



HOME BUILDERS ASSOCIATION
of Dayton

Designing Your New Home for the Times – Universal Design

By Marty Coates, President
Home Builders Association of Dayton

Even if retirement is a few years down the road, it's not too early to start planning for your home of tomorrow. While you probably have made arrangements for your financial future, you may not have given much thought to making the most of your next home's design. But it's important for your home to accommodate anybody, regardless of age or ability. How can you accomplish this? With universal design.

To most visitors, a home built with universal design looks like any other home, yet homes with these features enable residents to live comfortably and stay in their homes even as they age. That's good news for your parents, grandparents and older friends and family members. It can make things easier for children as well.

Here are a few general universal design features to look for in your new home:

- Sloped sidewalks and stepless entries that create easier access to the home
- Lever door handles to make it easier to open doors – even when carrying groceries, a small child or other parcels
- Wider doorways and hallways
- Non-slip flooring with level thresholds
- Front-loading washers and dryers
- Garage door openers
- Lighting and interior finishes that illuminate common paths
- Electrical outlets that are a minimum of 18 inches above the floor
- Light switches that are 42 inches above the floor

Universal design features also are a perfect fit for the kitchen, bath and practically every room in the house. Some of the features include:

- Single-lever faucets – many attractive lever faucet designs exist in the market today

- Pulls, instead of knobs, on cabinets and drawers – again, stylish pull hardware is getting more and more popular
- Countertops at a variety of common heights (usually 30, 36 and 42 inches)
- Raised dishwashers and clothes washers and dryers – easier on the back
- Roll-out shelves or drawers in lower cabinets – these also help keep your kitchen supplies organized
- Glass doors or open shelves in upper cabinets – a hot design trend right now
- Side-by-side refrigerators and freezers
- Raised toilet heights as an option – a lot of manufacturers offer these
- Shower seats

As noted above, more and more manufacturers are designing attractive universal design products. Everything from stylish grab bars in a variety of finishes to skylights and in-glass blinds that operate at the touch of a button are readily available, and truly benefit people of all ages and abilities.

Universal design has many ergonomic - the science of making things people use easier and more efficient - benefits and can make a home “transgenerational,” allowing the entire family to get together and enjoy themselves with ease. Universal design also makes it possible for people to recuperate from illness or injury, and to “age in place” as they get older, which may allow them to stay in their homes longer.

Contrary to popular belief, universal design won’t add much to the cost of your home. The base price will increase only slightly. However, if you wait until after your home is built, it becomes far more expensive to modify an existing home. Universal design not only can make your life better today, but it can save you money down the road.

When planning your next home new purchase, look for universal design features. They’re as important as your retirement fund.

For more information on universal design and aging-in-place or to find a certified remodeler, visit www.nahb.org/aginginplace .