

# The Washington Post Magazine

SPRING HOME & DESIGN

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## Accessible Design Grows Up

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BY MAILE PINGEL



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#### ^~ NICOLE FULLER

The designer created an accessible, low-maintenance wet room for a Manhattan client. A narrow eat-in kitchen on the Upper East Side has the proper turning radius for a wheelchair and is designed to adapt as the homeowners' needs change.

#### > MICHAEL GRAVES ARCHITECTURE & DESIGN

The firm developed prototype housing at Fort Belvoir, Va., in 2010. The single-family homes were designed to meet the needs of injured soldiers or those adversely affected by their military service.



"It felt like a care home."

Disappointed by what they found on the market, he and the friend, James Taylor, launched Motionspot, a company that offers stylish products and the guidance clients need to better understand their options and how they can make their homes work.

"Five or 10 years ago, people put up with what they were given, but people are becoming much more aware now," says Warner. "We're constantly trying to get manufacturers to think about design that can enhance people's lives: beautiful faucets, washrooms and kitchens, front doors and windows that are easy to open. What technology can be incorporated?"

"There's a real movement in the market with the realization that things can be beautiful," he adds. "There are clever ways to design flexible homes that you wouldn't necessarily know were designed for a need. Every product designer has a responsibility to design for this area."

To meet the growing demand for what they call "future-proofing," later this year the company is launching Fine & Able, a kitchen and bath line that includes grab bars, faucets, sanitary ware, slip-resistant tile flooring, shower enclosures, adjustable work tops and cabinetry, and appliances. "We've designed out the stigma and created beautiful solutions," says Warner.

"Products have to get better made — good design and a better price point," Nichols says. Retailers including Walmart, Walgreens and CVS are getting into the medical space, and Lowe's and Home Depot carry ADA-compliant options, but designers agree there's still a huge void. Because designers can't necessarily find universal options in their local design centers, it often comes down to doing their own research, attending niche conferences like Environments for Aging, hiring sometimes-pricey custom work or finding other accessibility hacks. (Israeli company ThisAbles creates downloadable 3-D-printer templates for items like sofa lifts and oversized light switches that convert popular Ikea furnishings into accessible designs.)

"Every kitchen and bath showroom should have at least one person on staff who understands ADA requirements," says Los Angeles designer Christian May, who is recovering from a debilitating spinal injury he suffered several years ago. "Anyone at any time may find themselves with a permanent or temporary disability. [Maybe] you can survive without an ADA kitchen because we have Postmates and DoorDash, you can sleep on your sofa if need be, or turn your dining room into a bedroom like I had to do, but you can't survive without an accessible bathroom."

"We just need more accessible designs for the general public across the board — and from major brands like Pottery Barn or Crate and Barrel. But it's not profitable yet," adds Low.

Perhaps that will change with the so-called silver tsunami of baby boomers, and if designers have their way, the world will be all the more beautiful for it. Accessible homes have even graced the cover of national design magazines, whether readers knew it or not. "People have an emotional and physical reaction to something pleasant; beauty matters," says Nichols, echoing Graves's belief that "beauty can reduce stress and make us feel better," and that "well-designed places and objects can actually improve healing."

For Sechrist, beauty is key to spiritual wellness, especially as we age and deal with issues of marginalization and purpose. "To be in your own home and be able to just put a flower in a vase — that can feel really good." 🌸

Maile Pingel is a design historian and writer in Los Angeles. To comment on this story, email [wpmagazine@washpost.com](mailto:wpmagazine@washpost.com) or visit [wapo.st/magazine](http://wapo.st/magazine).

