



KEEPING BOOMERS IN THEIR PLACE

Q&A with Anne Kellett

ANNE KELLETT WANTS YOU TO STAY right where you are. An award-winning interior designer and instructor at the Design Institute of San Diego, Kellett, ASID, is a Certified Aging-in-Place Specialist who concentrates on creating safer, smarter, more-accessible home environments that promote long-term, independent living. Her firm, A Kinder Space, offers help with floor plans, lighting, appliances, cabinetry, plumbing fixtures and more — developing barrier-free design for all ages and abilities, but paying special attention to our graying population. Kellett will be participating in ASID's 2014 Designed for Life competition, which will provide pro bono bath and kitchen remodels to two deserving San Diegans.

Q: Functionality versus beauty — do you have to sacrifice one for the other with aging-in-place remodels?

A: I'm so glad you brought that up, because that's really what I'm all about. And I think that's what designers who are entering into this type of design are really pushing: Beauty, functionality and safety all go hand in hand. ... If you're going to do this kind of remodeling — especially with the boomer generation — it needs to be beautiful, or at least it needs to be as invisible as possible.

Q: Wider doorways, bathroom grab bars — it seems like a no-brainer to incorporate these kinds of design changes. Why has it taken so long for this to go mainstream?

A: I've wondered that myself. I think part of the problem is that many builders seem to be stuck in the way things have always been done and have been slow to realize that there is a market for universal design, particularly for people who are growing up, as I say, rather than aging. ... That has begun to change, because now both the National Association of the Remodeling Industry and the National Association of Home Builders have certification courses and training for their members in both universal design and aging in place, which is a positive step.

Q: What are some of the common obstacles you run into?

A: The first obstacle is when you walk up to the house. I have a saying: If you can't get in or out, you can't call it home. So the entry into the house can be the biggest obstacle — and not just for someone in a wheelchair. If you have neuropathy or you have a little arthritis, climbing stairs can be a challenge. There's also a safety issue associated with that. So the first thing is, 'How do you get into the house?' Then when you're in the house, the two biggest areas of challenge are kitchens and baths.

Left: Anne Kellett photographed in a shower at Fixtures Living.

PATRICIA BEAN ARCHITECTURAL PHOTOGRAPHY



An aging-in-place kitchen features multiple layers of light and easy-clean surfaces.

PATRICIA BEAN ARCHITECTURAL PHOTOGRAPHY



The remodeling of this kitchen involved lowering the oven, installing easy-grasp handles and pull-out shelves behind pantry doors, widening the doorway into the living room and adding lighting, including under the cabinets.

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Q: What are some common solutions?

A: The most common solution is education: letting the client understand the challenges to safety. ... Bringing up the subject can be difficult with boomers, because we don't think we're going to grow old; we're going to go on forever, and there's a huge denial about the need for changing where we live so we can stay there for as long as we can. Usually change doesn't happen until something serious happens, and then it's an emergency. That's what I'm fighting against. I'm trying to educate people so that they do it before anything might happen so that it's not such a traumatic experience. And it can be done more easily and seamlessly and beautifully rather than in a quick way.

Q: So how do you start that conversation?

A: I like the concept of visitability. That's an issue that is much easier for people to understand. Almost every one of us might have someone we know who can't come see us because they can't get into our house or they can't use the bathroom or they can't stay overnight because there's no bedroom downstairs. ... People tend to think that they may not need [aging-in-place design] for themselves, but there might be somebody in their family [that does]. So if I can bring up the subject of visitability and making those kinds of adaptations so that their house is more welcoming, then things are already in place for ease of use for the people who live there. ♦

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