

around the HOUSE

A Soothing Shower

The curb-less shower, sometimes called a Roman shower, was invented thousands of years ago and today it's one of the most important of all Universal Design (UD) features for accessible and life span living.

With the advent of dozens of new linear drain systems and pre-fab sloping floor systems the walk and roll-in easy access shower is also a highly desired amenity in standard non-UD home designs. It's practical, quick, easy to use and is clearly a great choice for anyone who has a fast-paced lifestyle and wishes to "age in place."

The deep, walk-in soaking baths with jets are also popular and sometimes nothing beats a deep-soaking bath with a whirlpool, but we'll save that topic for another day.

Nonetheless, as far as easy access bathing and hygiene goes, the curb-less Roman shower is still the best choice.

A Place to Drain

For someone who already uses a wheelchair, a full "Wet Room" is a good common sense solution and I specify these in many of my home designs.

A Wet Room includes both the shower and toilet in the same room. It may also have a simple hand wash sink, but the vanities are located outside this fully tiled room.

The floor in the room has a separate 2-inch for 4-inch drain other than the shower drain and its floor and walls up to about 30 inches are waterproofed as well.

I prefer to design a very subtle 1/16-inch to 1/8-inch slope to drain the

area so as not to throw people off balance if they use a walker or have balance problems. It also eliminates the feeling of a "speed bump" when rolling out of the shower and into the Wet Room area.

The drain outside the shower allows one to use the hand-held

often carry a lot of water with it. This also allows the user to exit and access towels or a towel warmer located outside the actual shower. They can dry outside the shower and the dripping water has a place to drain.

Structural Integrity

The shower itself should be a minimum of 3 feet, 6 inches by 5 feet, if a weighted anti-bacterial shower curtain is used, which is what I specify for this size of shower.

There are also more traditional glass shower enclosures that can be quite beautiful and designed to include angles and varying heights, if wanted for design alternatives. I make sure there is absolutely no curb. Such a glass shower door should swing out.

I believe a wider 4–5 foot shower is necessary so a wheelchair user can adequately turn into it. This is not an issue with a shower curtain. There are also pre-fab showers of all sizes, but I prefer a full built-in, mud-set tile shower for structural integrity.

A traditional sloped mud-set tile floor and properly detailed shower walls will require serious attention be paid to the structure underneath.

I specify walls with glass matt gypsum board that will not allow mold growth. The waterproof membrane is added, then the concrete. Finally, tile backer board, tile and grout are added.

East Access

A wheelchair, the user and possible caretaker means the shower floor could be supporting two tons or more of



A large Roman shower features easy access and space enough for a caregiver.

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shower outside the actual shower if need be. This is also an integrated solution for someone who already uses a wheelchair.

When one exits the shower in a mobile shower chair, the chair can

weight. It would need to be recessed from 2½ – 3½ inches.

The structure must be designed so there is no deflection or the tile will crack and the shower will fail. For these reasons, always hire an experienced professional to design this detail. It's not recommended that this detail is designed by the weekend home improvement warrior.

Any accessible shower should also have grab bars for support that should withstand a minimum of 250 pounds of vertical and horizontal force. I also design integral shelves and niches and a fold down shower chair, which is a nice UD feature for those who don't use a wheelchair.



The curb-less shower implements stylish glass doors, easy access and a soaking tub.

tems that slide on a pole. All too often they are left at a position too high for the seated user to reach and they can be difficult to clean.

I make sure the actual union (where the water comes out of the wall and meets the handheld shower) is no higher than 36 inches, which gives the hose a longer reach as it's closer to a seated user. If it's too high, its effective use is limited for the seated user.

Dual showerheads are also popular in the oversized shower.

So enjoy a soothing shower with easy access that will work for the life-span of everyone.

For more information, visit universaldesignonline.com. ■

I specify hand-held showers with a 7-0 hose; programmable shower control in order to avoid scalding and it's offset towards the outside for easy access.

Many people, as well as myself, don't prefer the actual handheld sys-

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