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Disablity doesn't hinder home design

BY HILARY WELDMAN
The Hartford Courant

Outside the home where Greg Hughes lives with his yellow lab, Lincoln, retaining walls and terraced ramps tame the property's slopes and invite visitors to stroll the landscaped grounds.

Inside, polished red-oak floors, oriental rugs, elegantly upholstered walls and doorways artfully encased by carved moldings reflect the owner's style and success long before he greets visitors in his motorized wheelchair.

Hughes, 39, lost the use of his arms and legs in a car crash when he was 17. But while his disability obviously has affected the course of his life, it does not define him.

Like Hughes, the house design accepts the realities of life with a wheelchair, but without compromising on comfort or style.

Experts say this is a new model for home design that everyone should embrace, even if they are young and active.

An increasingly popular concept known as universal design is based on the notion that any building should be attractive and usable by all people, regardless of age or physical ability. The idea has caught on as the population ages and people seek to remain in their homes instead of moving to retirement communities.

"It's difficult to swallow that we're all going to need these things," said Mary Jo Peterson, an interior designer from Brookfield, Conn., who specializes in creating accessible kitchens and bathrooms.

But whether from old age, a skiing accident or a hip

replacement, it's a fair bet that most people will have to live with a mobility problem during at least some portion of their lives.

So some designers say any home renovation or new construction should include accessibility features such as no-step entrances, extra-wide doorways, lever door handles, no-lip showers and at least some lower coun-

An increasingly popular concept known as universal design is based on the notion that any building should be attractive and usable by all people, regardless of age or physical ability.

ters and under-sink leg room in the kitchens and baths. And nobody should be able to notice.

"We don't want it to look institutional," said Carol Peredo Lopez, national architecture director for the Paralyzed Veterans of America. Lopez is completing a book on accessible design.

When he bought his rear lot off Chestnut Hill Road four years ago, Hughes wanted a home where he could live independently and where his two brothers, two sisters and 12 nieces and nephews could congregate on weekends to play pool or watch the Red Sox or the Giants on the big-screen TV.

He modified the builder's house plan to add a caretaker's apartment above the garage, move the master bedroom to the first floor and add space for an elevator.

Then Hughes hired Lisa Davenport of Lisa Davenport's Home Gallery in Glastonbury to design the interior of his 7,000 square-

foot-house.

He chose Davenport because she had decorated his sister's home. When they met, and she saw that her new client used a wheelchair, Davenport said she panicked.

"I had one class on (the Americans with Disabilities Act)," Davenport recalled, clutching her head in her hands.

Davenport checked her old textbooks and the many Internet sites devoted to accessible design. It was then that she realized her challenge was only slightly different from what it might be for any other residential client.

She set out to create a warm, spacious interior that would be comfortable for Hughes and his many visitors.

While hardwood and tile floors throughout the first floor make for easy rolling in Hughes' wheelchair, Davenport persuaded him to try a few low-pile area rugs to absorb noise and warm up rooms that might otherwise feel cavernous.

With every door, window and window treatment motorized so Hughes could operate them from his wheelchair lap tray, the constant whirring of fans and motors threatened to detract from the home's peaceful feel.

Davenport added full-length drapes to soften many spaces and upholstered the walls of the din-



Hartford Courant photo by Mark Mirko

You would barely notice that Greg Hughes' home in Glastonbury, Conn., has been designed for an owner who is quadriplegic. The brick walkway to his front door is a wheelchair ramp in disguise.

ing room with fabric and the master bedroom with suede to absorb more sound.

The kitchen table is higher than standard, so Hughes can roll up and eat with friends, and there is plenty of space for him to move around the center island.

"It's very comfortable," said Hughes, who said he felt like a bull in a china

shop while visiting his parents' less-accessible home during the holidays. "I forget until I come back here how nice it is to get around so easily."

While Hughes' kitchen is all custom-made, there are many simple and inexpensive ways to improve access in the kitchen, said

PLEASE SEE PAGE 3

Never too late to consider bulbs for next season

BY ED HUTCHISON
Special to the Record-Eagle

Spring-flowering bulbs and baseball have something in common — and it's not that April is their month to shine.

That may sound nutty but look at it this way: Professional baseball has minor and major league play, and within the world of spring bulbs, we have minor and by implication, major bulbs. The majors are the ones mostly in blooms now while the minors have for the most part bloomed.

Minor in the bulb world includes most everything but tulips, daffodils and hyacinths. Thus, crocus, grape hyacinth, Galanthus, oxalis, scilla and a few other small charmers are known as minor. The term comes not from the quality of their performance or value to the gardener but from their overall ranking in an industry that grows, imports and sells a lot more tulips and daffodils.

One of the charms of minor bulbs is their genetic drive to come up and blossom

each year. They are unlike most varieties of tulips and hyacinths in this attribute. Properly sited, planted and maintained, they will multiply and bloom for many years.

Even though the bulb planting season is months away, now is still a good time to look at matters of sowing, planting and maintaining because doing so gives a wonderful clue as to why minor bulbs did well, or not, just a few weeks ago. Here is a review:

Siting: Pick a location with well-drained, reasonably fertile soil and one that gets at least half day sun. Many folks make the mistake of planting in areas that are sunny in the spring but then shady from noon on after leaves emerge. Most minor bulbs have finished by this time but it is still important the foliage be in a spot sufficiently sunny so food reserves can be built for the next season's growth in roots, foliage and especially, flowers.

Planting: For some reason, many of us have it in our heads that all bulbs should

be planted five to six inches deep. Well, this is true with a lot of tulips, hyacinths and daffodils but it is not the case with minor bulbs. Most should be set about two inches below the surface of the soil. Some of these are less "pointy" than tulips and other bulbs and it can be difficult to know which end goes up. Please read and heed the label instructions as to depth and right size up details.

Maintaining: One of the charms of minor bulbs is they require little care and yet give so much, year after year. Proper maintenance is as simple as removing foliage when it has withered and in the spring, sprinkling a bit of general-purpose fertilizer around the foliage, taking care not to get the granules on the foliage.

Bulbs can usually take care of themselves when it comes to nutrients but increasingly, I am seeing recommendations that a light feeding in the spring while the foliage is still intact contributes to the bulbs' ability to thrive both in multiplying and flowering



Photo/Ed Hutchison

Take care of minor bulbs and they will continue to bloom gloriously for years. Shown is a cluster of grape hyacinths, one of the more colorful of the minor bulbs, and bigger too in blossom size and appeal.

robustly.

Some purists use bulb fertilizer; something inexpensive and common like 12-12-

12 works fine. Please don't use a weed-and-feed product on bulbs, thinking the herbicide component won't hurt

the bulb. It will.

Ed Hutchison is a freelance writer from Midland.

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