

REMODELING WITH *Universal Design*

Where do you begin?

The thought of remodeling a home is an exciting adventure for most, but the excitement of planning a project can quickly turn south when details pile-up into a mass of important decisions. Most of us apply a shotgun approach to our decision-making philosophy. We want it yesterday and we want it to be perfect.

It's common for people to rush their remodelers through a project so they can begin enjoying their new space. Then they wonder why their neighbor's recently remodeled home took twice as long to complete, but it's three times more functional. Let's think for a second...maybe the neighbor and remodeler actually took time to plan a design that met their short-term and long-term goals.

THINK OF SHORT-TERM AND LONG-TERM NEEDS

People typically make plans based on what they want or need today and simply assume they will never change. The truth is our lives change so rapidly, it's hard to know what to plan for.

That's where Universal Design comes into play. Gaining an understanding of Universal Design is the first step in learning how to remodel using Universal features.



Surveys indicate that 84% of Americans prefer to stay in their home the rest of their lives, as opposed to moving to an alternative living option. The sad reality is that most homes have not been designed to accommodate people throughout all stages of their lives. A large portion of that 84% will be forced to move from their home because they can no longer navigate stairs or may risk falling by stepping over the edge of the bath tub to take a shower.

UNIVERSAL DESIGN ADDRESSES ALL AGES, SIZES, AND PHYSICAL CONDITIONS

The concept of Universal Design has been around for years, but still it seems like a foreign language to most. Universal Design addresses all ages, sizes, and physical conditions of each family member and accommodates them through their life span.

Many people have Universal Design features in their homes and don't even know it. The most common Universal Design applications are:

- First floor master bedroom and bathroom
- First floor laundry room
- Accessible appliances and storage in the kitchen
- Curbless entry showers with built-in seat/ shower wand
- Lever handles on doors and plumbing fixtures
- Slip resistant flooring surfaces
- Abundant natural and artificial lighting
- Handrails in areas of elevation change
- Grab bars in wet areas
- Electronic safety and security devices

It is important to understand that you do not have to implement all of these features to have a Universally Designed home. In some cases there just isn't enough room to put a master bedroom and bathroom on the first floor without an addition. However, it may be possible to stack storage closets on the first and second floor that can later be converted to an elevator shaft. This solution may provide storage in the present and access to the second floor master bedroom in the future.

Each home possesses a unique opportunity for Universal Design, but it often takes the eyes and experience of an expert to identify problems and solutions. There are many factors that impact the solutions an expert will offer for Universal Design, such as: your ideas for use of space; the structure itself; building codes; specific restrictions in your neighborhood; property set-back guidelines; and your budget.

PERSONAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT

So, before you rush things and end up with a remodeling project that doesn't fit your lifestyle five years from today, it's important to set goals and perform a personal needs assessment when remodeling with Universal Design features.

- How will my goals effect every family member in my home?
- How long do I wish to live in my home?
- How will the dynamics of my family change?
- Will I have visitors who have physical disabilities?
- Are there extended family members that may be living with me in the future?

EVOLVE YOUR PLAN TO ACCOMMODATE YOUR NEEDS

Once you have completed the assessment, determine how your remodeling plans need to evolve to accommodate your needs. If there is more to plan for than you can comfortably handle, involving a professional remodeler may benefit. It's easy to flip through a magazine and get inspired by images of dream homes. But remember, those images are other people's dream homes. The most successful remodeling project comes from solid planning, which means using your own dreams.