

YOUR BUSINESS

Creating a presence
on YouTube

YOUR CLIENTS

Tips for landing new
customers

YOUR TEAM

Cell phone allowance
vs. ownership

YOUR PROJECTS

Ways to market your
universal design skills

hanley wood

remodeling

YOUR TOOLBOX FOR SUCCESS

Lifelong Design

For Greg Buitrago Jr.,
of Hammer Contractors
Design & Build, designing
for multiple generations
is standard practice



Anatomy of Aging

By understanding how our bodies change over time, we can do a better job of designing our built environment to accommodate a broader range of physical abilities.

Vision

Changes may start in our 30s, but accelerate in our mid-50s. Peripheral vision shrinks; we have trouble seeing objects clearly at different distances and in dim light; correctly judging distances; distinguishing certain colors.

Hearing

Gradual hearing loss starts in our mid-40s. It becomes harder to hear higher frequencies — particularly when there's background noise. One-third of people 65 to 74, and half of those over 75, experience significant hearing loss.

Touch

As we age, reduced skin sensitivity may affect our ability to distinguish changes in temperature or movement, to feel pain, and to react to different stimuli.

Muscles

Strength and endurance diminish over time, beginning with loss of muscle mass around age 30. As muscles become weaker, more rigid, and less flexible, movement and gait become slower, more limited, and unsteady; fatigue occurs sooner. All these changes increase the risk of injury.

Brain & Nervous System

Subtle deficits in memory may start in our 40s. One third of people experience more significant loss by their 70s, after which 10%+ develop Alzheimer's disease.

Lungs

Maximum lung capacity may decrease as much as 40% between the ages of 20 and 70.

Joints

With less fluid to lubricate joints, cartilage erodes and joints become stiffer — particularly knee, hip, and finger joints — leading to pain, inflammation, stiffness, and sometimes deformity. Most people over 60 experience some joint problems, whether it's minor stiffness or severe arthritis.

Bones

Bone replacement slows with age, reducing density and making bones more susceptible to fracture — occurring more quickly in women during and after menopause. Overall height often decreases as vertebrae become less dense, curving and compressing the spinal column into a stooped posture.



Lifelong Design

Universal design is convenient for everyone —
not just grandma and grandpa

Universal design. Accessible design. Aging-in-place. All of these terms describe a design philosophy that recognizes the need for the built environment to accommodate people of different sizes, shapes, and abilities, and strives to remove obstacles to easy use by current and future occupants.

Some solutions are as simple as wider doorways and lever-handle locksets; others are tailored to particular physical constraints and the needs of caregivers. Still other solutions anticipate the effects of aging on vision, range of motion, and strength.

Many believe these solutions should become standard practice, but it's not always easy to design for an eventuality that most homeowners don't want to think about.

| BY MARK A. NEWMAN |
WITH STACEY FREED

Baby Boomers: the Age of Denial

Most remodelers who are doing universal design work agree that **the biggest obstacle with clients is strictly psychological.** And if the client is a baby boomer, there is even more pushback.

“Baby boomers live in the age of denial,” says Mindy Mitchell, a Certified Aging-in-Place Specialist (CAPS) design consultant with Sun Design, in Burke, Va. “They’re waiting for a catastrophic event before they do something — and then it’s not as well thought out and it’s more expensive because it’s knee-jerk.”

Mitchell adds that at 60, her age actually helps her in pitching universal design because her clients view her more as a peer. “As a boomer, I know we are prone to denial,” she says. “However, having the ‘what-if’ conversation with clients before a catastrophic event occurs gives them the time and space they need to make thoughtful decisions about

how they want to live into the future. Do it now, do it later, or do it differently. These are the three choices aging clients face with their homes.”

Andrew Shore, president of SeaPointe Construction in Irvine, Calif., has also run into very active clients who don’t want to admit they are growing older and could benefit from universal design features. **“We have to subtly educate them and talk about grab bars in showers and how access is going to be if they continue to live in the home,”** he says. “It’s more subtle, but you can get them interested and point out the difficulties they might have maneuvering around the home.”

