

# LIVING IN PLACE

## THOUGHTFUL DESIGN FOR EVERY SEASON OF LIFE

Architectural design professional Adam Gibson explains the importance of making homes more comfortable and accessible to everyone, regardless of age or ability.

### HOW IS “LIVING IN PLACE” DIFFERENT FROM “AGING IN PLACE”?

“Aging in Place” concepts are focused on people who want to remain in their homes as they age. The type of design I do has a more in-depth coverage of people’s needs. “Living in Place” is a more comprehensive type of design. It’s about making all homes accessible, comfortable and safe for everyone. There’s even an institute dedicated to the practice, called The Living In Place Institute.

### HOW DID YOU GET INTERESTED IN THE CONCEPT OF LIVING IN PLACE?

For the last 20 years, a lot of my focus has been on kitchen and bath design. I moved into full-scale architectural design about 10 years ago and initially concentrated on Aging in Place concepts. Then I started realizing that I knew a lot of families who had unique, specific needs. I worked with one family who had an autistic child. I also worked with an individual who had vertigo and needed a horizon line to keep herself upright.



### HOW WOULD YOU DESIGN A BATHROOM TO SUPPORT THE IDEA OF “LIVING IN PLACE”?

For the client who had vertigo, I designed a shower that has a horizon line – a row of accent tiles – five feet off the floor. Because those tiles were a different texture and color than the rest, she remained upright without having to hold on for dear life. I also design towel bars to be actual grab bars. (How many people have had their child pull a towel bar out of the wall?) These are designed to hold up to 250 pounds, and they’re so decorative that you can’t tell it’s not a towel bar.

### EVERY DETAIL IS IMPORTANT. WHAT’S A “SMALL THING” YOU ALWAYS INCORPORATE?

Lever door handles, which are far better than knobs. People with arthritic hands have trouble gripping “regular” door handles. I like to use levers that have a “return” (the piece at the end that bends back toward the door). If someone loses their balance but grabs the door, it can catch them and save them from a pretty disastrous fall.

### WHAT ARE SOME DESIGN DETAILS THAT BENEFIT EVERYONE, REGARDLESS OF AGE AND/OR ABILITY?

Beach-entry, or curbless, showers are natural and aesthetically pleasing for those who have needs and for those who don’t. Doors, especially in a bathroom, should swing outward. That way, if someone slips and falls, you can still get to them. I like to have shower doors swing both ways – outward for safety, inward for aesthetics. It’s a small thing that may not be noticeable, but works well for everyone.

### WHAT ARE SOME WAYS A HOMEOWNER CAN PLAN AHEAD?

When planning, I often draw a doorway to be framed for a 36-inch door (which is ADA-compliant). I can infill it and make sure the electrical switch isn’t in that infill. Should the need arise, the homeowner can order a new door and, within a couple of hours, have a wheelchair-accessible doorway. If it’s a multi-story home, I’ll stack closets on top of each other. That way, you can easily remove the flooring between the floors and have an elevator shaft. This is prohibitively expensive if not planned in advance. But with forethought, there is much less cost.



Adam Gibson is an Indianapolis-based architectural design professional specializing in luxury home additions, homes, kitchens, bathrooms, entertainment spaces and commercial suites. Adam is a Certified Master Kitchen and Bath Designer, a Certified Aging in Place Specialist and a Certified Living In Place Professional. Known for infusions of natural light, clean lines and efficient use of space, Adam brings out-of-the-box imagination, eco-friendly technologies and a healthy environment to each of his designs.

### KITCHENS ARE THE HEART OF THE HOME. WHAT DO YOU RECOMMEND?

- Toe-kick lighting is for more than just aesthetics. They make for a good night light and show people the walk line.
- Lowering the reflectance of counter tops makes a big difference. Consider honed or matte surfaces rather than polished counter tops.
- Don’t put a microwave above a cooking surface. A vertically challenged person, or someone weaker than average, can get severely burned when removing hot liquids.
- Use push-to-open drawers, or drawer and cabinet pulls that are easy to grip for those with arthritic joints.
- Consider a flush-mounted, induction cooktop. Aside from being the quickest and most efficient, flushing it with the counter top adds to the work area.

# BATHROOM CHECKLIST

**THIS BATHROOM DESIGN IS IDEAL FOR LIVING IN PLACE**

- Multi-height counters
- Built-in seating
- Beach-entry shower for safe entry and exit
- Textured shower floor for better grip
- Shower horizon line
- Peened (textured) cabinet pulls for easy opening
- Easy-to-access faucet handles
- Outward swinging shower door (not shown)
- Excellent facial light for easy visibility
- A bonus window to invite natural light



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