



Designing for retirement

The time to think about what should go where is now

by Karen Doss Bowman/Loghome.com

When planning a retirement home, people tend to consider ways to reduce the hassles of maintenance and ways to facilitate getting around as their mobility becomes more limited. A few of our experts offered minor design tips that may go a long way in making a retirement home as comfortable as possible.

1. Widen interior doors and hallways.

Consider the possibility that a family member will eventually need to use a wheelchair or walker, says Drew Ridder of Dogwood Mountain Log Homes in Harrisonburg, Virginia. Design wider hallways and doors so that a person using such implements may go straight through, without having to turn sideways. Additionally, more retirees are adding in oversized closets (one on top of another) that may later be converted into elevators if needed, says Craig Seider of Expedition Log Homes of Oostburg, Wisconsin.

2. Bathroom modifications.

Ridder suggests making the bathrooms bigger so there's more room to maneuver around. Also install a shower with a seat and hand-held shower head; install handlebars around the walls and around the toilet.

3. Appliances and accessories.

Folks who use wheelchairs might consider accessories like pull-down cabinets (you use a stick to pull them up and down) or appliances such as ovens or dishwashers with side-swing doors, Seider says. It's helpful to make the space around kitchen cabinets wider than

normal to allow a wheelchair to get through. Central vacuum and carefully planned lighting also may make life a little easier.

4. One-level living.

Many retirement homes are designed with the master bedroom suite on the main level, along with the kitchen, great room and laundry facilities. There may be a second level with a spare bedroom and bath for guests. A trend Ridder sees in the log homes he designs is a move away from “designated space” on the main floor, replaced by a large room that combines the kitchen, great room and dining room. Doing so provides plenty of space for gathering when the children and grandchildren visit.

5. Zero-clearance entryways.

While building codes call for the garage floor to be lower than the main floor level, Seider and Ridder suggest building a small ramp instead of a step into the house.

6. Reduce maintenance hassles.

“Maintenance-free is a fantasy,” Ridder says, but there are many design elements that can be incorporated to make maintenance easier. Porches, for example, not only provide nice spots for relaxing, but also protect the house from wind, sun and water damage. Other ideas: Select pressure-treated logs or a weather-resistant stain; use roofing materials that respond well to the climate in which the house is located; and install computerized controls for lights, thermostat, or melting snow on the driveway.

A final note: A log-home community might make a nice retirement option as well. In a community where all residents appreciate the beauty of dwellings that are made from natural elements, everyone is bound to feel at home, says Jeff Arnold, director of marketing for Heritage Log Homes, Sevierville, Tennessee.

“All of these people instantly have something in common, and that is love of the atypical, the love of nature, and the elegance and the beauty of wood homes,” says Arnold.

And from a practical standpoint, it’s easier. People can usually work with a community representative to pick out a floor plan, a position on the lot, and a few other options, and the construction crew will take care of the rest — no worries about permits, trenching, wiring, or perk tests. Once you’re settled in, most communities provide some type of security system, yard maintenance or snow removal services, and other conveniences.

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