

May 16<sup>th</sup> 2013

**Question:** *Stacey an executive for a national publication wrote asking for information on “Universal Design” and “Aging in Place” design and building principles and practices. I have met Stacey; the question seemed odd coming from someone who looked to be in perfect health and not a day over twenty five. But after thinking about it I realized she was correct to be interested in understanding how these issues can impact all of us.*

**Considerations:** What is “Universal Design” or “Aging in Place” construction? Why should I concern myself with these issues at my age? I’m an investor, why should I worry about the next owner’s problems and needs? Where do you go to start figuring out your needs? Just getting started can be a major headache.

**Answer:** Take two aspirin and don’t call me until you have read the rest of this article.

Universal Design contrary to what many believe designing for the handicapped. It is about making rooms, homes and other buildings more accessible and usable for everyone. It can be basic like making faucet handles easier to use and closer to the front of a sink or removing obstructions from under a sink so a wheel chair can be rolled up under it. It can also be more involved. Universal design in public spaces can be more generic trying to accommodate a large variety of possibilities to very specific when designing a residence with a single person or set of circumstances.

The concept of “Aging in Place” design or construction is relatively new. In a nutshell it’s about remodeling your home to accommodate you when you are older and perhaps dealing with disabilities or other issues that come with age. It’s much more than widening a door and adding some grab bars to a bathroom. It’s about transforming a home for you or a future owner to be easier to live when day to day living is more challenging.

Here are just two reasons to incorporate these principles into the repairs and remodeling plans for your property. First, why wouldn't you want to make your property appealing to a broader group of people?

Second, this applies to investor owners, ever hear the phrase "Reasonable Accommodation"? There are thousands of pages of law, rules and regulations written regarding the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Most attorneys will tell you the two most important are "Reasonable Accommodation". Put simply if a tenant asks you to modify your property, at your expense, to make it more accessible to him or her you may be required to do so if it is considered a reasonable accommodation. In case you are wondering, the final decision on what is reasonable is not yours to make.

So now what?

You shouldn't think of these principles as an additional cost to a project. In many cases there is no difference in costs. It's really about doing things different. If you have read any of my past articles you may be able to guess what my next statement is going to be. It starts with a plan and a budget. However, before you can start formulating your plan and budget there are a few people you need to consult with. It also requires a frank face to face conversations with your family, financial advisor, physician and most importantly the person you see in the mirror every day.

To help formulate the plan and budget once you have consulted with the necessary people I suggest you look for a certified professional in the residential home building or remodeling industry.

A few good places to start looking for certified professionals is through professional associations such as:

NARI – National Association for the Remodeling Industry – [www.NARI.org](http://www.NARI.org)

NAHB – National Association of Home Builders – [www.nahb.org](http://www.nahb.org)

NKBA - National Kitchen and Bath Association – [www.NKBA.org](http://www.NKBA.org)