

## Ron Wickman : Entry

00;00;00;00 - 00;00;24;07

Karen Brown

Welcome to Real Life Renos : The Podcast. My name is Karen Brown. I'm your host and we're continuing our series on accessible housing with Ron Wickman, who is an architect specializing in barrier free design, and he joins us from Edmonton. Welcome, Ron.

00;00;24;10 - 00;00;26;11

Ron Wickman

Thanks. Welcome to you.

00;00;26;13 - 00;00;48;16

Karen Brown

We've done a show on the history of accessible housing, and then we did one on the three areas of a home you focus attention on for ease of renovation entry, vertical movement and bathrooms. Our listeners can go back and listen to those podcasts, but in this podcast we're focusing on the first point entry and looking at specific renovation solutions to make a home accessible.

00;00;48;19 - 00;00;57;02

Karen Brown

We've already acknowledged that the ideal situation would be that the front door would be two feet or less off the ground. Where do we go from here?

00;00;57;04 - 00;01;27;03

Ron Wickman

Yeah. So that it it for me and my history, working in this field of accessibility, I really did think it was an easy thing, you know, 30

years ago. And I've since discovered that here in Canada it, it is a little trickier than than one might think. Having this no step entrance, there's a there's a technical issue in terms of trying to keep wood water away from the wood.

00;01;27;03 - 00;01;58;15

Ron Wickman

So we built our floors higher than the ground surface so that we don't expose the wood to to water. I'll talk about how we can get around that. And then secondly, and in some ways, the harder one to to get people to buy into is more of a kind of attitudinal or cultural history to this. So people just think that a house needs to have steps at the front door to make it, to give it character, make it feel like a house.

00;01;58;17 - 00;02;26;10

Ron Wickman

And I know that many people who use wheelchairs that have built their own houses have purposely built their homes with steps at the front door. And they have they're on great access at the back so that they feel like they are in keeping with the rest of their neighbors in the streetscape. So. So that's very telling of some of the challenges that that we face, both culturally and technically.

00;02;26;12 - 00;02;50;01

Ron Wickman

One one story I guess that I can share with you is an experience. I guess that I worked with a builder who was tasked with building 42 homes for a gated seniors community, and they were all bungalows and they had all of the bungalows had to have no step entrances as well as a couple of other other features.

00;02;50;01 - 00;03;21;08

Ron Wickman

But the builder, this was the first time that they were challenged with this idea of building homes with with no steps at the front door, all front car garages. So that's that's a bit of a plus in the sense that your your front entrance then tends to be a little further away from the public street. So so the no step entrance is really a product of being able to have a gently sloping pathway to the front door.

00;03;21;10 - 00;03;50;29

Ron Wickman

So if your front door is only 15 feet from the front or you only have 15 feet of front yard and your house is two feet off the ground, you're going to have to have some sort of ramp or a mechanical porch lift at the at the front. So working with this builder. He he through his experience, he explained to me that there were other challenges that he faced other than just creating this this sloping sidewalk situation or ramping situation at the front door.

00;03;51;00 - 00;04;11;28

Ron Wickman

Part of that was just getting the house closer to the ground, the main floor closer to the ground. And and then the need to waterproof the the what we call the rim joist So the rim joist is the is the vertical piece of wood that wraps around of the house, the perimeter of the house and keeps the floor joists in place.

00;04;12;03 - 00;04;36;05

Ron Wickman

So we can we can protect that wood with waterproofing membrane, rubber waterproofing membrane, the same type of

product that you'd see on a flat roof, for example. What I like to do is, is build my foundations so that we can actually bury the floor joist inside the concrete. So build the build a concrete foundation wall a little higher.

00;04;36;07 - 00;04;44;05

Ron Wickman

And rather than resting our floor joist On top of the concrete, we rested inside. We hang the joist from the from the concrete.

00;04;44;07 - 00;04;49;23

Karen Brown

So that the way they do it now is to put them on top of the concrete. That's the typical building situation.

00;04;49;26 - 00;05;15;14

Ron Wickman

Correct. Correct. So, again, builders will resist this new way or this other way of of building because they're just not used to it. And they're the way that they often get their way is they'll say, well, it's way more expensive to do it that way. It truly isn't. It It's just it's just different. So they didn't want to go there because then they have to train all the trades to make sure that they pay attention to this different type of detail.

00;05;15;22 - 00;05;18;02

Karen Brown

You really need the buy in.

00;05;18;04 - 00;05;52;10

Ron Wickman

You really need to buy in from everybody, right? Yeah, that's right. But but he did you know, he did say that that was that was

a bit of an issue and something I hadn't realized at the time. But it is true. We also now generally use high efficiency furnaces in our in our homes and rather than having our chimney flue go through the the floor system and up through the roof, and you often see that in older homes that your chimney flue is protruding out of your roof.

00;05;52;12 - 00;06;19;16

Ron Wickman

The high efficiency furnace has the exhausting air out of the rim joists at the at the floor level. So if your ground is is very close to that exhausting then you have to create a window well around that that exhaust valve at the rim. joist So that's a little bit more and different construction techniques. So, you know, one could argue that that that costs more money.

