What is the Process in Order to Build a Universal Design Custom Home?

Multiple Perspectives on Access, Inclusion, & Disability Conference
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Selecting a Home Site

Homeowner Considerations:

- Location within personal preferences (distance to airport, family, character & style of houses in the neighborhood, ability to bicycle, price range of other houses, reputation of builder, amenities (horse stable, ponds)
- Wooded vs. non-wooded
- Elevation of the lot
- Structural eye sores associated with the lot – location of utility boxes, sewer lids, structures on surrounding lots (old silo, rusty cars)

Architect's Considerations:

- Flat lot vs. walk out basement -Difficulty in getting to the back yard from the basement (food preparation on a grill, dining, gardening, added cost of a vertical platform lift, excessive ramping)
- Size of lot – based on the square footage of the house and garage and the price of the lot.
- Orientation of the lot – taking advantage of the views from windows and doors as well as solar energy (seasonal sun angles) from south and west exposures. Consider the direction of prevailing winds.
- Soils report – core samples, soil analysis, soil composition, ability to support the footings, water table level

Selecting a Builder

- Word of mouth referrals on the reputation of the builder – other builders, architect, interior designers, subcontractors, recent home buyers. Inspection of model homes.
- Interview and ask questions:
  - Have you built a universal design home before?
  - What universal design features have you included in your homes?
  - What is your level of interest in building a universal design home?
  - How will your construction supervisors over see the work of the sub-contractors and train them about the design differences?
  - How will you hold the sub-contractors accountable for doing the job right? Ex. Pouring the concrete floor in the garage at a gentle grade with no steps to the house, installing electrical outlets higher on the walls.

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- If building in a subdivision, the builder is usually the owner of the lot. In rare cases, one builder will trade a lot with another builder in the same subdivision. An option is to buy a lot and then select any builder you prefer.

Selecting an Architect or Home Designer

- Look for a referral – Center for Independent Living, builder, interior designer, subcontractors, other home buyers with similar homes, phone book
- Interview to learn their experience with universal design.
    - What approach will you take to design the kitchen? Beware if this will be left up to the cabinet company.
    - Ask what ADA compliant projects they have worked on.
    - Ask their level of experience with the standards of HUD Uniform Federal Accessibility Standards (UFAS). ADA is really minimum standards with functional limits. ADA falls short of what universal design elements should be included in a home.
    - Ask what residential construction experience they have had. This is more complex than office construction. They should be experienced in helping you evaluate products and materials for use in your home. They should realize that sub-contractors are limited in executing a design that is too difficult to construct.
- Appraise the architect's attitude about approaching this universal design project. Willing to learn? Willing to listen to your specific needs, dreams, ideas, desires for self sufficiency and functionality, and design solutions?
- Local architect is best
- Architect is not needed to "stamp" the blueprints in all cases. Depends on local jurisdiction (city, county, township, sub-division). House designers are not licensed. Illegal for an architect to stamp a project that was not directly supervised. "Plan stamping."
- Call all references to see their level of satisfaction with the architect's services and find out the universal design features that were included.
- Meet the architect to see how well you feel about the process and similar thoughts about the project. Ask what solutions could be presented for particular design challenges. Determine the level of commitment to learn more about universal design if not that familiar with it already.

Selecting a Kitchen & Bath Designer

- An experienced universal design specialist - National Kitchen & Bath Association, National Association of Home Builders, authors of books on universal design
- Need not be local if you have e-mail and phone communication.
- These rooms require heavy scrutiny. Due to the nature of accessibility, convenience, safety and use by all people in the home. This includes all the details like appliance design, appliance placement, counter top heights, cabinet heights, door handle design, faucet design, lighting design.

Selecting an Interior Designer and Lighting Designer

- Many builders include a specified number of hours for you to work with their interior designers to select colors, finishes, light fixtures, etc. This service is included in the cost of the home.
- You may also bring your own designer. Suggest a local person. Many interior designers are available through the major furniture department stores (Macy's). Some are independent contractors. Get word of mouth referrals and call all references. Meet with them to discuss your tastes in interior design and look at their portfolios.

