

lifespan perspective

A different way of looking at design

Volume 2, Issue 2

10 ways to prepare your site and building for “older” boomers ... and win new fans of all ages

1. Reconfigure the site to create more parking spaces with safe, easy access to the entrance
2. Provide an area for drop-off (preferably covered) at the main entrance
3. Increase lighting in the parking lot, along walkways, and at entrances
4. Neutralize sources of glare (including high-gloss floors and other reflective surfaces) throughout the building; redirect unfiltered natural light
5. Enhance lighting in under-illuminated areas, and supplement with task lighting where needed
6. Reduce or eliminate thresholds at entrances (and transition strips between flooring surfaces) that are taller than 1/4"
7. Replace floor treatments and walkway surfaces that are easy to slip or stumble on, or difficult to travel with a walker, cane, or in a wheelchair



When most people think about design for “older adults” they conjure up images of ramp- and railing-laden institutional settings. They dismiss the possibility that aging is an issue that impacts our environmental needs until we are “elderly” and therefore, according to the stereotypes, too frail to go anywhere other than a medical facility or nursing home. They don’t stop to think that people don’t grow old overnight—that aging is in fact a lifelong process that first catches most people’s attention when trying to read fine print in their forties, and grows into a more perpetual awareness of a full-body metamorphosis as the decades pass. It will be a long time before they fit the description above (if ever), but by the time they’ve passed into their sixties, most people are well aware of the aging process, and beginning to notice the ways in which the constructed environment can make life more difficult and less comfortable than it could be. They make allowances, they do things differently, and sometimes, with very little fanfare, they simply stop going places that are no longer a good fit for their abilities.

As design for aging specialists we frequently hear business owners argue that they don’t worry about the kinds of issues we’ve addressed with this checklist, because they “never see anyone having any trouble with them.” If 78 million aging baby boomers slowly start to disappear from the places that make them feel old, in favor of those that are designed to welcome them for a lifetime, their absence will

8. Add informal seating (benches or firm chairs with arms) along lengthy walkways and hallways, and at intervals in large open spaces. Note: avoid blocking the path in narrow passages—creating alcoves may be preferable.
9. Add (or relocate) restrooms in a central location
10. Provide ADA-height and regular height toilets, enhance regular stall widths for ease of movement, and provide grab bars on both sides in all stalls



Lifespan Design Studio offers architectural studies, assessments, planning, and design for new construction and renovations.

11 South Broadway, Suite 301
Lebanon, OH 45036

513.228.1196
info@lifespandesignstudio.com

Visit us on the web at:
www.lifespandesignstudio.com

be seen on the bottom line. True, the baby boomers aren't old yet, and won't be for a long time, but they are actively engaged in the aging process, and many are already making decisions (both consciously and unconsciously) that reflect that fact. Your best hedge against the possibility that your facility could come between you and your senior-boomer clients or customers is to adjust it now to accommodate their changing needs.

Fringe benefits

The kinds of changes proposed here to address the needs of the "aging," are actually *ageless*, and of potential value to anyone at any lifestage. What toddler-toting mother wouldn't appreciate restrooms that aren't secluded in a distant corner? Who hasn't been temporarily blinded by abrupt transitions from bright to dimly-lit spaces? And we've all struggled with unfortunate choices in floor coverings or walkway surfaces.

The adjustments you make to protect your stake in the boomer market should enhance your popularity with consumers of any age by increasing the overall accessibility, user-friendliness and safety of your site and building. There's no need to worry that you'll offend youth-worshiping baby boomers, in fact, they don't need to know you made the adjustments with them in mind. Changes like these are in no way age-specific—they're simply good-sense concepts in universal design. Some people won't (consciously) notice the difference—but they'll keep coming back.



Accessibility: we've got it covered

Do you really? 4 key issues that deserve a second look

When it comes to the constructed environment, people tend to accept things as they are, and look to architects, builders, and government agencies for guidance as to how things should be. Traditionally, most buildings were constructed with a step or two at the entrance until the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) addressed the inequity that those steps perpetuated. Trusting the government to serve as our conscience on the issue, we assume that the ADA pretty much has "it" (accessibility) covered.

If a building is ADA compliant, it stands to reason that it is, indeed, accessible. But is it really? The ADA eliminates obvious barriers to getting in and moving around, but for a variety of reasons stops short of prescribing the details that define a building's function and character. Often it is the (unregulated) design details that determine the ways that the environment ultimately works with (or against) the unique capacities of the individuals who pass through it. Critical flaws in layout, product selection, and other design issues may impose demands on some people that exceed their abilities, rendering an ADA compliant building unusable/inaccessible to them.

Listed below are four familiar issues governed by ADA standards but frequently still "sore spots" limiting a building's usability and user-friendliness. We've posed some questions to illustrate the ways in which it can be necessary to exceed standards in order to serve clients, customers, and the general public comfortably.

Parking

You've got the prescribed number of handicapped spaces, but is it enough?

As the older adult population grows, the number of people with

impairments limiting their ability to travel significant distances to the entrance will increase, too. Don't presume that everyone requiring handicapped parking or close access to the entrance uses a wheelchair.

Ramps

Your ramp meets the standards, but is it really wide enough?

People with various mobility issues may require personal assistance rather than a wheelchair or walker. Will the ramp accommodate two people walking side by side? What if someone approaches from the other end?



Doors

The ADA says it's okay, but is the door too heavy for some people to manage comfortably and safely?

Does the hardware (or the heating and air conditioning system) make it difficult to open, or cause it to close too quickly?

Handicapped toilets

Do you have left-, right-, and front-access toilets?

"Handedness" can be an important issue in successful side transfer for some wheelchair users. Some people (especially older adults) may need to transfer from the front, rather than the side of the fixture.