



Housing Our Aging Parents: How to Retrofit Your Home to Care for a Senior Loved One

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At some point in their lives, most people will face helping their aging parents live comfortably. Often, the decision of where to live later in life depends on physical accommodations, health and finances. Your loved ones usually have three housing options when they hit their golden years:

1. **Stay in their existing homes as long as possible.** Obviously, this choice is based on health and capabilities. If your parents aren't medically challenged and can easily navigate their current home safely, this is the preferred choice for many aging people.
2. **Move into an independent living, assisted living or nursing home facility.** A personal choice many adult children struggle with, this difficult decision is usually made when an aging parent needs care beyond what family members can provide.
3. **Move in with one of their children or other family member.** When your aging parent needs housing and care that you're able to provide, they can move into a "mother-in-law suite" in your home. Accommodating a senior in your home raises several issues that must be addressed so the living arrangement can meet the needs of everyone in the household.

Even if your aging parent doesn't need a higher level of care, you may just want them close to you, especially if they live in an area that experiences harsh winters. Many Arizonans prefer to have their loved ones live in a climate that's fantastic eight to nine months of the year. For your parents, living in Arizona eliminates having to deal with dangerous elements and feeling closed-in for many months of the year.

This white paper will focus on the housing issues involved in the third option – having an aging loved one move into your home. We'll cover topics including:

- Dealing with Emotional Issues
- Understanding Economic Concerns
- Exploring Space Requirements
- Considering Basic Design Concepts
- Developing a Check List with Specific Design Elements
- Learning about Republic West Remodeling's "Success Stories"

The trend of parents moving in with their adult children isn't expected to reverse anytime soon, especially with the Baby Boomer generation. As the cost of assisted living and nursing home care skyrockets, children and their parents find living together a great solution for a number of reasons. However, the decision is never an easy one for either party. Multigenerational living brings families closer, but it also requires big adjustments for everyone involved.

We hope to raise the issues involved in this complex situation and provide some insight into how you can best prepare for this life-changing event. Making physical changes to your home well in advance of your loved one moving in will ease the transition and promote a happy, healthy and safe environment.

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And if an aging parent never moves in, you will have taken measures to ensure your home is viable for you and your spouse as you grow older. Remodeling your home to include multi-generational features is a smart decision: they're there if you need them, they can accommodate temporary guests and they create a marketable asset if you sell your home.

Dealing with Emotional Issues

When your aging parent moves into your home, it's an emotional time for everyone. It is essential to understand the emotional consequences for all involved – both the good and challenging. Then, have an honest dialogue about how you're all going to maintain a happy, healthy living environment for every member of the household. An important suggestion is to focus on all the wonderful ways your parent can enrich your lives, and vice-versa.

It's important to recognize how difficult it may be for your parent to give up a home of their own that they've lived in independently. This loss of self-reliance and feeling like a "burden" on relatives are major obstacles many aging parents must overcome. You can help them through the transition by creating a living space that lets them keep their autonomy as much as possible.

Welcome them into your home and point out how much you will all benefit from being in close proximity. And, assure them you will care for them to the best of your abilities. Emphasizing your goals of keeping your parent safe, healthy and happy will help ease the transition.

In addition, acknowledge how much you look forward to having them be a part of your family's everyday life for many years to come. Having the opportunity to live with children and grandchildren creates a closeness no other living arrangement would provide.

Most of all, you'll be building new memories that will always have a special place in your heart. As the saying goes, "Life is too short," and you will treasure the time you have with your loved one. Although challenging, most people find caring for aging parents rewarding. It's a great way to give back some of the love and care your parents gave to you.

Some people have found moving an aging parent in with them while they're still relatively healthy and independent is an ideal situation. Your parent can adjust to the new surroundings and even help out with household chores. And you won't be overwhelmed providing care, coping with drastic living changes and retrofitting your home all at the same time.

Plus, your kids can get to know their grandparents while they're still healthy. Grandparents can pass down valuable family history and life lessons. You're also providing a model for your children about caring and commitment. It prepares them for what may be expected of them as you both grow older. Teaching children to nurture other people is one of the best gifts you can give them.