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- The lighting designer may be a separate person than your interior designer. This could be supplied by your builder or you can work with a lighting specialist in conjunction with the architect and kitchen and bath designer and interior designer. A team approach to design.

Creating a Custom Home Floor Plan

- Universal design homes have 10-15 times more areas to consider in the design phase than a traditional home, which is designed by default.

Planning

- Read books on home design and universal design
- Use home planning guides – www.uniteddesign.com
- Shoehorning into a builder's/architect's floor plan
- Evaluating existing floor plans
- Modifications to a purchased or builder's floor plan
- Locating universal design floor plans and house floor plans that can be modified for universal design – "Universal Designed "Smart" Homes for the 21st Century" Plan book by Charles Schwab. "Products & Plans for Universal Homes" by Home Planners
- Consider your existing home and the number and sizes of rooms – What rooms should be included based on function?
- Selecting universal design features to include – Determines floor space needs and cabinet layout
  - Do I want it?
  - Can I afford it?
  - Space consideration for access. Ex. Roll out shelves in lower cabinets, roll in/transfer shower, elevator, roll in pantry
  - Room sizes based on accessibility and furniture size
- A circular process of elimination – a general approach to space planning
- What universal design features are essential?
- What universal design features would be nice to have?
- What universal design features are not affordable?
- What alternatives are there to non-affordable features?
- What rooms are not needed?
- What rooms are too large?
- What space can be reduced?
  - Space savers - uses for pocket doors
  - Looking for wasted space – halls, living room, bedroom, and foyer
- Pathways of travel – 4' halls, 3' doors
- Five foot turning radius within the rooms
- Positioning rooms within the floor plan
  - Bubble diagrams
- Building from the inside out
  - What UD features are essential?
  - What UD features would be nice to have?
  - What UD features are not affordable?
  - What alternatives are there to non-affordable features?
  - What rooms are too large or not needed?
  - What space is being wasted?
- Positioning the house foot print on the lot
  - Consider the location of other houses adjoining the lot - privacy
  - Approach to the house from the street to the garage

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- Curb appeal – elevation of the house for a better look and improved drainage
- Minimizing the look of the garage from the street view

Budgeting for architectural, design and construction costs

- Average costs for architectural services – 10-17% of the home cost. Includes the design of the home and coordination time with the design team. Don't skimp on the execution phase. Keep the architect involved in the construction phase. Helps to coordinate the project and work with the builder in the field. Will refer questions to the right person on the design team when needed. Provides supervision of the construction.
- Additional fees are charged for lighting, kitchen, bath, and interior designer.
- The costs are based on what the owner has to spend and the level of detail they want in the plan. Compare the ultimate in customization vs. using more standard options.
- Pick and choose priorities based on your resources. Ex. Architect or builder does the cabinet design vs. cabinet company doing the design.
- There are many ways to approach the design project. Team approach with specialists in each area or more general level of expertise from a smaller team.
- You decide what to include and what to leave out. What is important to you?
    - The specialist designers focus closely on your lifestyle and needs.
    - The generalist designers seek out enough information to get the job done.
    - Evaluate quality in the long term vs. costs when determining value.
    - What detail in designer fixtures is need?
    - How is the kitchen used? Ex. As a center of entertainment, to cook, to grab a bowl of cereal.
    - Resources are critical. What can you afford? Why dwell on making this important if you can't afford it? Where do you get the most value for your investment? Ex. brushed chrome vs. brushed nickel faucets. Significant cost difference. Nickel is more expensive. Little difference when new and almost no difference when it has been in for a while.

What drives up the costs? - *The level of pre-planning is directly related to the cost of the home.*

- The importance of prior planning vs. making decisions after the house is built. Cost of expediting delivery, scrambling and making changes, frustration, stress, undoing work that was previously done is very costly. Make decisions early in the process!
- Architect's and designer's time
- Disagreement between the homeowner, architect and designers
- Complete floor plan revisions
- Abandoning a design approach and starting over
- Unable to agree on design solutions
- Inability to create design solutions
- Reluctance of the home owners to make a decision until they see the space finished Ex. Cabinets put in and taken out. Lights installed then replaced.
- Last minute changes in design before construction.
- Changes during construction
- Changes after construction
- Lighting budgets from the builder are not that generous, overall. Be aware of sticker shock when you go shopping for lighting. This drives the total cost up!

