

MASTER BUILDERS

ROMINA DE SANTIS, technical adviser at Master Builders WA, answers your questions about home building



THE QUESTION

We are both septuagenarian retirees living in a two-storey house and we would dearly like to stay in our home as long as possible. We have made many enquiries to different companies who manufacture/supply lifts, which are quite expensive and don't seem to be particularly suitable for homes.

THE ANSWER

There are a number of companies that specialise in lifts suitable for residential buildings or that have both domestic and commercial lifts available.

Sometimes it is not the cost of the lift, but the installation that may require expensive building modifications.

An alternative is the chair stair lift that would be a more economical option, but perhaps does not have the practicality that a lift provides.

As an aging population, it is surprising we do not consider future proofing our homes to be more adaptable for when we age.

We have clear standards for access for people with disabilities to and within commercial buildings, such as shopping centres, offices, and public venues – these design requirements also make it easy for the aged and parents to access buildings and facilities – but nothing mandatory for residential homes.

Steps, small bathrooms, poor circulation and showers with hobs are some of the limiting features to homes being more universally accessible.

A few years ago, the Disability Services Commission formed a working group with Master Builders and a number of other stakeholders to develop the Liveable Homes resource.

Liveable Homes ensures people of all ages and abilities can live in or visit a home in comfort.

The resources available on the website have been developed for people designing new homes or renovating existing ones.

There are essential and desirable checklists, design templates and great ideas to make a home more liveable.

Some of the design or renovation features to

consider include:

- Flat or level entrance into the home. Outdoor steps can be replaced with a ramp, or a ramp included in addition to the stairs.
- Wide doorways and corridors. This design consideration also helps with moving furniture in and out of rooms more comfortably.
- Hobless showers are very popular in modern homes and require discussion with a licensed plumber. This removes the need to step over and into the shower where slips and falls are common.
- Looking at the slip resistance of floor coverings and the transition between different floor coverings, as these can be trip hazards.
- Including handrails along all stairways. Any change in level is a hazard. Handrails provide additional stability for movement and something to grab if falling.
- Door handles located between 900mm and 1100mm and using lever handles rather than door knobs that are easier to use with arthritis.
- Power points or switches should be easy to reach from a sitting position (around 300mm above the ground for power points and around door handle-height for switches)

For more inspirational ideas, visit www.liveablehomes.net.au.

There are a number of Master Builder members that have adopted the Liveable Homes principles in their designs, and others that provide advice and services to make modifications to existing homes.

Visit www.mbawa.com.

For more information about building, visit the Master Builders A-Z Building Information Directory at www.mbawa.com. If you have any questions about home building or purchase issues, email romina@mbawa.com

120 YEARS AND GOING STRONG

Master Builders this month celebrates its 120th anniversary in Western Australia. Master Builders director Michael McLean reports on some of the changes that have occurred in the building industry since 1898.

MEDICAL advancements and changes in lifestyle have resulted in reduced mortality rates and more people living to 100 or over, but it is still extremely rare for businesses or brand names to survive 100 years or more.

Can you name any of these businesses? The centurions that I am aware of include Bankwest (formerly the Rural and Industries Bank), Plunkett Homes (now owned by the JWH Group) and Perth Zoo.

Several chambers of commerce and REIWA have also been around for 100 or more years.

The Master Builders Association was founded during a watershed period in Western Australia's history, before Federation and soon after gold was discovered in the Goldfields near Kalgoorlie.

It was also during a time when trade unions were being formed and industrial disputes were rampant.

Skill shortages highlighted the need for training and poorly drafted contracts were the recipe for many contractual disputes between builders and their clients.

These were the circumstances which prompted a group of master builders to form an organisation to represent the interests of builders and those who operated businesses in the building industry.

The original purpose of creating an association to help builders hasn't changed, but the range of services have, along with the way we go about our business.

The building industry has also changed a lot in WA, as evidenced by the following examples:

- WA became the first state to introduce builders' registration in 1939, which means that builders are required to have technical and practical skills, as well as the financial means, in order to build.
- Master Builders established regional branches in Geraldton, Albany, Bunbury, Kalgoorlie and Esperance from 1964.
- Display homes became popular in the 1970s to help homebuyers choose their preferred style of home.
- The housing industry successfully resisted union attempts to abolish the sub-contact system in the 1980s.
- Industry superannuation was pioneered in the building industry in 1984, with the Cbus superannuation scheme now having over 750,000 members nation-wide.
- New safety laws were introduced in 1988 which heralded mandatory safety inductions for all building industry personnel.
- Although double brick remains the dominant form of home construction in WA, homebuyers now have a lot more choice in the form of modular, pre-fabricated, timber or steel-framed, brick

veneer, mud brick, pole or bale housing.

- Housing designs are now rated according to their energy efficiency.

- Compulsory housing indemnity insurance was introduced in 1996.

- Water-saving devices such as rainwater tanks, water-efficient plumbing appliances and fittings, water-friendly natural landscapes and artificial lawns have become more popular.

- More and more builders are now focused on waste management and recycling.

- Colorbond roofing and fencing provide alternatives to clay and concrete roof tiles and timber picket fences.

- KeyStart commenced in 1989 to help Western Australians buy or rent their own home, including via a shared equity scheme.

- Homebuyers have been assisted into homeownership through the First Home Owner Grant.

- Alfresco areas have become more prevalent in the form of outdoor kitchens, pizza ovens and spas.

- Home theatre rooms have replaced formal lounge, dining and games rooms.

- Blocks of land have reduced in size and there is a trend towards medium and higher-density living in the form of townhouses, grouped dwellings and apartments.

- Technology, particularly through the internet and mobile phones, has had an enormous impact on builders. Websites and social media have become popular forms of advertising.

- Master Builders introduced its first Housing Excellence Awards in 1980 and they still remain important benchmarks in comparing workmanship levels between all types of builders.

- Master Builders launched its Home in WA television program on Channel 7 and GWN in 1999 to showcase what the housing industry is capable of.

The list goes on. The conclusion I draw from all of these things is that the building industry is constantly changing and always will be.

Future changes will come about for different reasons, such as new inventions and new products, different regulations, economic factors, demographic changes and lifestyle choices.

To have been around for 120 years, Master Builders has evolved with the times and been at the forefront of many of the changes that have occurred.

Our challenge, like that of all our members, is to continue to embrace change and keep ahead of the game to be around for the next 120 years.