



Curbless Appeal: Curbless Showers Now and Forever

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Let's face it: people don't want to think about a time when they might become disabled or unable to safely remain in their own home. The stereotypical vision of a nursing home abounds, with wide linoleum hallways, stainless steel grab bars and wheelchair ramps.

Fortunately, an increasing amount of people are rejecting this gloomy stereotype. Instead, they are choosing to make their homes accommodate their bodies as they age in place -- without forgoing the style and comfort to which they're accustomed. According to a recent AARP study, 83% of Americans over age 45 prefer to age in place in their existing homes. Homeowners Steve and Cindy Karas are a perfect example of this phenomenon.

Educating clients to prepare for future needs allows them to talk about all the possibilities in their remodel. Steve and Cindy approached their bathroom remodel with the idea of aging in place. They had some major obstacles in their bathroom. The first obstacle was that the bathroom was carpeted and had a step up into both the tub and the shower. To make matters worse there was only a small entrance into the shower that was too close to the vanity to allow for a wheelchair. While there was a separate toilet area that most people would find acceptable, it was not large enough to be wheelchair accessible. Another issue that Cindy brought up was a lack of storage for towels and linens.



Curbless Shower is sloped to contain water and prevent leakage.



Since Steve and Cindy never used the tub and didn't really want one, it was eliminated altogether. This allowed them to fulfill their goals: 1) a large curbless shower with all the bells and whistles, 2) a beautiful master bath with a spa-like feel, and 3) a space that would be accessible and allow them to age in place. Armed with information and ideas, the perfect design for their bathroom was created.

The main feature of the master bath is a curbless shower that is accessible by wheelchair and, also, has a built-in bench for wheelchair transfer, if necessary. At a central point in the bathroom, a five-foot turning radius was created that provides access to all of the main areas of the bathroom, including the shower, the vanity area and toilet. According to American Disability Act guidelines, five feet is the minimum amount of space needed for a wheelchair to turn. Other key features of the design include lever handles rather than knobs on the shower controls and sink faucets. The shower controls are also at the opening of the shower for ease of operation. The shower heads are on an adjustable slider bar for accessibility from different heights and can be hand-held to facilitate easy cleaning.

Speaking of easy clean, this granite countertop is permanently sealed so that all the homeowners have to do is spray and wipe. Steve and Cindy also chose porcelain tile instead of stone, which gave them the look they desired without the high maintenance. In addition, epoxy grout was used to prevent staining and provide easy cleaning.

Even though the current bathroom does not contain grab bars, it was built to accommodate this feature if the need ever arises. Constructed with wood backing in the walls, grab bars can easily be installed in the future. Additionally, in order to accommodate either a standing or sitting person, the vanity area has two different heights. The knee space in the lowered seating area also allows for either a stool or a wheelchair to be used.

Storage was maximized with lots of new drawer space and a tall cabinet for towels and linens. Roll-out drawers are on the bottom half of the linen cabinet and adjustable shelves on top for maximum flexibility.

Like Steve and Cindy, a growing number of baby boomers and beyond are choosing to add value to their homes by incorporating the principles of universal design into their remodeling projects. These principles address design and materials to accommodate people of all ages and physical abilities.

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Ask Mike and Kathe

Got a remodeling question? Feel free to email us at info@ourdreambuilder.com and we'll publish our response to you in our monthly column.

Dear Mike and Kathe,

What are the pros and cons of a tankless water heater and which one is the best? ~ Rick M., Orangevale

Dear Rick,

There is really only one con in my mind. The average cost of installing one is about \$2,500.00 and it will take about 5-7 years to recoup the cost depending on your usage. Now for the pros. The operating cost is considerably less and energy is never wasted. This is an on-demand unit meaning that it only operates when you use it which is way more efficient than a standard water heater that has to keep a tank full of water at a pre-set temperature. The next advantage is that it takes up less room and is about the size of a backpack. Additional storage space is often created when installing a tankless. There are many brands out there but the one we use is the Rinnai gas unit. ~ Mike

Dear Mike and Kathe,

I keep hearing the term "universal design", but I can't seem to find a concise definition for it. Is this something they use in nursing homes? Please explain. ~ Debbie C., Sacramento

Dear Debbie,

Great question. I like to define universal design as thoughtful design which accommodates people of all ages and physical abilities. While universal design is applied in nursing homes, it's not just for that purpose. For example, using lever handles on doors instead of knobs doesn't cost more, but is much easier to operate from a wheelchair. Having a handheld shower head on a slider bar makes it adjustable and usable for people of all heights and abilities. Universal design does not have to be expensive or ugly. ~ Kathe



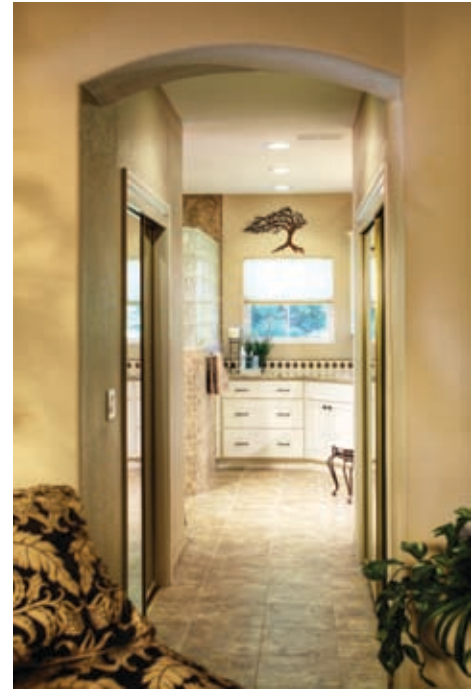
Open knee space allows for stool or wheelchair. Drawer storage and rollouts in linen cabinet are easily accessed.

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To learn more about this topic, you are invited to attend DreamBuilders Home Remodeling's upcoming seminar on "Remodeling Your Forever Home" this month. For more information, visit their website at www.ourdreambuilder.com.

NEXT MONTH: We will feature another project and discuss the in's and outs of planning your kitchen and bath remodeling projects.

Mike Russell, CR and Kathe Russell, CKBR are the owners of DreamBuilders Home Remodeling, an award winning design build firm specializing in kitchens, baths, and whole house remodels. Their showroom is located in El Dorado Hills. Mike is a licensed general contractor and Kathe is an interior designer. Together with their design and construction team, they have helped hundreds of clients achieve their dream spaces. For more information, please visit their website at www.ourdreambuilder.com or contact (916) 933-3506 to schedule a consultation. ❖



Living Your Dreams, That's what remodeling is all about.

Get started by attending one of Mike and Kathe's fun and interactive seminars!

September Seminars:

Remodeling Your Forever Home

Date: Sat., Sept. 25, 2010,

Register by Sept. 22

Time: 10:00am – 10:50am

If you're a baby boomer or beyond, come learn about the 5 major design considerations to explore before you remodel.

Budgeting for Your Remodel

Date: Saturday September 25, 2010

Time: 11:00am – 11:50am

Cost information and re-sale data on major types of remodeling projects for the Sacramento area will be presented and discussed.



October Seminars:

Planning Your Kitchen Remodel

Date: Sat., Oct. 23rd, 2010. Register by Oct. 20

Time: 10:00am – 10:50am

Planning Your Bathroom Remodel

Date: Saturday October 23rd, 2010

Time: 11:00am – 11:50am

If you're planning a kitchen or bathroom remodel, these seminars will shave months and even years off of your research process! Come learn what things cost and what you can expect during the process.



Celebrating 10 years in business.

Register online at
www.ourdreambuilder.com

Cost: Free

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