If the client is an avid skier or other type of athlete, you could ask about injuries and how difficult it would be for access if they took a fall on the slopes. “They may not be permanently handicapped, but they may have a disability for a few months while they recover,” he

says. “They can admit that [without having to think in terms of] being permanently disabled.”

“When we start the initial design process with our clients, we always talk about the fact that none of us have crystal balls to be able to foresee what our health and mobility challenges may be in the coming years, so it’s important to try to plan for whatever may come to pass,” says Joanne Chappell-Theunissen, co-owner of Howling Hammer Builders, in Lansing, Mich. “I’m always surprised and saddened to see large remodeling projects with huge investments where universal design practices have been totally ignored in favor of aesthetics alone.”

Beyond Grab Bars

To get around any potential prickliness from clients, Russell Glickman, owner of Glickman Design Build, in North Potomac, Md., broaches

HOUSING TRENDS

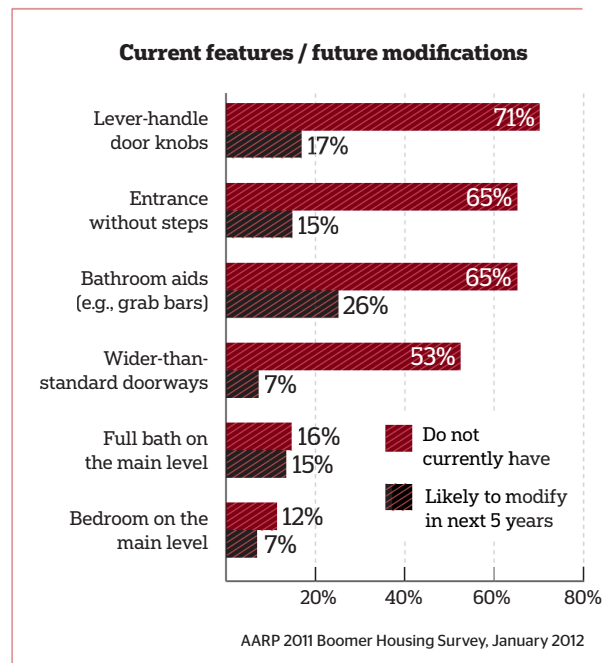
The Stay-Put Generation

Forty more years of being 40 pretty much sums up the attitude of baby boomers, says Jeanne Anthony, senior project manager in AARP’s education and outreach department.

In a survey of 2,000 homeowners age 45 to 65, AARP discovered that while 80% of them have definite ideas about remaining in their current homes for at least 10 years, they aren’t actively planning for how their homes will accommodate them as they age and as their families grow or contract. “Boomers already have chronic illnesses and are starting to slow down a little — but are not admitting it,” Anthony says.

The chart at right shows boomers’ responses to questions about their current homes and the features that are lacking — a great insight for remodelers to learn about potential modifications. No-step entries, wider doorways, and bedrooms and full baths that are accessible without climbing stairs are projects for which remodelers will likely be needed.

But Anthony suggests being proactive: vary counter heights, plan for grab bars by sheathing bathroom walls with plywood, and stack closets so you can convert them later to elevator shafts. “Make these practices part of your routine.”



the subject by asking prospective clients how long they plan to stay in the home — especially if they are of a certain age.

“I ask them if they’re thinking about resale value and things other people might want if they go to sell the house,” he says. “If they’re staying forever, then that’s an obvious need for universal design. And if they’re planning on selling it, then they should consider universal design, due to the aging population. People seem more receptive for other people’s needs, so that tends to be more of a selling point.”

And that seems to be the way in for many remodelers: Tell the potential clients in as subtle a way as possible, **“Well, of course you may not need these features, but with an aging population, the next resident might.”**

Glickman says he puts the idea out there and that it typically is not a turn-off; people seem to like the



idea of making their house more viable for anyone who might be interested in buying it a few years down the road.

Aside from being a benefit for future homeowners and adding value to the home, Greg Buitrago Jr., co-owner of Hammer Contractors Design & Build, in Olney, Md., says that he promotes the familial aspect of universal design to clients who might be on the fence.

