



This accessible kitchen (above) incorporates an oversized pathway around island, oversized island, wall mount ovens and microwave, extra lighting and plug molding on the end of the island. This accessible bathroom (below) has features including a curbless shower, hand-held sprayer, window (in shower) and sola-tube for natural light, with extra emphasis on artificial light and lever handles. LIVING STONE CONSTRUCTION PHOTO

Aging in Place

Accessibility Is “Hip” in the Mountains

BY SEAN D. SULLIVAN

It is often said in our household, particularly on birthdays, that “you are only as old as you feel.”

The truth of the matter is that we are all aging in place every day.

Most Gen Xers have had experience dealing with aging parents and their living situations. So why has it taken so long for us to accept the inevitable about our own accommodations?

One sunny afternoon, I sat down with the Smiths, soon-to-retire clients of ours, and shared our mantra that if we are going to design-build a home for them, then we should do it right, with no regrets.

I explained that one of the considerations we make on every home is for our client to be able to “age in place.” I looked across the table and noticed that their eye-

brows were raised. They responded somewhat defensively with, “Do you think we are that old?”

I reassured them I was not commenting on their current health situation but simply wanted to deliver a home that, first, allowed them to live there as long as they needed without being forced into a retirement home, and, second, would be comfortable for anyone who chose to visit, including parents, neighbors and friends.

They put their trust in me and we continued on with the design of their soon-to-be beautiful (and barrier-free) home.

If you are like the majority of Americans over the age of 55, you want to find the perfect retirement spot and then be able to continue living in that familiar environment throughout your maturing years.

According to the AARP, older



homeowners overwhelmingly prefer to age in place, which means living in your home safely, independently and comfortably, regardless of age or ability level.

Aging-in-place homes are in limited supply, and often the result is that we are forced out of our own houses and into an assisted-living facility.

Odds are high that someone in your family will need a nursing home sooner or later. More than two-thirds of people over the age of 65 will require some type of

long-term care services during their lifetime, and more than 45 percent of people will need a period of care in a nursing home, according to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

The cost of that care can financially cripple a family. But there are steps you can take: design and build (or renovate) a home that will accommodate your needs and allow for an in-home caretaker.

We all enjoy where we live in the mountains. However, due to the topography, finding a barrier-free home can be especially challenging here.

To support aging in place through our design process, we consider implementation of accessible entrances and exits, wider doorways, curbless showers, specific types of handles, blocking for grab bars, an extra emphasis on lighting, and the possible use of an elevator. Clients are often surprised to learn we can install an elevator for much less than the cost of building an extra bedroom on the main level.

We also design-in a “flex” room which can be used as a home office or a future bedroom for a caregiver.

Close to one year went by before the Smiths began their move to Asheville. They later called us to share that their adult daughter had moved home with them after having recently broken her ankle. To everyone’s surprise, the move went incredibly smooth as the daughter was able to get around anywhere in the house on crutches with ease.

So, whether it is your hip, knee, or ankle that gives out, the satisfaction of forward thinking and a job well done will pay off and save you money and comfort in the end.

Just ask the Smiths; they immediately became our greatest sales team.

Sean D. Sullivan is the president of Living Stone Construction, a leading design+build firm in Asheville. He is also a Certified Aging-In-Place specialist and past president of the Asheville and North Carolina Home Builders Associations. Sullivan’s current duties include chairing NAHB’s Design Committee and membership of their Executive Board. To learn more about aging in place, or Living Stone Construction, visit LivingStoneConstruction.com.