a strong advantage when it comes time to sell.

Whether you are building a separate in-law or granny suite, or an entirely accessible home, here are factors to keep in mind as you work out your plan.



THE BIG PICTURE

One-floor living makes it easier to use a wheelchair or scooter. Eliminating or reducing stairs is important inside and outside. Can a person sleep, prepare food, do laundry, bathe and access the outdoors from the main floor? Can the yard and outdoor living spaces be enjoyed by someone with limited mobility?

Add space in critical areas whenever possible. In the kitchen, make sure a wheelchair can reach every appliance. If a center island is planned, could it be easily removed in the future if more traffic space is needed? Bathrooms are another area where turnaround space is a must; do plan to build in extra square footage when possible. A roll-in shower and roll-up sink are good choices. Grab bars that resemble towel bars can be installed without making the bath look too “institutional,” or you can add the bracing required for grab bars in the future when you’re building your bathroom now.

Hallways and doorways should be at least 36 inches wide. The garage should be large enough to accommodate a van with a wheelchair lift.

If you are planning for a separate suite, ensure privacy for everyone by including a seating area in the suite and doors to separate that space from the rest of the house. A kitchenette, laundry facilities and outdoor living will be welcome additions to the suite, if your space and budget permit.



THE DETAILS

Many small working parts need to be reconsidered to make a home functional for everyone.

- Comprehensive lighting will help anyone with failing eyesight navigate around and perform tasks in the home. Plan for night lighting where appropriate.
- Position electrical outlets and switches so they can be reached by someone seated in a wheelchair.
- Take care when positioning shower controls and include a hand-held shower head.
- Plan for hard flooring materials in places where carpeting or rugs would make it difficult to roll a wheelchair or scooter or present a tripping hazard.
- Place storage within reach and include slide-out shelves where feasible.
- For safety, consider adding an exterior door to an accessible bedroom.
- Avoid knobs or faucets that need to be turned; lever-style hardware is easier for people with arthritis to use.
- Casement windows that are opened with a crank may be easier to operate than windows that have to be lifted up.
- Consider using smart technology so that the home's systems can be operated by remote.
- For older residents or those with limited mobility, maintaining a warm home may be critical.
- Adding south-facing windows will help augment heat, or auxiliary heating systems could be installed in key spaces.

An internet search for ADA guidelines will help you cover all the bases in your new, fully accessible home.



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