



Make Your House More Livable

Little Ideas for BIG Convenience

by John P. S. Salmen, AIA

A universally designed home is one that supports people throughout their life span. Its features provide comfort, safety and choice for all users. The following are universal design ideas that you should consider incorporating into your next home renovation project. Some features are easily installed, others complex; but all will make a difference in your ability to fully enjoy your house now and in the future.



This kitchen design can accommodate all kinds of users -- kids, parents, grandparents; people who like stand to do dishes and those who prefer to sit...

Replace knobs with lever hardware. There are now hundreds of hardware options on the market that can retrofit or replace old or worn-out tub, shower or sink hardware. Single lever faucets work best where you want easy access to tempered water such as for hand and face washing in lavatories or at tubs or showers. Dual handle lever faucets (with a common spigot) can still provide mixed temperatures, but give faster access to all cold or all hot water that may be desirable in a kitchen or laundry.

Install grab bars to help get in and out of the shower or tub. One of the most dangerous places in the home is the entry to tubs and showers. Unless you have a no-step shower, the act of crossing the edge, curb or threshold, without the aid of your glasses, in bare feet, on wet and

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It's Not You, It's the House

Leon Harper, Relentless in His Pursuit of Universally Designed Housing

by Denise Hofstedt

When he started his career as a public servant in California in the 1970s, Leon Harper never envisioned himself as one of the country's leading experts on universally designed housing.

Yet today, the one time parole officer is the "go to" guy for bringing universal design housing into communities, states and beyond. His relentless activism over the years has given him an opportunity to see the positive impact that universal design has on peoples' lives

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slippery surfaces is a formula for a slip and fall. A securely installed short vertical or horizontal grab bar within reach gives you something to “hang-on-to” as you make the dangerous crossing. Many bathroom hardware manufacturers include grab bar options in their product lines. Did you know

that by using wing-its, you can securely install a grab bar almost anywhere? (www.wing-its.com)

Add a covered entry, and better yet, include a shelf or bench.

Nothing is worse than standing in the rain outside your entry, fishing in your bag for your keys while struggling with a bag of groceries at the end of a long day. A covered entry gives you and your guests a place to comfortably and safely enter your home. And a convenient shelf, ledge or bench gives everyone a place to rest their packages while they find their keys, or wait for someone to answer the door.

Eliminate steps on at least one of the paths into your house. Ramps can often be unobtrusively integrated into decks, porches patios or landscaping, allowing occupants to easily and

safely roll things in and out of the house. Luggage, trash barrels, strollers, wheelchairs, carts, medical equipment, dollies for moving furniture, are all allowed when the home has at least one no-step entry. It's best to keep walkway slopes less than 5% (1 in 20) and remember that ramps steeper than 8.3% (1 in 12) are difficult for people with disabilities to use, though short rises (of up to 3 inches) can be slightly steeper.

Replace a kitchen base cabinet with a rolling cart. When remodeling your kitchen, leave

a 30-inch (or wider) finished opening below a counter instead of a base cabinet and either have your cabinet maker build or purchase a rolling cart to fit the space. Depending on the configuration and materials, rolling carts can be used

for: table service, extra work surface and storage, tea/toast carts, trash recycling and compost bins, or even breakfast in bed. And when the cart is pulled out you have a work surface with knee and toe clearance that allows comfortable use by a person seated on a stool or in a wheelchair.

Replace your clothes washer/dryer with a front loading model on a raised base. Aside from being general-

ly more energy efficient than top loading

washers, the front loading models eliminate the need to bend and reach when moving clothes from the washer to the dryer.



This curbless shower includes grab bars that are seamlessly integrated into the design.

Incorporate amenities into your home that will make it your safe, comfortable retreat for years to come.

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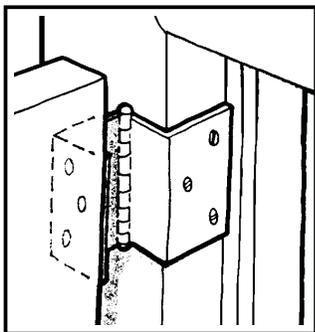
Lighting, Doors, Sinks and Entrances that Make Life Easier

? PROBLEM: Table lamps and free-standing room lighting is often operated by small switches on the electrical cord or head of the fixture that require tight grasping or fine finger dexterity.



Tip: Many hardware retailers carry a “touch lamp” adapter that screws into the light bulb socket. With each touch to any metal part of the fixture, the lamp turns on, goes through a gradation of lighting intensities and then turns off.

