

MULTIGENERATIONAL HOMES

By Dan Howard

for TRIB TOTAL MEDIA

Multigenerational homes are making a comeback as a practical solution and a great experience for many modern families.

According to the Pew Research Center, a record 57 million Americans or 18.1% of the population of the United States were living in multi-generational households in 2012. This is double the number who lived in such households in 1980.

"Boomerang kids" and seniors "aging in place" living in homes with "the sandwich generation" make up the largest portion of these households. There are both very unique advantages and complex challenges with these arrangements.

The boomerang kids are often adult children returning home after college, loss

of a job, a failed marriage or other problem living arrangement. They often bring their children into the home. Becoming a part of a grandchild's life is an abundant joy and bonus in what could be a rough time of life.

For some seniors, living with an adult child may be the only choice that they can afford. For others, the freedom of living in a private home is a "quality of life" decision for the parent. Even the very best assisted living facility is restrictive and personally invasive. The company of children and grandchildren can be a great bonus for a senior as well as the younger family members.

Good planning should come first before converting to a multigenerational home

There will almost always be a need for renovation of the multigenerational home. A very important consideration is to preserve the resale value of the home. When creating separate quarters within a home, select materials and finishes that enhance the value of a home. The separate area can be finished with future use as a game room or home office area in mind.

An example would be when adding a separate cooking area, select appliances, cabinets and other materials that would look like they could be used as an entertainment kitchenette.

Privacy is a very important factor to consider. By the way, privacy goes both ways

with each generation. Pocket doors used to be the "go to" design consideration to allow privacy while maintaining openness when desired. HGTV has come up with an attractive and easier to install solution. They use decorative doors on barn door type hardware to slide across the door openings.

A separate exterior entrance is an important feature. Having a push button combination lock on the door to the area is a great idea. This can allow family or professional emergency help to enter the space without damaging the door if a senior is unresponsive. It can also provide access when one of the generations is left without a key to the house.



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For links and additional information about multigenerational housing go to the online copy of this article at: www.EnviroSpect.info/MultigenerationalHousing

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Design considerations for the multigenerational home

Prepare for accessibility. When remodeling for seniors or physically challenged individuals, install doors to open out from their space into the main areas. The best example of the need for this is the bathroom door. Most bathroom doors open in toward the bathroom. If a senior falls against the door, help can't reach them without busting down the door and possibly further injuring them.

When possible, install plywood or cement board before installing the drywall in areas that could require safety grab bars. Bathrooms and stairways are prime candidates for these reinforced walls. This provides the maximum ability to place grab bars in the best place for the resident requiring them.

The new high toilets are designed for ease of use by seniors or others with limited mobility. They are safer to use and more comfortable than traditional toilets. It just makes good sense to use these toilets as they are not an inconvenience for

anybody and a benefit for many people.

A critical feature is supplemental heat and cooling. The temperature that people find comfortable varies greatly between individuals. The variation is usually even wider between generations. The main heating system will get you near the desired temperature in most areas. Adding a small capacity supplemental heating and cooling system on its own thermostat can allow for adjustments in areas, but allow the main house system to manage the main load more efficiently and economically.

Provide for fresh air and light. This is a big challenge particularly when the added space is in a basement. If a window can't be added, install an air intake and a separate exhaust fan. For lighting, use daylight light bulbs. These are easy to install and an economical way to add the psychological and health benefits of sunlight.



A final thought on the social and business sides of multigenerational housing

Multigenerational housing arrangements start with the best of intentions. However, there can be stress and problems that arise. These should be discussed and sorted out ahead of time. The child returning from college will be on "college time". That loud music at 1:00 AM may not be welcome in the parent's home. The senior moving into their child's home will naturally desire to assume the role of head of household, when their health and other factors make that unreasonable. Communication ahead of time can enrich the experience and reduce stress for everyone involved.

Beware of potential financial landmines with shared financing of improvements in a multigenerational home.

It often makes good sense for sharing the cost of renovations or additions to accommodate multigenerational living arrangements. Mom sells her home and moves in with daughter, it makes sense for mom to contribute to setting up her living space.

In certain circumstances when a senior contributes funds to the improvements in the relative's home, liens can be levied against the home if the senior later uses some of the social services assistance programs. Other examples include ownership issues that can arise from divorce and estate circumstances. The bottom line is to first consult an attorney when funding is shared between different parties.

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