“Whether it’s making the home

Breaking Barriers

Co-owners Greg Buitrago Jr. and Jorge Castellanos of Hammer Contractors Design & Build, Olney, Md.

easier for their grandchildren or their parents to navigate, **we point to universal design as a way to help with family life and performing day-to-day activities,**” he says. “For boomers, we go up a generation and talk about their visiting parents or even their grandkids. We emphasize

MULTIGENERATIONAL HOUSING

Families are continually growing and contracting. Now a poor job market has many college graduates moving back home, and fewer homes are being formed by young adults.

“We think this trend is going to increase,” Anthony says. “Wouldn’t [clients] like a way for [their grown children] to be on their own in [the client’s] home?”

People of various ethnicities and cultures, too, are interested in having space for aging relatives. And there is a “certain percentage of grandparents raising children.”

All of which lead to different opportunities for remodelers. Universal design features support people of all ages, Anthony points out.

60%

live with their spouse or partner

15%

live with their siblings

2%

live with their grandchildren

25%

live with their parents or their in-laws

15%

live with their children more than 18 years of age

30%

live with their children less than 18 years of age

AARP Survey: Multi-Generational Housing Patterns, 2009

Photo: David Sharpe



that it's better living and safer living.”

Buitrago says that for Hammer Contractors, universal design is not just a selling point to close on the lucrative boomer market. “I’ve seen, from my own parents, how those features literally make life possible,” he says. “When you combine those learning points with the universal design mentality — function with beauty — you’re really able to take care of the client and empathize with them more so than just giving someone grab bars.”

Biggest Challenges: People & Products

Most remodelers and contractors agree that the biggest challenge in pitching universal design is the mindset of potential clients who

All Access

Russell Glickman, president of Glickman Design Build, North Potomac, Md.

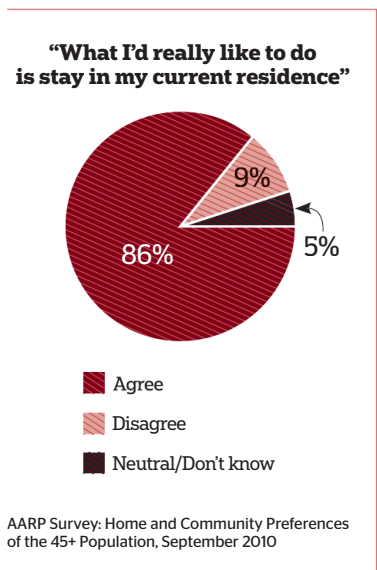
don’t want to admit they will not remain able-bodied forever.

When Molly McCabe, owner of A Kitchen That Works, in the Seattle area, met with a client who was over 65, she subtly suggested planning for the future.

“I noticed that the hallways, in particular the one from the master bedroom to the master bath, were narrow,” she explains. “I suggested, since it was only framing, that the client consider widening the hallway. The homeowner’s response was, ‘I’ll deal with that when the time comes!’ Needless to say, I received an email canceling our in-office appointment for the following day. I can’t say that I was disappointed.”

Shore says that his biggest challenge was his own staff’s initial reluctance. “At the beginning, there was a little bit of hesitancy with the guys wondering why they need [universal design certifications] or how it’s going to help our business,”

COMMUNITY PREFERENCES



“These community aspects are important to me”

66%

being near friends and/or family

46%

being near somewhere where it's easy to walk

32% being near work

being near good schools 39%

65% being near where one wants to go

48%

being near church or social organizations

21%

being near transit (bus or rail)

Photo: David Sharpe

he explains. “But once we started designing and selling jobs, they saw the benefit of having the knowledge to help the client. It was a pretty quick transformation in a relatively short period of time.” Adding that even more of SeaPointe’s employees have gotten CAPS certified as the number of jobs has increased.

For Pam Miller, owner of Alchemy Construction & Consulting, in Santa Rosa, Calif., her clients and her staff were onboard with universal design solutions. **The obstacle that she ran into time and time again was the lack of functional and attractive options for barrier-free installations.**

“Where I live, you see the same option for a curbless shower pan in almost every kitchen and bath showroom,” she says. “And my clients didn’t want it; they all wanted more barrier-free options, but they didn’t want something that looked like a big piece of plastic that had been cut out of a hospital.”

