

lifespan perspective

A different way of looking at design

Volume 2, Issue 1

Aging in Place isn't just for old people

Ellen R. Gallow, CAPS

When I completed training last fall and prepared to announce that I am now a Certified Aging in Place Specialist (CAPS), I realized that the title doesn't fully express the broad-based importance and relevance of the concepts I'd learned. Although the CAPS program was created by the Remodelers Council of the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) in association with AARP, I want to be careful not to represent the desire to "age in place" as a late-life phenomenon—or remodeling as the preferred means of accommodating that goal. To do this would risk perpetuating the short-sightedness that produces so many essentially "unfriendly" homes, businesses, and institutions throughout our constructed environment in the first place.



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

Aging in Place doesn't mean staying home and growing old. It means living where (and doing what) we want at any lifestage, without having to move as our circumstances change:

Raising our kids in an environment where they are safe and effective

Can your four year-old hang up their own coat, turn off their light, or wash their hands unassisted?

Welcoming guests of any ability

If your best friend became wheelchair-bound, would they be able to visit you in your home?



Remaining independent and functional at home in the face of a temporary or permanent impairment

What would happen if you become unable to go up or down stairs?

Accommodating loved ones who need our assistance

If your dad could no longer function in his own home, could he function in yours?

Being cared for in familiar surroundings when we are unable to care for ourselves

Would your home accommodate caregiving and caregivers?

Although almost everyone would claim to value these things, they are rarely considered in the design or choice of a new home unless one or more of these issues is actually motivating the move. Potentially problematic design features such as stairs, high cabinets, and deep tubs, that define (rather than being defined by) our capabilities, are rarely questioned until they become a problem. Hence, *home remodelers* are leading the way as aging in place specialists, as the need for more accessible, user-friendly home environments grows with the aging of the Baby Boom generation. Driven by increasing demand, they are helping to correct or compensate for critical flaws in home design with modifications such as ramps, lifts, and elevators; wider doorways and hallways; ground-level master bed and bathrooms; accessible cabinetry, fixtures, and appliances; enhancements to lighting; etc. Design professionals play an important role in this reactive process, and have a responsibility to be proactive in utilizing—and promoting universal/lifespan design practices in new construction.

Aging in Place takes more than a user-friendly house

The ability to age in place isn't solely defined by the appropriateness of the home. At any age, the accessibility and user-friendliness of the stores, restaurants, offices, public

places, and other facilities in the community profoundly impact the experience—and feasibility—of living there. Although it is AARP that brought the concept of “livable community” to our attention in recent years, people of all ages will benefit from the universally important changes and innovations beginning to occur. If creating livable communities for aging adults means better accommodating people with impairments we associate with advanced age (such as walker or wheelchair use, visual and auditory loss, below average strength, flexibility, and stamina, etc.), the similar needs of people of any age, for any reason, also will be addressed. Thus the Baby Boom generation may bestow its greatest gift upon society simply by growing old in numbers large



enough to spawn action on the long overlooked issue of accessible design.

Not for housing use only

Whether you’re remodeling or building new, in a residential, commercial, institutional, or public setting, the CAPS program illuminates a long list of design considerations of universal relevance. General features and specific details like those cited here are starting to make their way into design classrooms and textbooks, construction practices, and consumer consciousness—many will eventually become industry and government standards. Good universal/lifespan design, however, is more than the sum of these items, and is tailored to the uses and users for whom the space is created. The challenge of advancing design itself to a more evolved user-centered level lies in the creative imaginations and consciences of our community planners, architects, interior designers, and product designers.

Design features for Aging in Place

- At-grade (no step) entry (preferably *all* entrances)
- Parking area as close as possible to entrance/s
- Level, navigable walkways
- Minimal/no thresholds
- 32" clear door openings
- Five-foot radius open space in all enclosed areas
- Ground floor bathroom
- Elevator (or stacked closets for future elevator, in residences)

Lifespan design details

- Lever handles on doors and sinks
- Switches, outlets and thermostats at moderate heights
- Handrails on both sides of all stairways
- Grab bars at toilets, tubs and showers
- Curbless showers w/seat
- Sinks, counters and vanities that accommodate seated use
- Accessible appliances and cabinets at accessible heights
- Enhanced general, ambient and task lighting
- Color contrast applied to define spaces, transitions, and edges
- Navigable floor treatments
- Easy-access closets and storage
- Low maintenance
- Technology used to enhance safety, access and ease of use

LDS Members to speak at Aging Conference

Please join Lifespan Design Studio (LDS) Members Doug Gallow, Michael Murphy, and Ellen Gallow for the following sessions at the Joint Conference of the American Society on Aging and National Council on Aging: **Let’s Rethink Aging**, in Chicago this March:

Senior Centers on the Move: Strategies for the 21st Century
Tuesday, March 6, 8:30 AM

Let’s ReThink Design: Invitation to a Revolution
Wednesday, March 7, 4:30 PM

Teaching Young Designers How to Design for Aging
Saturday, March 10, 10:45 AM

For more information log on to www.agingconference.org

Legislating “visitability” What lies ahead?

The Inclusive Home Design Act of 2005 (HR 1441, resubmitted in June 2006), sponsored by Representative Janice D. Schakowsky of Illinois, would require all new single family and townhouses receiving federal funds to have the following features to support “visitability” by people of all ages and abilities: one no-step entrance, 32" minimum door widths, an accessible bathroom on the ground floor, accessibly placed switches and outlets, and reinforced bathroom walls to support grab bars.

In 2006, the US Conference of Mayors passed a resolution strongly supporting the adoption of visitability standards at the state and local levels. These insightful guidelines will shape a more useful pool of public housing while supporting values that are constructive in the community. Whether the demand-driven private market will follow suit is up to consumers and informed designers, developers, and builders.