00;06;19;19 - 00;06;26;12

Karen Brown

It would also require the homeowner to pay attention in the snowy times of year to make sure it stays clear and doesn't get blocked.

00;06;26;15 - 00;06;53;29

Ron Wickman

That's right. Yeah. So there's there's there's some some issues around there. And then, of course, if your house is a little bit further down in the in the ground, then your basement windows are a little bit further down which forces you to have deeper window wells, which gives you less light in the basement. So we talked about that in a previous podcast where a lot of people want to get their basement as high out of the ground as possible to gain access to natural light.

00;06;54;03 - 00;07;17;16

Ron Wickman

So what what I've been doing a lot of times is actually over sizing the window wells, building them quite big and and that allows you to have bigger windows and and bring lots of natural light into the into the basement space, which of course compared to your typical way of building a bigger window. Well is just more money than a smaller window.

00;07;17;16 - 00;07;40;14

Ron Wickman

Well that just stands to reason. So these are the sorts of things that builders will often argue, well, you're just you're just increasing costs. But the norm is is the norm is not to make buildings accessible. So anytime we make them accessible, then we're going outside of the norm. So one could argue it always costs a little bit more money.

00;07;40;16 - 00;08;07;11

Ron Wickman

And then and then another very, very important feature in the no step entrance is once you get to the door, you need to have your door threshold as having a minimal bump as possible. So something like a quarter of an inch bump and that that quarter of an inch would help prevent water from getting inside the house. And it's a very gentle bump.

00;08;07;11 - 00;08;38;21

Ron Wickman

So most wheelchairs would easily get over that or even a walker which would get over that threshold. So there's different tech, there's different techniques there that you can you can do in my own house, poured the concrete with a little divot in it so that the

door actually sat inside a little bit into the foundation. That's easy to do when you're pouring a new foundation, and then you just build the concrete up to it and the inside floor up to the threshold as well.

00;08;38;22 - 00;09;14;14

Ron Wickman

So that that works. That works really well and still keeps the water water out. If you go with a more commercial grade threshold, which is just a metal plate, then that that eliminates the bump altogether. And the problem with that is potentially you could get water entering the house at that point. So the way around, the way around that is to have a some kind of structure, a canopy over the entrance way that prevents water from actually getting to the door and to the doors for that child itself.

00;09;14;16 - 00;09;39;07

Ron Wickman

So, yeah, there's lots of there's lots of different ways to to tackle it. In my in my own house, it was a bungalow. We added the second story, but we we did have a front car garage so so I had about 40 feet from the, from from the public sidewalk to the door and in that 40 feet then I could just have a gently sloping driveway and sidewalk that gets to the door.

00;09;39;07 - 00;10;08;21

Ron Wickman

So it's not really I don't call it a ramp, I just call it a sloping pathway. And and in that way, any potential negative esthetics are eliminated because it just looks like a sidewalk. And and we had the distance. So that's what I was saying. If if my house was only 20 feet away or even closer to the sidewalk, the front public

sidewalk, then it would have been really hard to create that sloping situation.

00;10;08;24 - 00;10;35;06

Ron Wickman

My house was built in a conventional manner in 1967, and so it has the floor joists on top of the concrete foundation. And so only at the entrance is concrete up against the floor. joist And the rim joists, everywhere else, the ground is two feet below the floor level. And so with my high efficiency furnace in the back of my house, there is no problem.

00;10;35;06 - 00;10;45;22

Ron Wickman

I don't have to have window wells or anything like that. So there's different strategies you can use depending on the landscaping that exists on the lot that your that you're working with.

00;10;45;27 - 00;10;56;15

Karen Brown

Right. They could build up the the lot at the front of the house and have it slope off to the back and have traditional windows at the back. What is the slope that we're looking for? It's 2%?

00;10;56;17 - 00;11;23;25

Ron Wickman

It's 5% or less so so a ramp by code is is one in 12. So for every foot two, you go up, you have to go 12 feet horizontally across. If you have one in 20, which is 5%, then it's no longer considered a ramp and it's just a gently sloping pathway. So in my case, I was able to do that.



00;11;23;25 - 00;11;44;26

Ron Wickman

I was able to have even less than one in five slope again, the way the way you could do it in if you had less distance is to have your your sidewalk meander somewhat in the in the front yard. So not just have a straight run up to the front door, but actually go sort of side to side.

00;11;44;26 - 00;11;48;18

Ron Wickman

Right. So just make it a bit more of an adventure getting to the front door.

00;11;48;23 - 00;11;50;02

Karen Brown

That's a design and true.

00;11;50;05 - 00;12;17;16

Ron Wickman

Well, yeah, and through clever landscaping and so on. It could actually be quite nice. I'm I'm just finishing a house right now, not far from where I live, an infill house where we're doing exactly that with the house and we're having a landscape plan with little benches that people can sit at and planters and so on. So this pathway will be really a joy to to go up and down all the time.