Real-Life Customer Highlight: David & Toni

David, his wife Toni, their two young children ages five and two, and David's 74-year old mother Winona, reside in a Central Phoenix neighborhood. Prior to moving in with David's family, Winona lived with her husband Tom in Pinetop, Arizona. Winona had some physical challenges, but with Tom's help they were able to maintain their independent life style.

Sadly, Tom passed away about a year ago. Being handicapped and spending much of her time either in a wheel chair or a walker, Winona could no longer live independently. The family decided Winona needed to live permanently with David, Toni and the two grandkids. In addition to creating a safer environment, they were all excited about the opportunity to establish bonds that only living together offers.

A large ranch-style house, the family home incorporates ample space and an efficient layout:

- The south side accommodates bedrooms and baths.
- The center area includes a great deal of open living space with a family room, dining area and very expansive kitchen.
- The north side of the house has a master suite with a large master bedroom, walk-in closet and a decent bath.



The plan had been for David, Toni and the kids to live in the south section of the house and keep the master suite area for Winona and Tom when they came for extended visits. So David and Toni began a remodel of the master bath awhile ago. The original remodel added a shower to complement the existing bath area.

Unfortunately, the contractor chosen knew little about dealing with the needs of a handicapped person. The remodeled shower area had little space and minimal function. As a result, this significant remodeling investment turned into a complete waste of money.

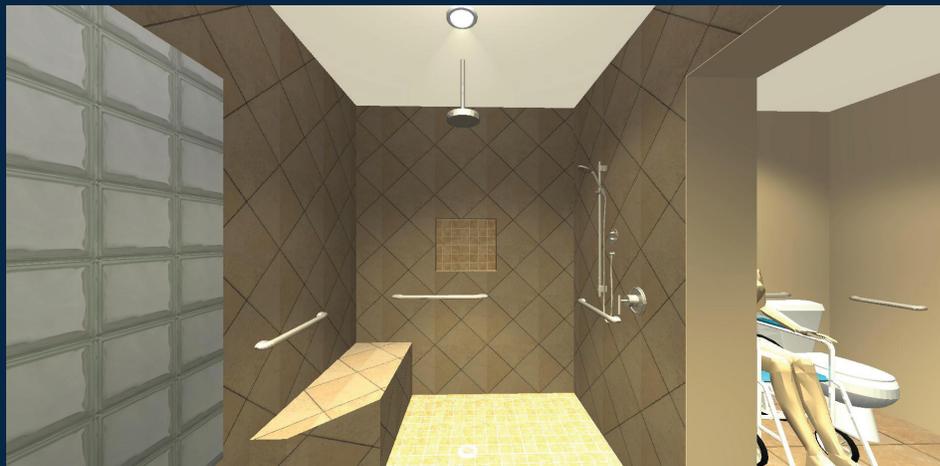
To create an appropriate living space for Winona, David and Toni recently contracted with Republic West Remodeling to appropriately remodel their master suite. Located off the kitchen with its own entry doorway, the existing master suite already provided the privacy important to Winona. To fully accommodate Winona's additional needs, the project required:

- Removing the bath tub area and creating a large walk in, curbless shower.
- Incorporating multiple niches in the shower at varying heights to accommodate Winona now and others in the future.
- Installing all necessary grab bars and other essential features.
- Opening the door areas in the master bath to better accommodate the space Winona needs to move around comfortably.
- Keeping aware continuously of current functionality and future flexibility.

David and Toni want the master bath remodel to create maximum value by meeting Winona’s requirements today, yet still be suitable for them should they move into the master suite at some later date. Plus, if they choose to sell their house, they want the space to appeal to future owners.



For example, the project included remodeling the vanity area for double vanities and sinks, new mirrors and other features for future users. In addition, the existing poorly designed shower installed by the previous contractor will be removed but the drain will stay in place. The couple may want to begin a “Phase Two” master bath remodel that could include a new tub and a future redesign that incorporates some of the current master bedroom space.