Her solution? With the help of a few of her subcontractors, Miller opened up a small kitchen and bath showroom that specializes in attractive and safe bathing products. “We all felt a passion for this and just went for it,” she said.

Added Costs

Aside from being in denial about how useful universal design could be, regardless of age or ability, another stumbling block is the perceived uptick in costs. Will universal design improvements cost more?

“It depends,” Glickman says. “If you’re already knocking out a wall and putting in new doors in a newly built wall, putting in a 3-foot door versus a 2½-foot door is not a big deal,” he explains, adding that, “if you have to widen existing doorways with hardwood floors around them, reframe them, adding a new header, maybe moving electrical wires, and



Virtual Remodel

To learn more about helping clients adapt their home for retirement, see REMODELING’s **Home for Life online tour**, which transforms a classic suburban family house into a convenient, energy-efficient, low-maintenance home. You’ll see:

- Before-and-after floor plans
- Designs for better use of space
- Insights from experts
- Innovative products

homeforlife2012.com

Also, “like” Remodeling Home for Life on Facebook for news and info about universal design.

NEW PERSPECTIVES

No one wants to be reminded that they are aging or that they may face health complications in the future. AARP’s survey found that the terms **“universal design”** and **“aging in place”** were either vague or had negative connotations.

A new perception is needed. **AARP is working to coin the term “better living design,”** since many of the features of these design principles are meant to help people of all ages, and they are transparent.

“If you have a no-step entry,” Anthony says, “it’s not going to register with a visitor that they just walked in without climbing stairs.”

While there may be some individuals for whom an illness will mean certain “institutional” features in their home, for the most part, the new view, as seen in the photo at right (bottom), marries style with function and can accommodate any price point: no-step shower entry, attractive grab bars, a sink under which a wheelchair can fit, enough space between features to allow for wheelchair transfers.

Anthony suggests **educating with visuals that clients can understand.** “It would help to ensure that livability features become standard, since consumers don’t know to ask for them,” she says. —*Stacey Freed*



Fresh Potential

High numbers of AARP survey respondents will likely modify their homes in the next five years — more work for remodelers. Educate clients with visuals (like those at left) to help them understand the potential of “better living design.”

Remodeling 911

When a home has to be adapted — usually made accessible — after a client is injured or has taken ill, a remodeler must act quickly. Longacre Construction, in Lewisville, Texas, had to remodel the home of a client who had broken his neck in a biking accident. The resulting injury left him a quadriplegic in a wheelchair that he operates with his head.

According to company vice president Carol Longacre, the job had its share of challenges, but she says it was one of the most rewarding things she has ever done. “I don’t normally do production, but I knew I just couldn’t hand it over,” she says.

Among the upgrades were new wooden floors throughout the home, wider doors, ramps leading to the house,



a completely refurbished bathroom, lifts in the bedroom, and offset hinges on doors where the doorways could not be widened.

Longacre Construction got the job on the last day of November, and the client would be back at his home on Christmas Eve, which meant extremely long days for the crew — up to 12 and 14 hours, plus weekends.

“I run a lead carpenter system, and it was a little easier for me because the guys are my employees,” Longacre explains. “That allowed us the flexibility and the quality control to get the job done. I don’t think for a second that I would have the same quality control over subs.”

She adds that, because the workers were all Longacre employees, she did not feel the need to “babysit” them.

Another unique aspect of this job was the opportunity to consult with a physical therapist who explained what adjustments were needed based on the client’s wheelchair. “The therapist said it was nice to have the time with a contractor because they don’t normally get that,” Longacre says. —*M.A.N.*



then you have to patch the floors and refinish ... well that’s a different story. That’s more expensive.”

Buitrago adds a few more specifics in terms of potential cost increases and homes in on bathrooms, saying that the costs could go anywhere from 50% to 70% higher — especially if you’re upgrading a standard master bath into a wet-room system and making the toilet more user-friendly.