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Universal Design in the Entry, Kitchen and Bath
The following list of Universal Design features can be easily incorporated into any new home from production development to luxury. It is important to note that almost none of the features are prohibitively high in cost and that a builder does not have to do this all or nothing. Adapting any of these features would be a step in the right direction.

The Entries

- No thresholds at any door
- 36" wide doors
- Lighting for safety and access
- Mail drop for easy access
- Grade level to the entrance, 1:12 ramp to door, or sloped garage floor
- Package shelves

The Kitchen

- Sufficient clear floor space for work/traffic flow
- Strategically placed visual barriers to kitchen mess
- Point of use storage
- Open/visible storage; flexible pantry storage
- Flexible base storage allowing for use as knee space
- Single lever faucets
- Pulls, rather than knobs on cabinets and drawers
- No-bend height installation for oven, microwave and dishwasher raised to 42" height
- Counter tops at a variety of common heights: 30", 36", and 42"
- Roll-out shelves or drawers in lower cabinets
- Glass doors or open shelves in upper cabinets
- Vertical (pantry style) cabinets for most used items
- Waste and recycling container on pull-out drawers in lower cabinets
- Side by side refrigerator/freezer (prefer 24" deep) w/ full extension shelves
- Safety shut-offs and dual cueing (where available) on appliances
- Pull-out step stool
- Rolling carts
- Contrasting edge on counter and flooring
- Varied light sources and adjustable controls
- Built-in desk
- Computer access
- Side hinged doors on oven and microwave
- Knee space under sink and cooktop
- 5' turning radius in working areas
- Pull out spice and towel racks
- Contrasting edge on counter and flooring
- Varied light sources (mix of fluorescent and incandescent/halogen with similar color temperatures)
- Under cabinet lighting: linear T5 fluorescent, low profile so as not to protrude below cabinet trim, well shielded (diffuse lens), good color (choose bulbs with a color rendering index, good distribution, located at front of cabinet with lens facing backsplash

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- Adjustable controls, i.e. dimmer switches
- Light switches should have rocker switch, and be located within easy reach of user (not back wall!)
- Preset control system option – allows you to set varying light levels according to room or task
- Important to note – California's Title 24 requires that 50% of wattage in kitchen must be high efficacy, i.e. fluorescent; all other hardwired fixtures that are not fluorescent throughout the house must be either dimmable or on a manual on occupancy sensor

The Bath

- No-threshold entries with no doors or 36" doors
- Extra-wide entry
- Sufficient clear floor space for functional passage
- 5' turning radius in key areas
- Point of use, easily accessed storage
- Multiple-height vanities with flexible knee spaces under the sink
- Increased use of support rails and grab bars in the toileting, shower and tub areas that compliment the aesthetics
- Heat in the floor, towel warmers, and toilet seat
- Anti-scald fittings
- Non-slip flooring
- Controls for windows, lighting and fixtures that are easy to operate
- Electrical outlets and controls within reach
- Consider options for flush threshold, no-door shower
- Shower designed for transfer (36" wide by 36" deep minimum) or roll in (36" wide by 48" deep minimum) depending on entry
- Shower chair or bench
- Easy maintenance, i.e. showerheads and whirlpool tubs with self-cleaning features
- Increased lighting from varied sources with adjustable controls
- Special design door for access to water closet
- Pocket doors may be a better alternative
- Hand-held shower spray on a sliding vertical bar, with 60" long hose
- Water controls within reach of person seated in the shower
- Tub deck with 15" extension for easier entry
- Comfort-height toilets 17-19"
- If toilet is compartmentalized, provide option to open up
- Increased lighting from varied sources with adjustable controls
- Provide sufficient, well shielded lighting along either side of vanity mirror to eliminate shadows while grooming
- Provide moderate light level for wayfinding and orientation from bed to bathroom during the night
- Light switches should have rocker switch, and be located within easy reach of user (not back wall!)