David and Toni liked the idea of investing in their home to meet Winona’s needs. By having the appropriate space and full-time care, the couple hopes Winona can live happily in the home and enjoy her time with her family. David and Toni improved the living environment to achieve better safety and comfort for Winona, while increasing the property’s value at the same time.

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Understanding Economic Concerns

Once you prepare for the emotional issues, you can look objectively at the economics of retrofitting your home for an aging parent. Too often many people think making a home “senior-friendly” means installing expensive, ugly fixtures and accommodations. That’s just not the case. Today’s solutions actually add value to your home. You also need to factor in any financial contributions your aging parent can make to the living arrangement.

Current family dynamics require flexibility. With multiple generations often being housed under one roof, the family home needs to meet every age group’s unique needs as much as possible. The home that does this becomes more appealing to a larger group of potential buyers when and if it comes time for you to sell.

If your home isn’t large enough to accommodate another adult, especially an aging parent who may require certain features, you need to add space. Adding livable square footage as a room addition or free-standing casita increases your property value.

It’s important to think about the numbers when comparing retrofitting your home to the cost of independent living for your senior loved one. Investing in a home remodel can cost anywhere from \$30,000 to \$200,000. According to Remodeling Magazine’s 2011-2012 Remodeling Cost vs. Value Report, the national average cost for a mid-range master suite addition is \$106,196. That sounds like a boat-load of cash. However independent or assisted living for your aging parent can cost upwards of \$4,000 to \$8,000 per month.

That cost being paid to an institution each and every month adds up quickly. It won’t take long before you reach a break-even point. In a few years or less, those same dollars can be invested in the value of your home instead of some outside institution.

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Exploring Space Requirements

You've considered the emotional and economic issues. Now it's time to take a hard look at your space. Above all, the space you provide your aging parent must be safe and secure. Your goal is to have your parent live as independently as possible in your home for as long as possible.

To accomplish this goal, what kind of space will you need for your parent's current and future requirements? Be sure to identify all the things your loved one must have.

Then, look at your available living space. Is any area of your home non-functional? Would it make sense to convert any unused space into a practical, flexible space for your parent?

Also, consider areas of your home that may need updating. If some space requires remodeling anyway, you may be able to get a fresh new space that will also deliver a working solution for your parent's care.

During your space evaluation, ask yourself these questions:

- Do you need to add-on, remodel or renovate to provide the required levels of privacy, safety and care?
- Can you re-purpose any existing space?
- What can your budget afford?
- Can you incorporate other desired home enhancements as part of the in-law suite design?
- How will the retrofitting project affect your home's value?
- What are the pros and cons of adding a free standing casita to the property?
- Would your proposed project meet all HOA, municipal and/or county building and zoning regulations?
- Can you easily convert any space devoted to an aging loved one to other usages when the parental care is no longer needed?

When designing your space, keep flexibility and value in the forefront. Because it can be repurposed, additional space will never go to waste. A bedroom can become an office; a casita suite can become a guest house; and an in-law suite within the home can become an area for a returning college student.

Real-Life Customer Highlight: Dennis & Debbie

Dennis and Debbie approached Republic West Remodeling about a remodel. They had just learned that Debbie's mother Anita was diagnosed with cancer and given about one year to live. To spend as much time with her as possible, the couple wanted to remodel their home so Anita could move in quickly. The couple needed Republic West Remodeling to complete a fast-track project that would create a "mother-in-law suite."

