

55+ Housing

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Creating a Sense of Community

Getting residents involved in the design process gives them a sense of ownership, pride and belonging.

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Ask the Expert

By Orren Pickell

Q:

In many high-income, non-urban areas, long-term home owners want to move to a smaller space, but one that will accommodate them as they age. Our boomer clients still want lots of kitchen/great room entertainment space on the main floor, as well as a master suite, laundry, guest room and lots of storage. Putting all that on one floor would demand a very large lot. So I'm wondering whether a residential elevator to another level could give them what they want at a price point that makes sense. Any thoughts?

A:

First, good builders can create floor plans that work now, and also can anticipate and accommodate future needs, such as an elevator.

For example, you can stack closets in the current design so that an elevator can be installed later, should the need arise. Installing such an option wouldn't necessarily be a must-have for most people in their 60s looking for a user-friendly home, but a forward-looking design makes it possible to retrofit an elevator later.

We typically encourage clients to consider elevators for their future needs when they don't want a first-floor master suite or their lot size will not permit them to have one. Having an elevator could turn out to be a huge benefit. Plus, by offering this option, the builder demonstrates a genuine and knowledgeable understanding of the aging population and their housing needs.

Depending on your location and the features clients desire, the cost to install a residential elevator can range from \$20,000 to \$60,000. Compared other options like installing an in-ground pool (which can range from \$100,000 to \$225,000), a residential elevator could be a more practical use of a home owner's budget. The price range for an elevator as a percentage of the cost of a \$1,000,000 to \$3,000,000 new home for move-up buyers could come in at around 2% of construction costs. And of course, the cost of stacking closets is minimal.



Elevators are usually located off the foyer or in the utilitarian areas of the house, mud room or back door areas. They're ideal for accommodating multi-generational family living, allowing aging parents or grandparents to live comfortably in the house.

Ask the Expert (Cont.)

Let's say your clients want an elevator. Selecting the appropriate elevator essentially comes down to the type of drive system that works best for your area and your structure. There are five basic types: roped hydraulic, winding drum, counter-weight, vacuum, and the new gearless systems. You'll need to check your local and state codes with regard to vacuum elevators, since some areas do not permit them. Each system has its advantages and cost considerations. The winding drum tends to be the least expensive. Our company leans toward roped hydraulic for its dependability and value in a residential application.

As for aesthetics, it's critical to plan for the residential elevator to be unobtrusive. Many people find that encountering a stair-climbing lift on the front stairs screams "disability," which most boomers perceive as a negative. An elevator could be located in an area convenient to the residents, but less obvious to visitors. We recommend an honest conversation with clients when it comes to how the system will look. But the virtues of an elevator tend to outweigh the perception issues — even able-bodied people would rather use an elevator to take items to a storage area, rather than risk climbing stairs with a heavy box.

Your clients also will be concerned about resale value, especially those who are slightly mobility-challenged but are not yet ready for assisted living. This is a group that will grow significantly through the next 15 to 20 years. Further, there is growing trend toward mobility-challenged extended family members moving in with — or at least visiting for longer than normal periods of time — your current and prospective clients. Don't be afraid to raise this issue as you discuss the possibility of installing an elevator. This, too, will showcase your firm's commitment to helping the aging population live with the highest quality of life that is practical and affordable.

About the Author: Orren Pickell and the dedicated, experienced team at the [Orren Pickell Building Group](#), Northfield, Ill., have provided great design and quality custom construction for 40 years. Pickell and his team are enthusiastic about the industry, and the opportunities in the 55+ age cohort. He and his company have been honored with more design and construction awards than any other Midwest company. Pickell enjoys a reputation as a premiere custom home builder, with happy customers throughout Illinois, Wisconsin, Indiana and Michigan.



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Model Homes: Bricks & Sticks? Virtual? Or Both? (Cont.)

The fact that the cost to create a virtual tour is a fraction of the cost of building an actual house isn't the only plus; virtual tours also can come together quickly. While the average amount of time to build a house is just under eight months — not counting staging — creating a virtual tour takes only weeks.

Accurately showing designs and plans in a hands-on way prior to breaking ground gives prospective buyers more and better information — and it can enhance a builder's ability to pre-sell homes.



***About the Author:** Erik Rothbard serves as vice president of [RSC, LLC](#) and of [Pixel Perfect Studios](#), a division of RSC. Pixel Perfect Studios is a full-service computer graphics company supplying visual content to the architectural and design/build community and real estate industry.*

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