

around the HOUSE

Don't Forget the Hall

Kitchens and bathrooms are often the main focus of a home created using Universal Design (UD). However, if the home is to be truly functional for everyone, the design of passageways can't be forgotten.

Another word for passageways in the traditional non-UD home is hallways. That word often brings to mind a dark narrow corridor buried in the middle of the house. Such a space is what we want to avoid in a UD home.

After all, that type of hallway isn't useful if a wheelchair user can't turn into his or her bedroom, the

space is too dark for a person with limited eyesight or too narrow for someone using a walker.

The functional UD home has an open floor plan allowing the spaces to flow together, providing visual and ease of circulation and access throughout. This can minimize passageways altogether.

Easier Moving

Nonetheless, there are almost always areas that may need to be separated by passageways.

These should always be a minimum of 3-feet, 8-inches wide when finished. This is the minimum width

that allows a wheelchair user to turn into a doorway with a 3-foot wide door and a lever handle. When the program allows, I prefer a minimum of a 4-foot wide passage.

This also makes moving much easier and first responders will appreciate it, too, should they ever be

[A dark narrow corridor] isn't useful if a wheelchair user can't turn into his or her bedroom.

needed. If this is a "dead-end" passage then I like to provide a 5-foot turning diameter space at the end so one can easily turn around in a wheelchair.

At this same location, I recently designed a linen closet and pull-out drawers for medical supplies. Both separate sides have full extension hardware so the user or caregiver can have access.

Another solution is to provide a window.

Let There be Light

Adequate lighting must be provided along the passage, but not too much, as narrow spaces can cause glare if it's too abundant.

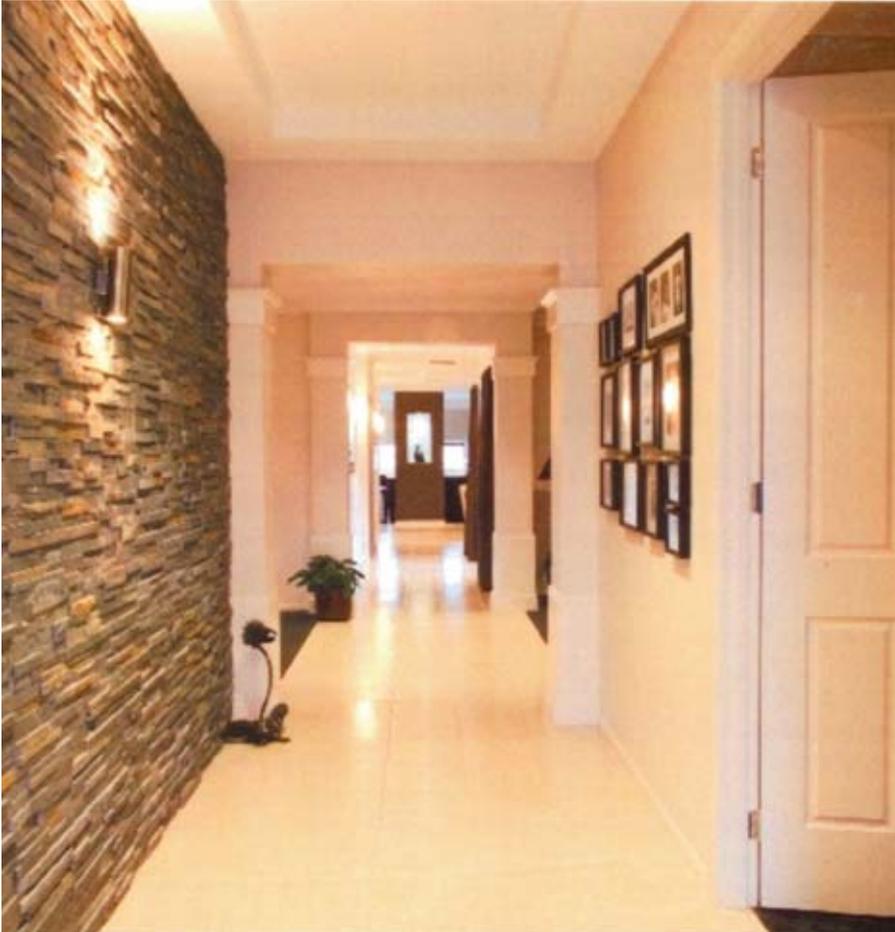
I like to specify a tubular skylight when there's a closet at the end. There is now a product that is solar powered and also has a light in it and even a fan, if you desire.

At least two ceiling downlights should be provided. Wall sconces along the passage are an effective way to light the area.

Nightlights with light sensors are a good idea for evening use. There

If runners are used, they should be securely attached.





A wide, well-lit passage serves as a gallery and can also have varying materials.

should be at least two light switches at each end of the passage and maybe one centrally located depending on specific needs. Rocker switches that are illuminated at all times also help navigate at night.

This is also a nice location for a whole house fan or energy recovery ventilator.

Smooth Rolling

A chair-rail with an integrated non-obtrusive handrail is a useful feature for anyone who may have balance or sight difficulties.

This can also be a great benefit during evening hours. A bead-board

wainscot (if appropriate for the home's design style) will integrate well with the chair rail and hold up to heavy traffic areas.

An alternative I like here is a 12-inch high tile base designed to withstand wheelchair abuse so as not to destroy the base trim.

The flooring surface should be low-pile dense carpeting, wood or tile. All must be non-slip. Thicker carpeting with a pad is not a good idea in a UD home. Renewable bamboo and cork that slightly cushions are a good choice here as well.

Whatever the flooring surfaces are try to use the same one in the

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This wide and bright passage also serves as a library/ memorabilia area.



A more modest passage — notice the raised outlets and lowered thermostat.

adjacent rooms. This will minimize and hopefully eliminate threshold differences as one moves from the passage into the other spaces. Great attention and care detail is needed with flooring surfaces.

More Than a Passageway

A passage on an outside wall brings in natural light. This can be a great space, designed wider to accommodate a library or home office.

The passage doesn't really have to be thought of as a passageway at all, but rather another functional space.

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That same natural light can be shared with the adjacent bedrooms with clerestory interior windows or glass block. The bedrooms also have light from at least two sides. This space can open up into a courtyard or garden. Thus the old hallway no longer exists.

In remodels of older homes, all of the above may not be so easy, but the basics still apply. Many older homes used narrow hallway walls as structural support. Be sure to verify this with an architect before you widen an existing hallway.

All of these elements brought together help the UD passageway become truly useful for everyone.

For more information, visit universaldesignonline.com. ■