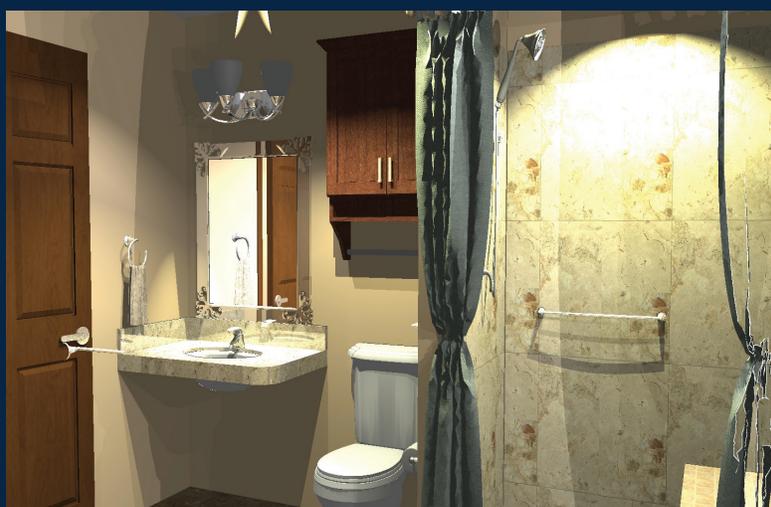
Anita provided primary care for her own mother until she passed away five years ago at age 99. Spending her career as a registered nurse, caring for others care came easily for this amazing woman.

At Debbie's daughter's graduation in May of 2013, Anita mentioned pain in her knee and she decided to have a biopsy done. The devastating results indicated stage four Adeno Carcenoma that had spread from her lungs. The doctors told Anita she had six months to live without treatment and one year if she chose to undergo treatment.

Up until this time, Anita lived alone and was extremely independent. She led a full and busy life in Denver, Colorado. But, Debbie and Dennis immediately went to Anita and asked her to come live with them in their Glendale home. She could have her treatments in Arizona while spending whatever time she had left together with her family.

Unfortunately, her health insurance plan dictated that treatments be conducted in Colorado. Therefore, they decided Anita should undergo treatments in Colorado and move to Arizona as soon as her treatments were completed around November 2013.

Having Anita move in with them was a clear-cut decision for the couple. Dennis and Debbie could guarantee Anita would be as comfortable as possible, ensure she was eating properly and taking her meds, and provide whatever additional care she needed. The move will also allow ongoing conversations about the topics that need to be discussed, as well as help keep Anita's attitude as positive as possible. But most important, everyone involved wants to maximize every minute they have together.



Once the decision was made, getting the house ready was the next order of business. Dennis and Debbie worked with Republic West Remodeling to re-utilize existing space. The space included a spare bedroom, a very small laundry room, a half bath, a hallway to a mud room and some storage. This entire area was converted into a bedroom suite suitable for Anita's needs. It included ample bedroom space, a walk-in closet and a bathroom meeting the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) guidelines.



In fact, everything was designed to meet Anita's requirements, including door openings, a curbless shower, proper grab bars, and other important features. Because time was of critical importance, Republic West Remodeling's execution of the project became vital.

Once an agreement was reached, Anita was very involved in the planning of her own space. She selected colors she liked, decided on furniture placement, and more. Throughout the design process, Dennis and Debbie wanted to ensure they had proper long-term storage space, an improved laundry room, and what will become a guest suite down the road. With three children and five grandchildren, having a guest quarters was very appealing to them.

This story factors in all of the emotion when dealing with parents who need care, as well as practical concerns. The couple's goal all along was to have Anita live independently as long as health would allow, then eventually care for her in their home. Anita's cancer changed the timetable, but not their thought process and original desire.

Republic West Remodeling is proud to be a part of this project and the team has never lost sight of its role and our purpose. Time has been at the forefront of everyone's mind and we are anxious to hear that Anita is safe and comfortable in her new home.

Housing an aging parent in your home can be challenging, but it can also provide major benefits for all family members. And, you just can't put a price on impacting the lives of your loved ones in very meaningful and profound ways.

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Considering Basic Design Concepts

Often major concerns for aging parents in a new home are privacy, mobility and safety. Therefore, you'll need to take some measures to enhance these features. And, by enlisting the services of an experienced remodeling company, you can develop a design that strikes a good balance between functionality and style. Remodeling for safety doesn't mean your house has to look like a hospital.

