



User Friendly “A Home for All Ages”

By Iris Harrell

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At the ripe young age of 62, I have finally done for myself and my family what I have done for other families for the last 25 years – remodeled my home into a user friendly home that works for people of all ages, sizes and abilities.

This single act has given me the option to stay in my home until the undertaker takes me out with my boots on. (I’m from Texas so I can say this with good humor.)

You might ask what I have done that makes my home so “user friendly” for all. My mother-in-law, who is turning 92 this week, just spent three days with us in our home, along with her daughter (my spouse), her son, her grandson, and her great grandson, who is 4 years old.

Because we remodeled our home last year with universal design principles, we could easily and safely accommodate these family guests, without being worried about their comfort, their safety or their ability to access all parts of our two-story hillside home.

From the driveway as you get out of the car, there is a deck path with a gentle slope that meanders through the oak trees and brings you to the front door.

It serves as a ramp, but in no way looks like a ramp. My mother-in-law brought a host of her friends to our house after our remodel was completed for a little celebration party. All of them, whether with wheelchair, walker or cane, were able to come through the front door with ease and dignity.

They were able to tour the entire home, including the outside decks and the lower floor, thanks to all of the interior doors being a little wider than usual and the elevator that was big enough for four people (or two people if one was in a wheelchair).

The upstairs guest bathroom is the most heavily used when we have guests. In designing for that, we installed a vanity counter that a wheelchair can roll under if need be.

We also installed a mechanism with a button that allows the counter height to vary from 30” high to 34” high. My mother-in-law is very short and so is our four year old great nephew.

The rest of us are very tall. The adjustable counter height accommodates everyone. The wall mounted toilet is set at ADA “comfort height” and has two color coordinated grab bars, should they be needed.

The shower area is “curb less” meaning the tile floor of the bath runs continuously at the same level as the floor all the way into the shower. The shower has two 15” vertical grab bars – one at each end – and the shower-head is removable should someone not be able to stand and shower.



All of the door handles throughout the home are lever style so anyone can operate them. The window shades are electronically operated so that we can raise them or lower them with the simple push of a button. Both my mother-in-law and our great nephew have been taught how to push one intercom button in their room in case they need our attention in the middle of the night.

We installed several gas appliance fireplaces for zoned heating. I noticed that my mother-in-law and myself are cold natured and like to have a toasty fire going wherever we plant ourselves. Why heat up the rest of the home when it is only she and I who want the extra warmth?

Each of the gas appliances has a remote control so we can turn it on or off without getting out of our chair and without ever having to clean out the fireplace of wood debris. These gas appliance fireplaces all have fixed glass fronts that curious little children cannot fall into and are located in the areas we sit at most often.

The kitchen is big enough for us to gather in and prepare a meal together. My mother-in-law can load the dishwasher without bending over and the island counter is low enough for her to chop vegetables on.

The best news about all of these thoughtfully integrated features is that I personally get the benefit of using these many conveniences for the rest of my life!

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