

Universal Design: One Size Fits All

Written by Tom Monte and Dave Green

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You may have heard about Universal Design or Design for All. Our Gilbert-based general contracting company, Arizona Structures, uses many of these concepts in our new homes and remodeling projects.

Universal Design creates spaces for everyone without changing the look of an average home.

You, your children, as well and your aging, perhaps physically challenged, parents.

Accessibility, flexibility and safety are key elements with Universal Design. Spaces should be user friendly for all people, regardless of their age or ability levels.

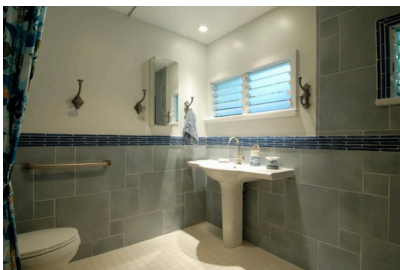
The renowned architect, Michael Graves, has made significant contributions to Universal Design. An unfortunate illness left him in a wheelchair in 2003, and he has since designed products and public and private buildings which are user friendly. His first day in the wheelchair, for instance, he had difficulty reaching both the hot water and the wall outlet. So, he began designing for everyone.



The bathroom and shower floors are at the same level, which removes the difficulty of moving in and out of the shower in a wheelchair and tripping hazards for everyone. And, the hanging shower curtain makes access to the shower easy and still gives privacy. Photo courtesy Hans Grohe USA.

In addition, barrier-free bathroom design can involve

- lowered sinks, countertops and cabinets
- slip-resistant finishes and textured surfaces
- no step shower enclosure and rolling shower doors
- elevated toilets
- lever-actuated components rather than knobs, which often require tight grasping
- easy-to-use large flat panel switches or automation controls
- hand rails



A large bathroom offers room for a wheelchair and the added space for maneuverability everyone enjoys. Courtesy TOTO.

Other elements to consider for your home:

- anti-scald inductive cooking surfaces in the kitchen
- wide hallways, ample clearances and easy storage access
- generous pathways lighting

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Incorporating Universal Design, kitchen counters are at the same level for uniform access, allowing for easy access without adding in different heights. To accommodate a cook who uses a wheelchair, space under the sink, cooktop and prep counter is left open. Photo courtesy Cabinets by Design.

Why consider Universal Design in building your new home or renovating your existing space?

For one, Value built into a 21st - century home, these components improve your lifestyle now. Your home is more convenient and comfortable for everyone living there.

Two, Marketability and Financial Returns. More and more, Universal Design has become a selling point, much as green is now for buyers across the market spectrum. We've seen how people, and not just older adults, are asking for components such as hand rails. People like them for their safety, regardless of age. And, today, they are available in a wide variety of styles, from the basic and practical to the more decorative.

When you choose to sell your home 5, 10, 20 years from now, this demand for Universal Design should be even more apparent. Once again, we recall when sustainability was considered by many a trend: It will pass, some said. It hasn't.

A woman whose home we built a few years back, with many Universal Design features, recently put it on the market and sold immediately. Even though the residential market has somewhat improved recently, she says the buyer bought her home, instead of comparative ones at similar prices, because of Universal Design.

Third, Broad Accessibility: With its flexibility, your home welcomes everyone.

Combining for four decades of experience in building and renovation, Arizona Structures serves the East Valley, Arcadia, Scottsdale and Paradise Valley. The first of a multi-part series, this story was assisted by David M. Brown (azwriter.com). Questions? Send them either to david@azwriter.com or Tom Monte, tom@azstructures.com.