Some basic features of your home you'll need to consider for remodeling for an aging parent:

- **Stairs** – Both indoors and out, stairs can limit access for your senior loved one. They can also create a safety hazard. So, make sure your parent's suite eliminates stairs and occupies one level. You may even want to consider replacing any stairs outside with beautiful, winding walkways. Too often people think that accommodating their homes for senior living means incorporating wheelchair ramps and the like. However, you can include features that are totally functional, modern and stylish.
- **Railings** – Existing railings should be checked for security. You might also want to consider installing new railings in indoor and outdoor locations.
- **Hallways and Doorways** – If your parent requires a wheelchair or walker for mobility, you need to be sure all access points are wide enough. Broader hallways and doorways will make it easier for your parent to navigate.
- **Surfaces** – Keeping safety in mind, all floor and ground surfaces must be smooth for current or future wheelchair and walker use, as well as free from obstacles that could cause a fall. Smooth surfaces around your home will not just help your parent, but will also make it easier for you to wheel your luggage from the car, your grandkids in a stroller and your groceries in a cart.
- **Access to Kitchen and Bathroom** – If possible, a suite or casita for your parent should include appropriate bathroom and kitchen facilities, or at least be in close proximity to these amenities. If mobility is an issue, you don't want your parent to have to move about any more than necessary.
- **Open Floor Plans** – If your parent will have access to your entire home, you might want to consider creating an open floor plan. Not only is openness a sought-after feature in today's homes, but it will improve your parent's mobility.
- **Lighting** – Navigation, safety and comfort are also enhanced through bright lighting. Consider installing sensor lights outside at entrances to your home. Inside, light switches should be larger than normal and flat to make it easier to turn fixtures on and off. In addition, incorporating larger windows allow for more natural light and relaxing exterior views.

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- **Fixtures** – When accommodating a senior adult, certain fixtures, such as grab bars and door levers, become important, yet stylish, design elements. When installed professionally, grab bars promote safety for both young and old. And, door levers instead of door knobs make it easier for some people to open.

Developing a Check List with Specific Design Elements

Planning ahead for when your aging parent may need to move in can make a huge difference in how smooth the transition is for everyone in the household. It's smart to talk with your parents before they need your help so you can prepare appropriately for all the emotional, financial and space issues.

To help retrofit your home for an aging person, here are some specific design elements to consider:

1. Entry Ways

- Make sure they are barrier free and allow accessibility using a wheel chair or crutches.
- Eliminate step entry ways. If necessary, replace stairs with ramps.
- If using ramps, try and maintain a slope no greater than one inch for each twelve inches in length.
- Establish a five-foot landing entrance.
- Replace step thresholds with flush thresholds.
- Increase width where required for better maneuverability.
- Install sensor lighting at all entry ways.
- Incorporate at least 32" of clear width and use at least 36" wide door.
- Install the doorbell in an accessible location.
- Consider an entry door sidelight or a lower peep hole.

2. Bathrooms

- Install Grab Bars with proper backing. Proper backing behind the grab bar is imperative so it doesn't become a safety hazard over time.
- Install an elevated toilet, approximately two and one-half inches higher than a standard toilet.
- Incorporate curbless showers.
- Add a fold down seat in shower.
- Lower the bathroom sink but ensuring proper knee clearance. Consideration should be given to a sink without a sink base cabinet underneath.
- Install adjustable hand held shower heads and arms, including a minimum six-foot hose.
- Include tub shower controls offset from center.
- Ensure a great deal of maneuverable space in the general bath area, especially around toilets and vanities.
- If using a bath tub, use a lower tub, or walk-in tub, for easier access. Remove any sunken tubs.
- Install slip resistant flooring.

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3. Bedrooms

- Ensure maximum maneuverability.
- Build a walk-in closet with storage at differing heights.
- Use rocker light switches that are easier to turn on.
- Consider location of light switches, especially making them accessible from the bedside, located 36" to 40" above the floor.
- Use Lever handled faucets
- Install thermostatic or anti-scald controls.

4. Kitchens

- Ensure maximum maneuverability.
- Vary the heights of the countertops.
- Install a sink with knee clearance.
- Lower cooking surfaces
- Mount a wall oven and/or microwave at reachable heights.
- Include as many rollouts rays and lazy Susans as possible in base cabinets.
- Install pull down shelving.
- Use open shelving for easy access to frequently used items.
- Consider upper wall cabinets three inches lower than conventional height.
- Incorporate abundant storage space at varying heights.
- Provide a desk/work area with knee clearance, again eliminating the base cabinet below.

