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# A stylish twist on accessible design

By Jane Lockhart

There is nothing less exciting to discuss in home décor than accessible design. For many, this is a vague category that incorporates the dated word of “handicapped” design and visions of large tiled rooms with safety bars and ramps. Little could be further from the truth these days.

Accessible design now refers to a series of physical features that incorporate elements able to service all home users. This is referred to as “universal design” and it ultimately makes everyone’s life easier within the built environment.

Now, consider passage door hardware. Many homeowners opt for lever handles as the breadth of styles and designs is immense. And lever handles, rather than knobs, allow for much easier use. A lever handle is merely a pushing action rather than the twist and turn needed for a knob, which can be difficult for some people to perform or for anyone carrying a lot in their arms!



Room designed by Jane Lockhart

Even the ubiquitous safety bar has under gone a transformation in main bathroom showers, which have become bigger with larger, porcelain tiles. No longer is it a plain, industrial-looking bar. Grab bars can be purchased in all lengths and metals. There are even some that double as towel bars.

Wider door openings and higher contrast materials both contribute to more accessible design, as they make it easier to pass through doors generally and contrast allows changes in elevation to be more easily seen. With improvements in tile manufacturing and prefinished wood planks, transitions between

materials from room to room have continued to disappear. This makes movement easier for frail, older adults, people who use walkers or wheelchairs, kids and anyone moving about as they perform day-to-day tasks.

LED lighting has meant better-quality illumination. This is especially true when it comes to kitchen lighting and rooms where more light is beneficial. LEDs have opened up the possibility of under-cabinet lighting, drawer lighting and hinge-activated inner cupboard lighting when the doors are opened. Better lighting is something we all crave.

Vanity counters have also become a



Photo: Brandon Boyd (not Scenic)

component of accessible design, as the increase in their height has made it easier to use the bathroom with less bending and turning. And shower thresholds have continued to become lower and are even removed on occasion to facilitate wheelchair access.

Although the term “accessible design” can seem industrial or institutional, it is an important development for home design and décor in general, as it allows those of us who are aging to consider remaining in our homes for as long as possible and, in many cases, when tastefully done, adds to the value of the home. ■

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