



By Jamie Hamilton

There are several misconceptions surrounding home elevators that still exist with buyers and the home construction industry.

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Build Up, Not Out

The financial & social benefits of home elevators

Every day, roughly 10,000 members of the Baby Boomer generation—those born between 1946 and 1964—reach the official retirement age of 65. The Conference Board of Canada predicts that by 2030 about 80% of new housing demand will come from consumers in their golden years. This well-educated group, arguably the wealthiest generation in North America's history, will continue to influence the housing market—in particular the way homes are designed.

Universal Design, a concept that's been around since the 1970s, is being embraced by the boomer generation to help with "Aging in Place." They're demanding designs that allow function and aesthetics to coexist. Why? Close to all—90% of respondents to a 2013 RBC poll—plan to live out their days in their own homes instead of entering a retirement facility.

Walk through any 2500+ sq.ft. model home, and you'll find evidence the Boomer influence exists. The step-less front entrance, lever door handles instead of round knobs, wider hallways and doorways guide you from room to room atop hardwood or laminate floors as opposed to movement-restricting carpet. These are all elements of Universal Design that builders have adopted for new homes today. The small improvements create a more livable environment should walkers and wheelchairs become necessary. They fall short, however, of addressing movement between levels in multi-storey homes. The answer? Assume boomers do the opposite of Age in Place and head for the burbs in search of sprawling bungalows? Or better yet, modernize our design playbook to meet today's demands by using home elevators for true Universal Design in multi-storey creations. It's a design revolution being led by a few, awaiting the majority to follow.

Why is the adoption of vertical transport systems in homes lagging behind in the buying public's minds? Education. There are several misconceptions surrounding home elevators that still exist with buyers and the home construction industry. Here's a few:

Too Costly – \$100,000 or More, Right?

Try \$25,000. Due to easier access to cost-effective technology and competitive growth, the starting price

to install an elevator has remained largely the same for 20 years. The price that homeowners pay for this luxury feature relative to the price of their home has drastically decreased given current home prices in major urban centers. It's equal to or less than other decorative upgrades offered. What's costlier, is trying to retrofit an elevator shaftway after the home is already built.

Difficult To Integrate Into Home

All manufacturers have detailed, easy to follow drawings. They detail the important items that need to be considered for an installation: forming a recessed pit in the basement, the size and construction requirements of the shaftway and all electrical requirements. Easy.

Elevators Are Only For People In Wheelchairs

The notion, because people don't need it, they won't use it is false. Over the years I've witnessed numerous creative and lifestyle improving ways homeowners have used their elevator. A townhome homeowner turned their elevator cab into a bar! Whichever floor he was entertaining on, he was stocked. Many home sites with a view invert their design so kitchen and living rooms take advantage of elevated vistas, and the elevator makes grocery transportation a breeze. Sometimes an elevator allows our furry four-legged family members some dignity to keep their routine of making it upstairs to bed each night.

Will the day come when every new multi-storey family home includes a home elevator? Perhaps not within the next few years, but we may be closer than

we think given the forces upon us. Land in all Canadian urban centers is sparse and expensive. Baby boomers are choosing to remain in their existing communities, in homes that allow them to age gracefully. A home elevator is the final piece to the Universal Design puzzle. All socioeconomic factors suggest the answer and opportunity is building "up." Maintain your competitive edge and seek modern, vertical living designs. Elevator technology is affordable, attains higher land yields stacking more square footage on a footprint, and more footprints on each parcel of land. Build up, not out. ■