5. Flooring

- Install non-slip floors. Use smooth, non-glare slip-resistant surfaces, interior and exterior.
- If using carpet, use low (less than one-half inch high pile) density and firm pad.
- Use color and texture to indicate changes in surface levels.

6. Overall Floor Plans

- Make main living area a single story.
- Eliminate steps between rooms or areas that are on the same level.
- Widen hallways to at least 36".
- Maintain a five-foot by five-foot clear/turn space in living areas, kitchens, a bedroom and a bathroom.

7. Interior Doors

- Install with a 32" minimum clearance, which requires a 36" wide door.
- Use levered door hardware instead of knobs

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8. Appliances

- Make sure controls are easy to read.
- Use front loaded washer and dryer. Mount the washer and dryer on a pedestal 12" to 15" above the floor to eliminate bending.
- Install side-by-side refrigerator and freezer
- Include a raised dishwasher with pushbutton controls.
- Install an electric cook top with level burners for safety. Also make a light illuminates when surface is hot.
- Use a 30" x 48" clear space at appliance locations.

9. Electrical and Lighting

- Install light switches by each entrance to halls and rooms.
- Include light receptacles with at least two bulbs in vital places, exits, bathrooms, etc.
- Install electrical outlets 15" on center from the floor.
- Maintain clear access of 30" x 48" in front of switches.
- Locate light switches, thermostats, and other environmental controls no higher than 48" from the floor.
- Use rocker or touch light switches.
- Install easy-to-see and read thermostats.
- Install pre-programmed thermostats.
- Wire home for security.
- Wire home for computers.

Republic West Remodeling – Home of the Dream Assurance Plan™

With Republic West Remodeling, your custom remodeling project will be a dream come true throughout the entire process. - With over 18 years in business, we've learned a thing or two about how to efficiently complete projects to every customer's expectations. Our testimonials, references and track record back this up.

We developed the Dream Assurance Plan™, a custom remodeling process that strives to deliver a pleasant experience and a successful outcome for our customers, out of determination to transform the common perception that every remodeling project will be a nightmare.

The Dream Assurance Plan includes three concepts:

- **Design & Visualization** -- One of the greatest risks in custom remodeling is having the end result not meet your expectations. When you're remodeling to care for an aging parent, you need to think beyond what special requirements are needed for your mom or dad to live safely and happily. You need to also focus on how everyone in the household will use the space both now and in the future.

Republic West Remodeling helps you see the big picture. We take time to listen, address all design and functionality issues, provide attention to detail, create personalized visualizations so you know how your remodel will turn out, and provide professional support throughout the entire project.

- **Cost Certainty** – Unfortunately, you might not have the luxury of planning for your aging parent to move in with you. Life throws us all curve balls and your parent may one day get injured or sick and need immediate care. You may find yourself needing to quickly remodel your home to accommodate your parent's needs.

More than ever, this unexpected expense requires your remodeling budget to stay on track. To avoid "cost creep," Republic West Remodeling provides a breakdown of project of scope, line-by-line. We have great respect for the budget and a real understanding of actual (not estimated) costs. When we finalize a contract with you, the amount will be the same or very close to the cost at the end of the project. The final cost will only change if we mutually agree to a change in scope of work.

- **Time Certainty** – When you need to have your parent move in with you as quickly as possible, time certainty becomes critical. You can't afford to have a remodeling project go on for months, especially if your loved one is facing a terminal illness.

Republic West Remodeling keeps your inconvenience to an absolute minimum and does everything possible to finish your project quickly. Our great attention to detail and extensive planning process ensures we execute your project as expected. We also deploy trained field personnel who use a sophisticated daily communication system to keep everything moving efficiently.

Republic West Remodeling assures your custom remodeling project will be as you visualized throughout the entire process – from creative design and detailed planning to execution and construction.

For more information on home remodeling, or to request a free, no obligation, design consultation, visit <http://www.republicwestremodeling.com/remodeling-and-construction.php> or call (480) 428-2695.