



RESIDENTIAL & BUSINESS INTERIORS | FURNITURE DESIGN | COLOR & ART CONSULTING

## INVISION DESIGN PARTNERS, LLC

Rochester, New York  
Tel. 585-244-9141

*In our first visit with you we LISTEN to your needs and wants for the project. Only then, we propose ways to accomplish them. Please call or email, we will respond promptly.*

### **WHAT'S THE HYPE ABOUT UNIVERSAL DESIGN?**

By Dan Harel & Naomi Harel, Principals | [info@invisiondesignpartners.com](mailto:info@invisiondesignpartners.com)  
First published in INVISIONS, Vol. 5, December 2011

The term "Universal Design" (UD) was coined by product designer and architect Ronald L. Mace of the Center for Universal Design, North Carolina State University over two decades ago. The basis of this concept is to design products, buildings, and environments that are useful, accessible, and barrier-free for all people without the need for adaptation or specialized design.

Since then, architects, designers (and increasingly builders too), have acquired and incorporated the principles of universal design in new developments. However, the task of educating consumers with the principles and benefits of UD, along with the desire for easy to use everyday life solutions, are far from over.

"Build Smart", an article published in Builder (The Magazine of the National Association of Home Builders, October 2011), suggests, "Universal Design can serve as a key differentiator for new homes". This article emphasizes that universally designed (or modified) homes, would sustain their value and usefulness longer than other homes. It further suggests that these types of homes would be suitable to serve their owners for as long as they wish to live in them (a condition referred to as "aging in place") thus maximizing independence in one's familiar environment.

While adopting UD ideas is in most cases a good plan, it is equally important for the designer to be aware of the specific needs of his or her customer. Such was our recent experience redesigning a kitchen for a client with chronic back pain who could not easily bend or reach beyond a certain height. Understanding this client's situation at project start helped us focus on solutions that minimize the need to bend in order to perform kitchen activities.

Some solutions we implemented include positioning the oven at a specific height convenient for the client, and easily accessible pull out shelves. In this case, our solutions would not necessarily be suitable for someone in a wheelchair, therefore would not qualify as UD, however they clearly meet our client's needs and expectations.

### **BENEFITS OF UNIVERSAL DESIGN INCLUDE:**

- Usefulness to people with diverse abilities and needs
- Easy and quick adaptation
- Simplicity and intuitiveness regardless of previous experiences
- Efficiency and comfort with minimum fatigue
- Attributes that communicate functionality and proper (safe) use
- Attributes that communicate potential hazards and minimize a chance for accidental or unintended actions

- Proper size and space for approaching, reaching and using a product regardless of one's physicality or mobility

Learn more:

Universal Design: Integrating Innovative Products and Spatial Design

*INVISION DESIGN PARTNERS practices Universal Design principles, but at the same time provides expert solutions for specific client needs and desires.*

-----