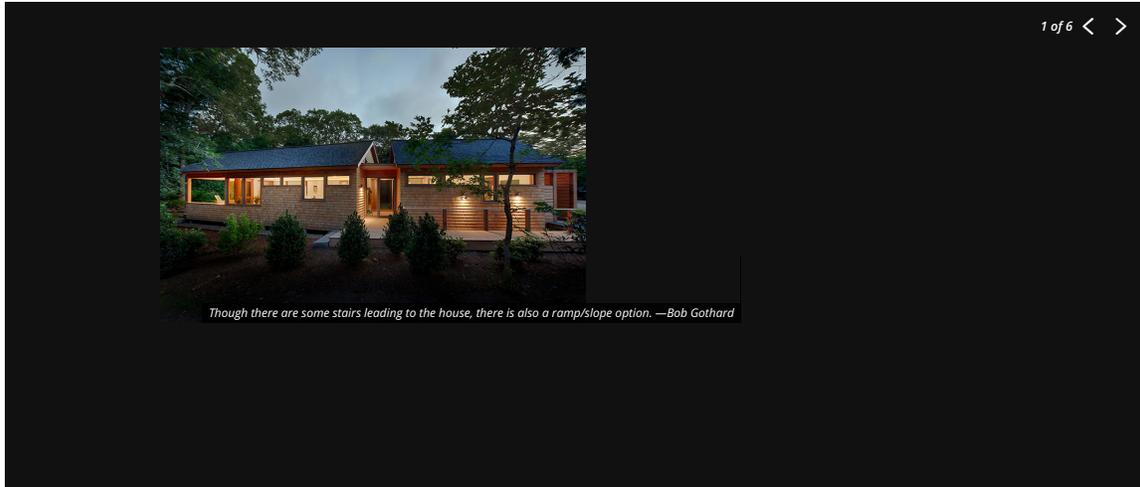


Design Q+A: How do we design our homes so we can 'Age in Place'?

South Mountain does it all the time.

March 20, 2019



Have you designed a house, or even just a room, to accommodate the needs of older or handicapped people?

“Aging in place is important to South Mountain,” said John Abrams, CEO and founder of the West Tisbury integrated architecture, building, and renewable energy firm. South Mountain recently completed a 715-square-foot home in West Chop Woods (bit.ly/SoMoWChop) that illustrates the provisions they incorporate for aging in place.

The company has created a three-tier checklist they present to all homeowners during the design phase (see box, next page).

Level 1 includes such features as at least one bathroom on the first floor, weather protection from elements to fully cover accessible entry door, and minimum 38-inch wide halls. Level 2 has such specifications as “Turning radius of 60 inches, or space for a T-turn in kitchen, full bathroom, bedroom, and living/dining area,” (to accommodate wheelchair users), and “ability to operate windows from a seated position.”

Level 3 advocates for using integrated rolling carts in place of base cabinets in the kitchen, to accommodate a wheelchair user; power-operated windows, and electrical outlets at a minimum of 18 inches high.

“We aim to incorporate all Level 1 provisions in every project we do. Should further accessibility be of interest, Levels 2 and 3 provisions can be incorporated at an additional cost,” said South Mountain architect and co-owner Matt Coffey.

Three-tier checklist for “Aging in Place” design. “Visitability” gauges the ease with which a person with disabilities could access a building. See the complete list on their site, here: bit.ly/SoMoAging

Level 1: South Mountain aims to incorporate all these features in homes they design

Absolutes for ‘visitability’

- At least one bath on the first floor
- At least one “zero-clearance” threshold entry
- 32-inch clearance for doors at all visitable spaces

Site and entrance

- No-step route to be no steeper than an 8 percent grade
- Accessible entry-door threshold to be 1-inch maximum
- Weather protection from elements to fully cover accessible entry door

Interior circulation to visitable spaces

- Readily visitable spaces via a no-step route to include a full bathroom, bedroom, kitchen, and dining and living space.
- Cased openings to be 32” wide minimum
- Level changes in circulation route via a ramp to be less than an 8 percent grade
- Minimum 38” wide halls to serve visitable spaces

Bedroom



- First-floor bedroom (or future bedroom) with 36-inch minimum clearance on one side of the bed preferred

Bathroom

- Adequate blocking for grab bars at toilet and shower in visitable bathroom at 33" to 36" above finished floor

Floors

- Maximum ½" threshold between floor surfaces in accessible spaces

Fixtures and hardware

- Lever handles on doors

Switches and controls

- Thermostats and electrical switches at 48 inches maximum, or remote-controlled

Level 2

Site and entrance

- Access to waste and recycling on accessible route

Interior Circulation

- Minimum 40-inch width for designated accessible passages and halls

Accessible bedroom clothes storage

- Drawers to be mounted on full-extension slides
- Place to sit when dressing (minimum 18 inches high by 15 inches deep by 30 inches wide)
- Easily accessible full-length mirror

Accessible bathroom

- Slip-resistant flooring
- Outswing doors for rescue access

Shower

- Curbless, with seat (or blocking for seat) adjacent to controls
- Minimum 4-foot by 4-foot, or 3-foot by 5-foot shower stall

Plumbing

- Clear space under vanity tops or easily removable vanity cabinets for future knee space (27-inch minimum vertical clearance)
- Single-lever water controls at plumbing fixtures

Appliances

- Ranges and cooktops with controls at front or side
- Side-by-side refrigerator/freezer
- Microwave and wall ovens located within reach from a seated position

Level 3

Site and entrance

- Package shelf at front door at 15-inch to 48-inch reach

Circulation and stairs

- Minimum 60-inch turning space in all rooms (or T-turn)
- Color changes, pathway lighting, and other visual cues to indicate surface planes (e.g., painted risers and natural treads)

Kitchen

- Continuous stretches of countertops for easy sliding of heavy objects between sink, refrigerator, and cooking area
- Glass doors and open shelves in upper cabinets for visual access to contents



Bathroom

- Hand-held showerhead with shutoff on shower end

Hardware

- Locks and hardware operable with closed fist, requiring minimum effort

Laundry

- Side by side front-loading washer and dryer with front controls (48-inch clearance in front of units)
- Access to folding surface

Technology

- 911 switch/flashing porch light
 - Visual and audio controls for doorbell, security, and smoke alarms
 - Power-operated windows
-
-

