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Comfort for a LIFETIME

FUNCTIONAL DESIGN STANDS THE TEST OF TIME

BY HANK MATHENY, ASID, IIDA, CAPS

In the spring issue of *CityScope* magazine, I outlined four key design trends to look for in 2010. The trends included:

1. Using optimistic colors for in-home décor
2. Designing with accessibility and utilizing aging-in-place techniques
3. Incorporating global style with a modern twist into interior designs
4. Focusing on sustainability and the use of renewable products

As the only Certified Aging-in-Place Specialist (CAPS), ASID designer in the Chattanooga area, I would like to address the second trend: aging-in-place design. Also known as universal design, this trend is coming of age – literally.

Aging-in-Place Design

Despite previously being thought of as institutional, unattractive and only used in the case of physical handicaps, this once misunderstood design trend is now flourishing in light of America's aging population. Manufacturers are clamoring to offer universal design products that are both beautiful, as well as highly functional.

By definition, when we speak of aging-in-place design (also known as "universal design"), we are speaking of products and design techniques that are useable by all people without the need for adaptation or specialized design. These techniques and products offer many advantages. First, they are easy for everyone to use, including those who have physical



Aging-in-place design makes a home easier to live and work in for people of all ages and abilities, while also providing great style.

limitations. Additionally, they allow homeowners to remain in their homes longer with full use and enjoyment of their space (thus the aging-in-place definition). Today, with baby boomers making up the largest segment of the population, being able to remain in the home longer with better use of the environment is not only a pleasure, but in many cases, a necessity.

Benefits of Aging-in-Place Design

Using the basic principles of universal design when remodeling or designing a home can add daily enjoyment and use, as well as resale value to a home. It can be the thing that sets a house apart from others and makes it more appealing to a larger market.



Simple aging-in-place design elements, such as this Lazy Susan cabinet, are easy to incorporate into a home and provide ease of use.

Many aging-in-place elements can be easily added or changed, such as hand-held shower heads.



A final advantage of universal design and aging-in-place techniques for baby boomers is versatility for their changing lives. It can make their homes safe for everyone, including younger children or grandchildren, aging parents and eventually themselves.

Aging-in-Place Design Techniques

Here are a few principles and requirements for universal design and aging-in-place techniques that will not only make your home safer, but easier to live and work in, while maintaining a great style. Remember, great design is great style with terrific function.

These principles and requirements can be placed in two categories: immediate fixes and future fixes. Immediate fixes are those that should be taken care of when an elderly, disabled or young person moves into a home. Future fixes are those that can wait until you start a larger-scale remodeling effort. Both are easy to implement as you begin to redesign and remodel your next room or house. Many of these ideas cost under \$100.


Immediate Fixes:

1. Tape down rugs.
2. Add handrails to both sides of your stairs.
3. Replace your shower head with a hand-held version on a vertical bar.
4. Add Lazy Susans, roll-out trays or pull-out racks to the inside of your kitchen cabinets.
5. Replace door knobs with door levers and cabinetry pulls with "D"-shaped pulls.
6. Add grab bars to your shower.
7. Add task lighting under your kitchen cabinets.
8. Change countertops to those with rounded corners and matte finish to reduce glare.
9. Install sinks with side-mounted faucets for easier reach and lever handles for easier grip.

10. Replace toggle light switches with illuminated rocker-type switches.
11. Replace toilets with chair-height toilets.

Future Fixes:

1. Design one entry into the home with no steps.
2. Make hallways four feet wide and create five-foot diameter turns around spaces in all major rooms.
3. Use wood or non-slip porcelain tiles on floors.
4. Add more windows/skylights to increase ambient light. We need an increase in light as we age.
5. Replace cooktop with an induction cooktop – it is safer and easier to use.
6. Design your shower with grab bars, a built-in seat and no curb.
7. Replace the washer and dryer with elevated front-door models.
8. Replace your oven with a side-door model and place a pull-out shelf below.
9. Place light switches lower and electrical outlets higher for easier reach.
10. Create work surfaces of various heights that are accessible to all users, including those standing or seated.

By using some of these techniques and design principles, you will create a more comfortable, easy-to-use home for everyday use. Additionally, you will broaden your home's appeal to future buyers, while accommodating those family members (older or younger) with physical challenges. After all, what is a home if it is not safe and comfortable and able to be enjoyed by all who live there? 

Would you like to have your design dilemma considered for an upcoming issue? Just send an e-mail to designerguy@haskellinteriors.com.

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