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The Principles of Universal Design

Definition of Universal Design: *The design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design.*

The authors, a working group of architects, product designers, engineers and environmental design researchers, collaborated to establish the following Principles of Universal Design to guide a wide range of design disciplines including environments, products, and communications. These seven principles may be applied to evaluate existing designs, guide the design process and educate both designers and consumers about the characteristics of more usable products and environments.

The Principles of Universal Design are presented here, in the following format: name of the principle, intended to be a concise and easily remembered statement of the key concept embodied in the principle; definition of the principle, a brief description of the principle's primary directive for design; and guidelines, a list of the key elements that should be present in a design which adheres to the principle. (Note: all guidelines may not be relevant to all designs.)

PRINCIPLE ONE: Equitable Use
The design is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities.

- Provide the same means of use for all users: identical whenever possible; equivalent when not.
- Avoid segregating or stigmatizing any users.
- Provisions for privacy, security, and safety should be equally available to all users.
- Make the design appealing to all users.

PRINCIPLE TWO: Flexibility in Use
The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.

- Provide choice in methods of use.
- Accommodate right- or left-handed access and use.
- Facilitate the user's accuracy and precision.
- Provide adaptability to the user's pace.

PRINCIPLE THREE: Simple and Intuitive Use
Use of the design is easy to understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level.

- Eliminate unnecessary complexity.
- Be consistent with user expectations and intuition.
- Accommodate a wide range of literacy and language skills.
- Arrange information consistent with its importance. Provide effective prompting and feedback during and after task completion.

PRINCIPLE FOUR: Perceptible Information
The design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user's sensory abilities.

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- Use different modes (pictorial, verbal, tactile) for redundant presentation of essential information.
- Provide adequate contrast between essential information and its surroundings. Maximize "legibility" of essential information.
- Differentiate elements in ways that can be described (i.e., make it easy to give instructions or directions).
- Provide compatibility with a variety of techniques or devices used by people with sensory limitations.

PRINCIPLE FIVE: Tolerance for Error
The design minimizes hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions.

- Arrange elements to minimize hazards and errors: most used elements, most accessible; hazardous elements eliminated, isolated, or shielded.
- Provide warnings of hazards and errors.
- Provide fail safe features.
- Discourage unconscious action in tasks that require vigilance.

PRINCIPLE SIX: Low Physical Effort
The design can be used efficiently and comfortably and with a minimum of fatigue.

- Allow user to maintain a neutral body position
- Use reasonable operating forces.
- Minimize repetitive actions.
- Minimize sustained physical effort.

PRINCIPLE SEVEN: Size and Space for Approach and Use
Appropriate size and space is provided for approach, reach, manipulation, and use regardless of user's body size, posture, or mobility.

- Provide a clear line of sight to important elements for any seated or standing user. Make reach to all components comfortable for any seated or standing user.
- Accommodate variations in hand and grip size.
- Provide adequate space for the use of assistive devices or personal assistance.

Please note that the Principles of Universal Design address only universally usable design, while the practice of design involves more than consideration for usability. Designers must also incorporate other considerations such as economic, engineering, cultural, gender, and environmental concerns in their design processes. These Principles offer designers guidance to better integrate features that meet the needs of as many users as possible.

Compiled by advocates of universal design, listed in alphabetical order:
Bettye Rose Connell, Mike Jones, Ron Mace, Jim Mueller, Abir Mullick, Elaine Ostroff, Jon Sanford, Ed Steinfeld, Molly Story, and Gregg Vanderheiden. Copyright 1997 NC State University, The Center for Universal Design

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Resources

Associations, Organizations, Corporations

Abledata
800-227-0216
www.abledata.com

Access One
www.beyondbarriers.com

Adaptive Environments
617- 695-1225
www.adaptenv.org

AARP
www.aarp.org

Alzheimer's Association
800-272-3900
www.alz.org

Alzheimer's Disease Education & Referral Center
800-438-4380
www.alzheimers.org/

American Foundation for the Blind
AARP
888-687-2277
www.aarp.org

800-AFB-LINE
www.afb.org

American Heart Association National Center
800-AHA-USA-1
www.americanheart.org

American National Standards Institute
212-642-4900
www.ansi.org

American Occupational Therapy Association
www.aota.org

Center for Inclusive Design and Environmental Access (IDEA Center), University of Buffalo
716-829-3485
www.ap.buffalo.edu/idea/

