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GardensLiving

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Minx Boren

Catching
Rainbows



Best Version Media

Cover photo by Lynn Studios

Building/Renovating With Universal Design

By JoAnn Munro, ASID

Creating environments that can be used by everyone, regardless of age or abilities, is called *universal design* (UD). It can enable someone who uses a walker to carry a full laundry basket through a hallway, or a petite person to make bread at the kitchen counter.

The time to consider UD elements (e.g. wider hallways, varying height counters in kitchen or bath for standing/sitting) is at the blueprint stage of new construction or renovation. UD not only addresses Americans with Disabilities Act compliance, but enhances overall design and marketability. A home that you never have to change, regardless of anyone's age or abilities, is a great selling point!

UD principles mean common sense, smart design for everyone. For example, eliminating different levels from outside to inside (such as steps or changes in elevation) or at least adding contrasting color or material (like bullnose or a pattern to bring attention to level changes) can be both an effective and attractive design detail.

Setting bath vanity and kitchen cabinet heights based upon needs is also a smart, as well as eye-catching, UD choice. Consider this example: A 36" counter is too high for kneading dough; a 29"- 30" would not only be more appropriate for the baker, but a low counter is also great for



kids or the disabled, and is the perfect height to use as a desk as well. Using butcher block or a contrasting color or material to set the low counter apart from other surfaces adds visual interest.

There are lots of other great UD elements for use in a kitchen as well. For example, a double

drawer dishwasher is more accessible than one with a pull-down door. Base full-extension cabinet drawers, not doors, facilitate finding items at the back. Sinks with cabinet doors that open to a space underneath can allow a wheelchair to slide underneath.

Baby Boomers, for whom "aging in place" is often important, need to plan accordingly. Since bathrooms are the site of most accidents, supporting walls of showers and toilets to permit future installation of grab bars is a good idea. Installing curbless showers (like the one pictured) results in

improved accessibility with a clean -- even luxurious -- look. A built-in shower bench or wall-mounted chair that adjusts flat to the wall or seat is a great UD element to consider. Cantilevered sinks offer greater height flexibility, and wall-hung vanities or toilets are not only simpler to clean under, but also make navigation with a walker much easier. Simplicity is an important facet of UD. Choose levers instead of knobs for doors and faucets, so that you can use any part of your hand to open a door or turn on the tap. You might even consider a hands-free auto faucet.

When possible, keep hallways 48" and doorways 36" wide, and install adequate lighting to eliminate shadows, remembering that as we age, our eyes' lenses yellow, and we require more light.

And remember, UD doesn't just make life better for the current residents; it can also help visiting parents, children, or people with broken limbs or other physical limitations. A zero-step entrance and 32" minimum doorways, and a main floor bath that is accessible to all are key elements of UD. ■



CREATING A Drop Dead Look without getting killed in the process



SOUTHEAST
I N T E R I O R
DESIGN INC.

JoAnn L. Munro, ASID

SoutheastInteriorDesign.com

(561) 745-6919

Florida License Number #ID0001827

Company Lic. # IBC 000180