“You might have to relocate the commode and a lot of the plumbing, and that’s where you’ll see a big jump in cost,” he says. “But if you’re doing an addition, the universal design upgrades can be incorporated for a marginal cost increase.”

“Do it now, do it later, or do it differently. These are the three choices aging clients face with their homes.”

MINDY MITCHELL, SUN DESIGN

In-House Spa

This remodeled bathroom by SeaPointe Construction allows ease of use regardless of ability.

To upgrade a kitchen, however, Buitrago says the increased costs could only fall in the 5% to 10% range depending on the custom cabinet system you’re using or how far down the spectrum from universal design to accessible design you need to go.

Shore is quick to add that, like pretty much every remodeling project, planning is key to keeping costs reasonable and within client expectations. “A well-planned universal design can minimize cost and provide homeowners with a safe, secure environment and the ability to stay in their homes for many years to come,” he says. “Which I think is a pretty good return on investment.”

Trickle Down

Just as it is a scary and unfamiliar territory for clients, universal design could be an unwelcome specialty to subcontractors who are used to doing tiling and plumbing, and framing doors, etc., a certain way.

But while there are new competencies needed for universal design, most subs have been entirely receptive and open to learning new skills.

Resources

- **Accessibility Design Tips From The Design Linc:** Info on where to find products, technical information, and other resources. Accessible design tips for the bath, kitchen, bedroom, and exterior. designlinc.com/destips.htm
- **American Association of Retired Persons (AARP):** The substantial website offers access to articles, courses, and other resources for home modification and accessible design. aarp.org
- **American Foundation for the Blind:** Resources and information about all aspects of life for people who are blind or visually impaired. afb.org
- **Center for Universal Design:** Safety standards, accessibility guidelines, products and services, technical assistance, and other resources relating to universal design. design.ncsu.edu/cud
- **Disability Resources Monthly Web-Watcher:** Disability-related resources on the Internet selected by Disability Resources Monthly staff and arranged by subject. disabilityresources.org/ARCHITECTURE.html
- **Idea – Center for Inclusive Design and Environmental Access:** A university-based program aimed at improving the design of environments and products by making them “more usable, safer, and appealing to people with a wide range of abilities.” The website has lots of articles, videos, and training info. ap.buffalo.edu/idea/



Shore says that his subs have had a largely positive reaction to SeaPointe undertaking universal design mainly because they saw the project managers take to it so readily.

“Once they saw that the project managers were onboard, they realized that we were taking it seriously and it was taken from design to implementation and installation pretty quickly,” he says. “It was really key having several guys who saw the benefit [of learning universal design] and were willing to get the education and the knowledge.”

Glickman concurs with Shore and simply says that regardless of regular or universal design, his subs “are happy to get the work,” but he adds that **the subs are not experts. “They pretty much need to be supervised by us, but they’re happy,”** he says. “They have no reluctance to take on those projects at all.”

Waterproofing a bathroom for a curbless shower or a wet room is where a lack of experience can really show, Glickman says, adding that his team has had to fix the work of other people who “did not have that down to a science.”

If you are just embarking on a universal design project for the first time, Glickman recommends hiring a certified universal design expert as a consultant. “It would be wise to bring someone in as an

What’s Cookin’?

Believe it or not, this kitchen by Sun Designs is filled with universal design elements.

adviser on the first few jobs,” he says. “[Your subs] might be able to do the work themselves but you may need to send your tile sub to a training class.”

After the first several jobs, Glickman advises anyone embarking on universal design projects to get certified through NAHB (Certified Aging-in-Place Specialist or CAPS) and Access Home Improvement of America (Certified Environmental Access Consultant or CEAC).

But the sooner that subs, salespeople, designers, and everyone else involved in the remodeling field get onboard, the better prepared everyone will be for the impending future.

As vital as universal design is now, Shore says that it is going to come to a head in the next 10 to 20 years. “We’re seeing it now with our parents,” he says, “but it’s going to be more personal as it becomes us, our family, our friends, and our spouses who will be affected by this. It really is a no-brainer that everyone should get involved with this because that’s where the market is going.”