

DESIGN IN ACTION

Some developers prefer to focus on a specific target audience, perhaps by age. Epcon Communities builds condos priced from the high \$160,000s to the mid-\$300,000s ideally suited for the 50-plus market. The interiors of the condos include wide-turning radiuses so wheelchairs won't bump into walls and counters, slip-resistant hardwood floors, abundant lighting, and counters built according to the owner's height and any disability, says Nanette Overly, vice president of sales and marketing for the Dublin, Ohio-based firm. The homes are designed and built to prevent renovations if owners' needs change, she says.

The universal design concepts carry through to the outdoors and shared facilities. "We want residents to have access to all amenities," Overly says, pointing out that the clubhouse is step-free, the fitness center offers free weights that residents in wheelchairs can use, and walking paths are wider than normal and are paved to accommodate wheelchairs.

The Banks of Saline, a condominium building with 2- and 3-story units in Saline, Mich., was designed to appeal to both young professionals and older homeowners with disabilities. "Door widths are wider than usual, and the open-style living plan was meant to appeal to young professionals with large sectional sofas, or older people in wheelchairs," says Tom Foley, the developer of The Banks of Saline. "I did these things to cut out different buyers' objections. If you don't, you limit your market and customer base. What this also does is create a greater sense of community by bringing together different ages."

Smaller firms also recognize the advantage of incorporating universal design. Chicago-based interior designer Leslie Markman-Stern conducts a "needs" analysis for every client. "I find out whether they're in a wheelchair and have eyesight or hearing problems," she says.

Markman-Stern tries to include certain features, even if clients don't have limitations such as arthritis or an inability to walk without a wheelchair or cane. Why? She considers the features smart long-term choices. Among those she frequently uses are easy-to-turn levers rather than knobs, shower seats, adjustable hand-

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held sprayers in tubs and showers, anti-scald valves, oven controls at the front of cooktops to avoid reaching, and floors tiled with small mosaics since the extra grout offers good traction.

THE NEXT ERA

Still, many developers and other design professionals choose not to incorporate universal design features in residential projects because they worry that the homes will look institutional or the features will add additional expense. In commercial projects, that's less of an issue because of ADA, state, and local codes, says Housing Works' Duncan.

Universal design experts say both fears can be overcome. "You don't

have to copy a handrail out of an ADA manual; [you] can select or design one that looks sculptural and attractive," says Janet Morra, an architect with Margulies & Associates in Boston.

Likewise, lights can be placed on dimmer switches since some people may need brighter lights while others need dimmer lights. "Even when something needs to be visible, aesthetically pleasing alternatives are often available," says Brooke Ziccardi, an architect with Ziccardi Designs in Costa Mesa, Calif.

Jordan Guide, a designer with Barbara Pallat Interiors in Burr Ridge, Ill., knew that a client with multiple sclerosis was concerned about how some features would look when her townhouse kitchen

Resource Center

Here are the Web's best sites for information about universal design.

- **American Association of Retired Persons** provides home design resources online, including tips for making a home safer and more comfortable (www.aarp.org).
- **Center for Universal Design at North Carolina State University** evaluates, develops, and promotes accessible and universal design (www.design.ncsu.edu).
- **The Center for Inclusive Design and Environmental Access**, known as the IDEA Center, is dedicated to improving the design of environments and products (www.ap.buffalo.edu/idea).
- **LifeSpring Environs** offers a Universal Design certification for builders and developers (www.lifespringenvirons.com) as well as its **Easy Living Home** guidelines (www.easylivinghome.org).
- **The National Association of Home Builders** offers its CAPS certification, an acronym for Certified Aging-in-Place Specialists, which educates building professionals on how to modify houses according to Universal Design guidelines. The organization also has a CASH designation, which stands for Certified Active Adult Specialist in Housing and is more geared for the 50-plus housing market (www.nahb.com).
- **Universal Design Living Laboratory** works to bring about awareness of the quality of indoor and outdoor lifestyle through universal design, green building, safety, and healthy home construction (www.udll.com).
- **Institute for Human Centered Design** is dedicated to the role of design in enhancing the human experience (www.ihcd.org).