

## RISE ABOVE THE CROWD WITH LEADING EDGE DESIGN CONCEPTS

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The number of product manufacturers and developers reaping the benefits of incorporating the principles of universal design is rapidly increasing as homebuyers continue to discover their benefits. Among the advantages are enhanced safety, comfort, health, convenience, and freedom of choice for people of all ages and abilities.

Current traditional designs are based on research conducted on the functional abilities of an "average," fit, young male adult. In reality, however, people are diverse in their height, weight, strength, flexibility, mobility, stamina, vision, hearing, coordination, and cognition. Our functional abilities are constantly changing as we age and are affected by changes in our health. Universal design is designing for diversity and changes in human functional abilities.

### **Organizations take notice**

Because of the profound impact that universal design has on quality of life, multiple governmental, public service and mainstream media organizations are now promoting it.

"At AARP, we promote appropriate, affordable, and accessible housing, and other supportive community features and services designed to enhance the ability of residents with diverse needs to remain independent and actively engaged in community life," says Julie Uritus, the coordinator for AARP's new Livable Communities: Housing Options program. "Proper housing design, housing mix, and land use are important components

of a Livable Community. Homes can be designed and retrofitted using universal design principles to accommodate both residents and visitors with a range of functional abilities.

"By designing communities within walking distance to civic life and services, and by providing a variety of housing types to accommodate a range of incomes and family units, communities can help older people age in place while they maintain both their independence and their roles in community life," she says.

### **Manufacturers offer seamless integration**

The principles of universal design are applicable to the design of all products, structures and communities. In the beginning of my universal design consulting practice in the early 1990s, I frequently had to shop for the one ADA-compliant toilet each manufacturer had to offer. Now, several manufacturers have embraced the concepts

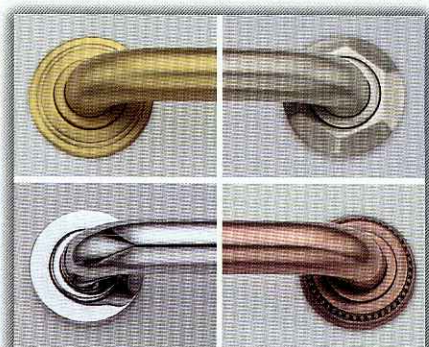
of universal design, developing entirely new product lines to meet the demand.

One of these manufacturers is Kohler®, who has introduced a complete line of Comfort Height® toilets. These toilets — ranging from 17 to 19 inches in seat height — are more comfortable for people who are tall or have arthritis in their hips and knees. Kohler® is just one of the companies meeting the growing demand for a more responsive product, while also improving marketability by using positive terminology.

However, do not assume that a high-rise toilet is appropriate for all residents. This

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product may not be appropriate for a lady of short stature whose feet would not reach the floor to assist with maintaining her balance while seated. One size does not fit all. Offering a high-rise toilet as an option would be recommended, but only in some cases.

For other universal design products, Ginger USA and Watermark have added decorator grab bars to their bathroom accessory sets, providing an aesthetically attractive and functional item that blends into the bathroom seamlessly. Installing a backing into the walls around a toilet is recommended in universal design homes in order to allow for convenient installation of grab bars in the future. Offering the grab bars as options allows the buyers the freedom to choose when they want to install them. Not just for the mature market, installation of attractive grab bars in all showers is recommended to reduce the risk of slip and fall injuries to people of all ages.

#### Choosing products wisely

In many cases, currently available products are adequate for use in universal homes, but only if they are carefully chosen and installed in the most ergonomically advantageous locations. Correct placement helps to reduce

obstructions, hazards, and stress to the back and joints, while enhancing usability.

Remember that most universal design features are not easily apparent. The most successful homes are designed for the spectrum of human differences but do not have the look of a specialized home, which would only appeal to a small portion of the population.

#### Universal design is a team effort

The principles of universal design are best implemented if they are adopted at the beginning of project planning, beginning with the land use plan and site engineering. It takes the whole team to seamlessly incorporate the principles of universal design throughout the development process.

The land planner, architect, engineer, interior designer, sales and marketing professionals, production manager, purchasing agent, superintendent, and subcontractors all need to be educated about the principles of universal design and how it affects their individual responsibilities. And it is the role of the universal design consultant to synthesize the principles of universal design into usable specifications for each member of the team.

**LEFT**  
Ginger USA offers decorator grab bars in several of their bathroom accessories sets for the total "decorator" effect, which enhances safety without detracting from the beauty of the bathroom.

**ABOVE TOP**  
LASCO Bathware has been producing "Freedomline" showers for many years, and the company is continuing to improve the line both functionally and aesthetically to meet the growing demand in the residential market.

**ABOVE BOTTOM**  
Watermark has redefined and transformed grab bars into a decorative element that coordinates with faucets, towel bars and bath accessories. Available in multiple finishes, sizes and trims, Watermark's ADA-approved grab bars ensure convenient, comfortable, stylish, and safe home environments for everyone.

50+

## THE BOTTOM LINE

To quote Ralph Waldo Emerson: "...to leave the world a bit better,...by a redeemed social condition; to know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived. This is to have succeeded." Increase profits and make a difference in many lives for decades to come by incorporating universal design into the homes that you build today.