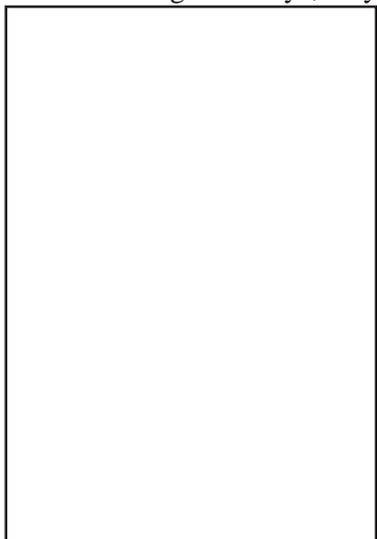
? PROBLEM: Some existing doors may be a little too narrow to meet the 32” clear width dimension required by accessibility codes or the actual dimensions of a person’s wheelchair.



Swing clear hinges

Tip: Replace the existing standard hinges with swing-clear hinges that will increase the clear opening of the doorway to the maximum width available between the door stops on the frame.

? PROBLEM: Some existing doorways, may have inadequate clear floor area, free of the door swing to allow a person with a walker or a wheelchair to easily open the door.



Tip: Replace the swinging door with a pocket door that slides into the wall.

? PROBLEM: How can lavatories accommodate both short and tall people?

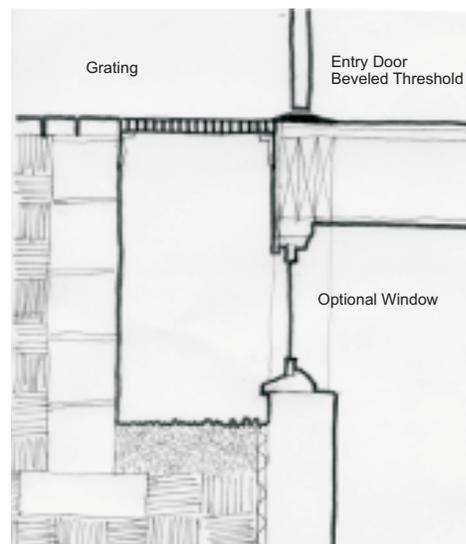
TIP: In the “Home for the Next 50 Years” kitchen and bath designer Jane Langmuir, AIA has developed designs that provide dual height lavatories in the bathrooms. In one bath, a design concept of John P. S. Salmen, AIA provides a shallow lavatory/counter with a high utility sink in a single concrete counter.

In a second bath, a lavatory is undermounted in a low solid phenolic countertop with an adjacent surface mounted lavatory on top of the counter for tall users. The designs make hand-washing easy for a variety of users and makes plant watering and maintenance a cinch.



? PROBLEM: How do you create a no-step entry for a visitable house?

Tip: Installing a trench and cover grate (with openings small enough to keep from trapping a wheelchair wheel or a high heel shoe heel) bridging the distance between the walk or stoop and the entry door threshold keeps the earth away from the wood portions of the house frame, while presenting a no-step entry and a shoe sole cleaning opportunity. Expanding the trench and grate can provide a light well for a below grade room under the entry space.



Leon Harper, from page 1

and allowed him to build a vast network of colleagues interested in bringing universal design to residential settings.

His Start

After a brief stint as a parole officer in the early 1970s, Harper jumped at the chance to work in the newly created Los Angeles County branch of the state Office on Aging. He loved it and was good at it. He went on to become the President of the California Association of Area Agencies on Aging and eventually President of the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging.

Because of his knowledge and network, Harper was hired to work as a Deputy Director for the 1981 White House Conference on Aging. In 1985, he went to work with AARP as a senior housing specialist. Despite many years of progress in promoting universal design, including, AARP changed direction and reduced its efforts in the area of universal design in housing. Harper didn't miss a beat and launched his own consulting business helping consumers, local governments, builders and companies understand and embrace livable communities, aging in place, universal design, home modification and visitability.

According to Paula Terry, Director of the Office for AccessAbility at the National Endowment for the Arts, Harper is "a most remarkable man, who, through his passion and work for universal design, has raised the awareness of designers and builders across the country concerning what UD encompasses, and its importance to the quality of everyday life."

She notes that he has the ability to get people to work together. In 1995 Harper organized an UD committee at AARP. It was composed of 12 key public and private groups, as well as staff within AARP, that met on a monthly basis to share information and plan coordinated events. "This resulted in many wonderful efforts," says Terry. "Including work with [National Association of Home Builders] to develop UD criteria for remodelers, and award winning, model UD homes in Atlantic City and Richmond."



Leon Harper

Adaptation

Over the years, Harper has seen it all. He's experienced housing booms and busts and watched a blur of housing trends come and go. Through it all, his message has been the same: "It's not you, it's the house."

"We have built houses in this country for so long that are defective," says Harper, referring to "Peter Pan" housing, built as if people never grow old and their needs never change. "People start to think they are getting shuttled off because of their personal and physical deficiencies, when actually it's the design of the house that's the problem.... It can be a disabling environment."

Read more of this article and discover more universal design ideas, visit: www.universaldesign.com

"People start to think they are getting shuttled off because of their personal and physical deficiencies, when actually it's the design of the house that's the problem.... It can be a disabling environment."

Leon Harper

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