Center for Universal Design
North Carolina State University
800-647-6777
www.design.ncsu.edu/cud

Charles Schwab Architects
309-792-4599
www.universaldesignonline.com

Concrete Change
In support of visitable homes
404-378-7455
www.concretechange.org

Council for Exceptional Children
888-CEC-SPED
www.cec.sped.org

Cystic Fibrosis Foundation
800-344-4823
www.cff.org

Disabled American Veterans
202-554-3501
www.dav.org

Disability Rights Education Defense Fund
202-986-0375
www.dredf.org

Draware (Ireland)
http://www.ucd.ie/avc/DraWare/default.htm

Easter Seal Society
312-726-6200
www.easter-seals.org

EasyLiving Home
www.easylivinghome.org

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American Stroke Association National Center
888-4-STROKE
www.strokeassociation.org

Area Agencies on Aging
www.aog.dhhs.gov/agingsites/state.html

Amputee Coalition of America
888-AMP-KNOW
www.amputee-coalition.org/

Arthritis Foundation
800-283-7800
www.arthritis.org

CAST
www.cast.org

Home Modification List Serve
Homemodification-list@listserv.acsu.buffalo.edu

Independent Living Research Utilization Project
713-520-0232
www.ilru.org

Institute on Independent Living (Sweden)
www.independentliving.org

Lifease
www.lifease.com

Lighthouse International
800-829-0500; 212-821-9713 TTY
www.lighthouse.org

Muscular Dystrophy Association
800-572-1717
www.mdausa.org

National Association of Home Builders

Certified Aging-in-Place Specialist (CAPS)
800-368-5242
www.nahb.com

Eldercare Locator
800-677-1116
www.eldercare.gov

European Concept for Accessibility (Luxembourg)
www.eca.lu

European Institute for Design and Disability
www.design-for-all.org

Harris Communications, Inc.
www.harriscomm.com

National Resource Center on Supportive Housing and Home Modifications
Andrus Gerontology Center,
University of Southern California
213-740-1364
www.homemods.org

National Rehabilitation Information Center
800-346-2742
www.naric.com

Paralyzed Veterans of America
800-424-8200
www.pva.org

ProMatura
www.promatura.com

Regional ADA technical assistance
800-949-4232
www.adata.org

Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology Society of North America (RESNA)
703-524-6686
www.resna.org

Trace Research and Development Center
University of Wisconsin
www.trace.wisc.edu

Universal Design Alliance
770-667-4593
www.universaldesign.org

U.S. Access Board
800-872-2253; 800-993-2822 TTY
www.access-board.gov

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National Association of the Deaf
301-587-1788; 301-587-1789 TTY
www.nad.org

National Center for Accessible Media
www.ncam.wgbh.org

National Council on Independent Living
703-525-3406; 703-525-4153 TYY
www.ncil.org

National Institute on Aging
301-496-1752
www.nia.nih.gov/

National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders National Institute of Health
301-496-0252
www.nidcd.nih.gov

National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research US Department of Education
202-205-8134; 202-205-4475 TYY
www.ed.gov

National Endowment for the Arts
www.arts.endow.gov

National Kitchen & Bath Association
908-843-6522
www.nkba.org

U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Dev. Tech. assist. on Section 504 & Fair Housing
800-827-5005
Publications Center: 800-767-7468
www.hud.gov/fhe/fheo.html

U.S. Dept. of Justice Technical assistance on ADA
800-514-0304, 800-514-0383 TTY
www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/adahom1.htm

United Design Home Planning Guides:
http://www.uniteddesign.com/homeplanning_request.html

Visitability List Serve
visitability-list@ACSU.buffalo.edu

Volunteers for Medical Engineering
2201 Argonne Drive
Baltimore, MD 21218
http://www.toad.net/~vme/

Printed Materials

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"A Basic Guide to Fair Housing Accessibility: Everything Architects and Builders Need to Know About the Fair Housing Act Accessibility Guidelines", Steven Winter Associates, Inc., John Wiley & Sons, 2001

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