

# More Than a Measured Glance

ASSESSING A CLIENT'S HOME FOR AGING IN PLACE/

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**THE DESIGN PROCESS** begins for the interior designer when a potential client calls for a consultation, bringing with them a design dilemma to be solved. Then come the standard client meetings and interviews to define scope of work and services; followed by programming; an inventory of the existing space and furnishings; and analysis of site conditions. This standard model is all well and good, however, if the client is over 50 years old and expresses a wish to stay in the home long term, then another, more comprehensive review may be in order.

Whether the client acknowledges it or not, their needs for safety, ease of access and mobility are likely to increase dramatically in the ensuing years. The age-related changes a client can expect include a decline in their physical and cognitive abilities. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, about one-third of all Americans over 65 years old—roughly 12 million people—fall in their homes each year, for example. The designer who is educated in these and other aging issues can play an essential role in helping clients maintain their independence for as long as they choose.

What tools exist for the designer to evaluate a client's home, beyond a keen eye and a tape measure? What guidelines can we use? Luckily, several checklists addressing aging in place are readily available.

AARP publishes a number of booklets that address comfort, safety and ease of living. These target homeowners and their families and offer excellent information, geared toward educating consumers. Likewise, the Center for Universal Design at North Carolina State University has been a longstanding leader in promoting the design philosophy that enables a person with reduced mobility to remain independent in an attractive home. The CUD provides a series of guidelines for creating "visitable" living spaces that incorporate equipment and strategies to make accessibility virtually invisible.

Another major contender in the aging-in-place movement, the National Association of Home Builders has

developed the Certified Aging-in-Place Specialist (CAPS) program to give basic training in the "strategies and techniques for designing and building aesthetically enriching, barrier-free living environments." The CAPS program provides an opportunity for designers to network with other professionals and encourages teamwork among the designer, the contractor and the healthcare professional for implementation.

Often, it is helpful to look to other professions who may approach the issue of aging from a different perspective. Occupational therapy professionals (OTs) have expertise and training in identifying ways to improve safety in the home and help residents manage daily life, regardless of disability type. Often, strategies introduced by occupational therapists can help a person live independently for many years. The American Occupational Therapy Association provides a variety of home evaluation tools that can be valuable for the designer even when a client is not drastically affected by injury or illness.

At heart, interior designers are problem solvers. Armed with appropriate assessment tools, designers can train their discerning vision on the details of a client's home to suggest and implement modifications that do not look like those found in a nursing home; rather, they can be simultaneously beautiful, stylish and functional. To this end, a client home assessment and resulting recommendations report can be a valuable addition to the programming process. It says to the client, "I am creating this space not only for your enjoyment now, but for many years to come. I've designed your home to grow with you. Live long and thrive!" **i**

To access any of the resources mentioned above, and view or download the author's Client Home Assessment form, go to [www.asid.org/icon](http://www.asid.org/icon).

A member of the ASID Design for Aging Council, Anne Kellelt, ASID, CAPS, is principal of the San Diego design firm A Kinder Space. She also serves on the faculty at the Design Institute of San Diego and advises the school's ASID student chapter.

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