

remodeling

YOUR TOOLBOX FOR SUCCESS

A HOME
FOR LIFE

Helpful, healthy
homes for all
ages, all stages



Forget-Me-Not

Don't overlook these thoughtful touches from the Universal Design Living Laboratory to make your next home work for everyone in it / by [Lauren Hunter](#)

When Rosemarie Rossetti lost the use of her legs in a freak accident in 1998, she and her husband Mark Leder focused on getting her well. Their experience has become a critique on traditional homebuilding and an impressive exercise in true universal design. After quickly discovering that the home they lived in would never work for Rosemarie's new needs, the couple was further discouraged by the dearth of universal design options offered by area builders. Their solution was to become general

contractors themselves and build the ultimate universal design custom home.

Today, the Universal Design Living Laboratory (UDLL), located in a suburb of Columbus, Ohio, is Rosemarie and Mark's home and office, and an education center where builders, architects, and the public can learn how to create homes that work for all of their residents, no matter their age or ability. I recently toured the UDLL and found a number of details worth sharing. Here are nine of my favorites.



1. ISLAND HOPPING: MULTILEVEL KITCHEN ISLAND

Bakers have lauded the benefits of a lowered section of counter space, which offers better leverage for kneading and mixing. But multilevel countertops are also an ideal addition to any universal design project. In the UDLL kitchen island, a raised portion works well for Mark who stands well over 6 feet tall, and also makes room for easy-access undercounter appliances without seeming out of place. Another section of the island stands at traditional 36-inch height, while a lowered section is ideal for seated cooks, homework, or casual dining.



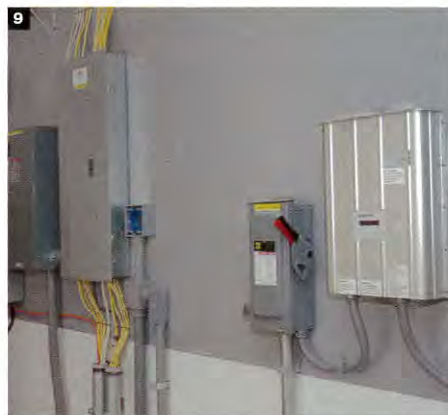
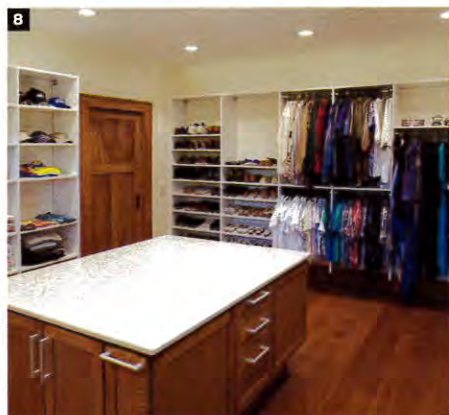
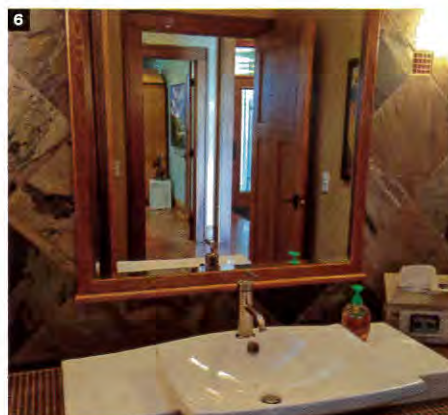
2. OUTDOOR ENJOYMENT: PLANTER BOXES

Adjusting to life in a wheelchair made Rosemarie's longtime love of gardening a challenge. Mark says that the chair-height planters the couple selected for their outdoor living area bring the plantings to a convenient height for Rosemarie to roll up to and tend any time she likes. The landscaped backyard also incorporates paved ramps and pathways so the couple can enjoy all of its amenities together.



3. SEE THROUGH: MULTILEVEL PEEP HOLES

Traditional entry doors have peepholes positioned at a height between 60 and 66 inches. Consider adding a peephole at closer to 48 inches for wheelchair users, children, and homeowners who are short of stature. Alternatively, you could let the oversized door glass do the work for you. In addition to providing daylighting as a universal design benefit, the glass in this ProVia door has clear panes for viewing at three different heights in the door.



4. COOKING CONFIDENCE: EASY-ACCESS BURNERS

ADA-compliant ranges put cooktop controls at the front of the appliance, so that users can access them easily without reaching over hot surfaces. The UDLL takes things a step further by installing individual burners side by side in the cooking area, eliminating the problem of hard-to-reach back burners. With this configuration, Rosemarie can easily and safely reach each cooking element, as well as vent hood controls.

5. SAFE AND SOUND: KNOX BOX

In emergency situations, first responders will gain access to a home in the most efficient ways possible. If this means breaking down a door, so be it—unless you have a Knox Box. This mini safe works similarly to the lock boxes that Realtors use when showing a home. The fire department has a key to the Knox Box, which stores your emergency house key inside, allowing them to open a door properly rather than breaking it down. As Mark points out, the last thing homeowners should be thinking about in an emergency situation is how much it will cost to replace a shattered door.

6. VANITY FAIR: NO TILTED MIRRORS

Another example of a lowered counter height is in the front hall bathroom. In addition to providing accessibility, Mark says, the 32-inch vanity height lets them bring the bottom of the mirror lower as well. The result is a lovely design that avoids awkward (and often institutional-looking) tilted mirrors.

7. SHOWER CONVENIENCE: LOWERED NICHE

The master shower features a wall niche about a foot above the floor, where it's convenient for Rosemarie to store toiletries and other shower essentials. The lowered niche makes for easier access than the niches or shelves that are usually placed midway up the wall, or bulky racks and baskets that hang from shower hardware.

8. DRESSING FOR SUCCESS: AN EXPANSIVE CLOSET

This closet and dressing area was placed between the master bathroom and living areas. The wide aisles and wood floors make it easy to maneuver for guests and household members alike. Between the customized storage unit with easy-to-grasp handles and the lower-level hanging racks, Rosemarie enjoys ready access to most of her things. The room also contains the house's washer and dryer. Both are front-loading units, again providing ready access while seated.

9. POWER PLAY: ELECTRICAL PANELS IN THE GARAGE

Electrical panels are often installed in the basement or some out-of-the-way corner, but homeowners who can't make it up and down the stairs may not be able to access them if a breaker trips or the power goes out. In the UDLL, Mark solved this problem by moving the panels to the garage and installing them at a wheelchair-accessible height. The garage has a no-threshold transition so Rosemarie can move through it easily and check the panels if necessary.