

“Good design is good design. Aging-in-place changes should be useful throughout your lifetime.”

— David Millsaps, DLM Builders

AGING IN PLACE

By KAREN L. HORNFECK
Special to Prime

When Jeff and Carroll Ann Miller moved to High Point in 1986, they built their dream home and happily raised two children there. Fast-forward 21 years later, and that same dream home seemed too large for their empty nest.

Seeking to downsize, the couple decided to pursue their dream of purchasing a smaller, older home and renovating it. Jeff, 59, and Carroll Ann, 57, weren't only interested in aesthetics as they thought about redesigning their new home.

"It's our plan to be here forever," Carroll Ann said. With that in mind, the couple hired Hoffman Builders to help them think through design issues that would allow them to age in place.

Aging in place is defined by the National Association of Home Builders as "living in your home safely, independently and comfortably," regardless of physical abilities. With baby boomers now 44 to 63 years old and comprising almost one-third of the nation's population, aging and its accompanying issues are hot topics and the NAHB lists aging-in-place renovations as the fastest-growing segment in the remodeling industry. With many boomers in the throes of taking care of their own aging parents, consumers in this age bracket have learned a lot about aging issues firsthand and want to make their own plans for the future.

Builder Karen Hoffman helped the Millers make several changes to their 1920s bungalow. Navigating steps can present a problem in later years, so the couple added a main-level master suite and bathroom, and chose to relocate a basement laundry room to the main floor. Doorways and hallways were widened to ensure that a wheel-

chair and walker could fit if the need arose. The Millers' only regret is that they didn't make the changes sooner. "Both sets of our parents are gone now, but if we'd had a downstairs bedroom, they would've been able to visit us more," Carroll Ann says.

A recent AARP survey noted that 89 percent of those age 50 and older wish to remain in their own homes indefinitely, but changes often need to be made as homeowners age to ensure safety. For guidance, the NAHB recommends consumers talk with a contractor who has earned the Certified Aging-In-Place Specialist designation (CAPS). The CAPS program is a joint venture designed by AARP and the NAHB Research Center, and offers contractors a chance to learn specific techniques and design strategies that address the needs of seniors wishing to remain in their homes.

David Millsaps, vice president of DLM Builders and a CAPS contractor, recommends that anyone who is considering renovating a home think about aging-in-place options early in the process, no matter what the client's current age.

"We ask at the beginning of any design process, 'How long do you intend to stay here?'" Millsaps said. If a family would like to stay in a home long-term, he says there are modifications that can be made now to make aging-in-place design possible in the future. "It's my opinion that good design is good design," Millsaps explained. "Aging-in-place changes should be useful throughout your lifetime."

Standard bathrooms often present many mobility and safety issues to seniors. The Millers chose to put in a walk-in shower with an attached fold-down seat to ensure that bathing is easy and safe no matter what mobility issues crop up.

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PHOTOS BY NANCY SIDELINGER/Special Sections Photographer

Karen Hoffman with Hoffman Builders explains how 36-inch doorways, wider than standard doorways, allow easier access in a newly remodeled home in High Point. The entrances to the home were also built with fewer steps for easier access.



Another easy-access upgrade that meets the aging-in-place model: trash pullouts in the kitchen.



In addition to the other changes, the master bathroom includes counters of varied heights, easy-access power outlets, levered handles and wide floor spaces.



Above: Pocket doors allow for more usable space in smaller rooms like the master bathroom.

Top: The home's new master bathroom now has a sit-down shower and separate pull-down sprayer. The shower also has reinforced walls for grab bars to be installed, should the need arise.

AGING GRACEFULLY

Changes to make if you are considering aging in place:

- A master bedroom and bathroom on the first floor.
- A low or no-threshold entrance on the home with an overhang.
- Lever-style door handles.
- No change in levels on the main floor.
- Bright lighting in all areas, especially places like stairways.
- A low-maintenance exterior.
- Non-slip flooring at the main entryway.
- An open floor plan, particularly in the kitchen/dining area.
- Handrails on all steps.

Source: National Association of Home Builders Web site, www.nahb.org

FIND OUT MORE ONLINE

• www.nahb.org

Information offered on the National Association of Home Builders Web site includes aging-in-place changes to make and a list of Certified Aging-In-Place Specialist designation (CAPS) contractors in the area.

• www.aarp.org/life/homedesign

This part of the AARP Web site provides homeowners with aging-in-place checklists for specific rooms to guide remodeling plans.