



## **Universal Design: Raising Quality of Life & Value of Property**

**Putting a little “future” thought into your next or current home can raise your property’s value and salability substantially...it could also do wonders for your quality of life – now and later.**

If you and I are lucky, we will live to a ripe old age. If we’re smart, we’ll be able to do it in the comfort of our own homes. But even if we are nowhere near our “golden years” we can benefit from the principles of universal design.

Ask most homeowners what they want in a home and you’ll find that convenience and efficiency top their list. This is backed up by some of the more popular features we are seeing in new home design today, including: smart technology - the ability to control lights, sounds, temperature, and security from one location; central vacuum - easy maintenance without having to lug around a heavy machine; and bedroom-level laundry rooms or laundry chutes – no more dragging the wash up and down stairs. All of these are universal design.

Universal design is not a new concept. It has been around at least since the 1950’s, but generally was only thought of as it applied to disabled persons. That is all changing now – as the needs of our society are changing.

Driven, as many things are, by the most populous generation – the baby boomers – universal design now implies making our lives a little easier, a little less stressful and a little more convenient through thoughtful planning. As the boomers age, they are concerned with remaining as independent as possible through their 60’s, 70’s, 80’s and even 90’s.

### **What is universal design exactly?**

Simply put, it is a mode of designing the buildings in our lives – homes, offices, establishments – in such a way as to make them useable to the broadest spectrum of people possible. Everyone wants their own homes to be as accessible and user-friendly as possible.

Think of how just these simple features could make your life a bit easier:

- Lever style door hardware instead of knobs. Ever carry one too many grocery bags in from the car and then be faced with a knob?
- Roll-out shelving and “Lazy Susan” style storage in the kitchen. How many times has that baking dish or cooking pot you need been way at the back and you practically climbed into the cabinet just to get it?
- Walk-in showers. No matter what your age, balancing on one foot as you step into a wet bathtub can be slippery and dangerous.

These are basic examples, if you explore the idea of universal design more in depth and start talking to builders that are employing the principles in their projects, you’ll see the unlimited ways you can make your life better and safer. Home based injuries are common, universal design could help you avoid some of them.

**Keys: Advanced planning for Flexibility, Accessibility & Adaptability.**

If you are in the market for a new home, you may want to keep universal design principles in mind. If you already own the home of your dreams, you can easily add many universal elements to it.

By purchasing a universal design home or by adding elements to your existing home, you are increasing your investment. Once again driven by the baby boomers, more and more buyers are

looking for homes with features to save time and energy, as well as enhance safety. Homes built or adapted with such items will inevitably be worth more on the marketplace.

Some additional items found in universally designed homes:

- No-step or flush thresholds
- Wide doorways and hallways
- Rocker-style light switches
- Low maintenance exteriors and interiors
- Raised, front-loading washers and dryers
- Increased amounts of natural lighting throughout. Task lighting in work areas such as kitchens, laundry rooms, closets, and garages.
- Wall bracing to accommodate grab bars (even if bars are not immediately installed)
- Elevators in multi-storied homes (or space for such if not immediately installed)
- Adjustable closet rods and shelves (excellent for children's rooms to adapt as they grow)
- Low pile, high density carpet and slip-resistant flooring

Having extra or bonus rooms is part of universal design too. A room or suite that is a playroom, guest room or den today can be living quarters for aging parents or for a live-in caregiver tomorrow.

Universal design is an idea all homeowners can use to their personal and financial advantage. For more information on universal design and how you can use it to improve the quality of your life, take a look at these informative web sites:

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- **The Center for Universal Design at the University of North Carolina:**  
**[www.design.ncsu.edu/cud/index.htm](http://www.design.ncsu.edu/cud/index.htm)**
- **AARP:** **[www.aarp.org/families/home\\_design](http://www.aarp.org/families/home_design)**
- **Adaptive Environments:** **[www.adaptenv.org](http://www.adaptenv.org)**
- **Universal Designers & Consultants:** **[www.universaldesign.com](http://www.universaldesign.com)**
- **Universal Design Alliance:** **[www.universaldesign.org](http://www.universaldesign.org)**

For more information on Naples real estate, contact our team of professionals. We are here to help you find a new home, sell your current home or answer any questions you may have about real estate investing.

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