00;12;17;22 - 00;12;38;22

Ron Wickman

In the meantime, there's no ramps. It's just a nice sidewalk that gets you to the front door. And sure, it takes you it takes you 30 seconds longer to get to the door than if it was a straight,

straight, straight sidewalk. But those 30 seconds are a big plus for your experience, right? So it's I think it's a real positive thing.

00;12;38;22 - 00;13;04;16

Ron Wickman

So these are things we can do when we're doing custom homes. Your your your typical spec homebuilder probably wouldn't do something like that because they would pass the, you know, whatever costs on to the to the buying public. So again, it gets back to educating the builders and the buying public that some of these things may cost, you know, a little bit more money but are really well worth it in the long run.

00;13;04;16 - 00;13;09;22

Ron Wickman

And then you can find ways to save money in other areas, areas of the house.

00;13;09;24 - 00;13;33;14

Karen Brown

That's actually a good point that you raise. Let's let's talk a bit about price now. I know you can't talk about exact price without having an exact home in front of you, but roughly what would the increase in price be to do an accessible entrance over the way builders typically do it now? And let's remind our our listeners, we're recording this podcast at the end of June in 2023.

00;13;33;14 - 00;13;40;25

Karen Brown

So when we talk about pricing, it's what we know based on current day pricing.

00;13;40;27 - 00;14;06;09

Ron Wickman

Right? Yeah. And the, you know, the great thing about that question and thinking about the numbers is again, the experience I had with that builder who who built 20 or sorry, 42 houses, he said the first house they did very inexperienced. He said all in it was probably about \$6,000 more for all of the things that he had to do.

00;14;06;11 - 00;14;21;15

Ron Wickman

The the extra window. Well, so he he factored in all of the all of the things he did, which some of the things may not have been, but just because of the no step entrance. But he's sort of factor that all in and he said that was about \$6,000 extra.

00;14;21;20 - 00;14;23;01

Karen Brown

For the first one.

00;14;23;04 - 00;14;47;06

Ron Wickman

For the first one. He said by the time they did, you know, the third or fourth one, that number was reduced to maybe \$1,000. So once they got used to doing it, it was easy. And in every one of those 42 houses that cost varied depending on the grading of that particular lot. So some lots were just easier to do than others just because of the nature of the the way the land was sloping and so on.

00;14;47;06 - 00;14;56;29

Ron Wickman

So so you really should I think you should keep in mind something in the order of 1 to \$3000 depending on depending on the situation.

00;14;57;01 - 00;14;57;16

Karen Brown

Okay.

00;14;57;17 - 00;15;14;03

Ron Wickman

And and so I think sometimes you'll hear in visibility documents that it's only \$100 more. One might argue that that's that's maybe California or Arizona numbers.

00;15;14;03 - 00;15;15;00

Karen Brown

Where they don't have winter.

00;15;15;20 - 00;15;39;28

Ron Wickman

They don't yeah, they don't have winter. They don't build with basements and that sort of thing. So it really doesn't, doesn't factor in. But, but the reality of building here is Yes, we, we, there are some, there are some added costs and, and but again, it's once you have the experience, once you've done it a number of times, then really the the the extra dollars don't really factor in at all.

00;15;40;05 - 00;15;59;20

Karen Brown

Right. Okay. Now in terms of language, you used a word visitability. Let's explain what that is and look at maybe some of the other terminology that consumers would need to understand

when they're talking to builders and the builders would need to understand to have an effective conversation with their clients.  
DO.

00;15;59;22 - 00;16;23;17

Ron Wickman

Yeah. So when it comes to the no step entrance visitability, is is the key term that one would use. So visitability is very simply defined as a means of gaining access to to a home with a no step entrance. So that would be that would be a hopefully the front or main entrance to the home having no steps.

00;16;23;17 - 00;16;49;06

Ron Wickman

So somebody in a wheelchair or a walker or somebody pushing a baby stroller could easily gain access into the house. The door of that entry would need to be wide enough for a walker wheelchair baby carriage to get through, which three feet is more than enough. So just your your standard three foot door, which is commonplace, three feet is what is typically done in in every home in Canada.

00;16;49;06 - 00;17;11;15

Karen Brown

So and if you need more room there are these cool little things called expandable door hinges that will give you two inches more that are relatively inexpensive and can be installed in a heartbeat. I can do that. I can do those and you can do those in as many doors in your house as you need to. And that gives you two extra inches without even messing with the door opening itself.

00;17;11;17 - 00;17;13;05

Ron Wickman

That's that's correct. Yeah.

00;17;13;06 - 00;17;15;02

Karen Brown

Okay.

00;17;15;04 - 00;17;33;13

Ron Wickman

And then and then the the third issue. So the no step entrance, the door wide enough to get through and then a bathroom on the level that you enter would be at least accessible. So it could be a powder room, a sink and a toilet, but at least somebody could, could come to the house and visit to you.

00;17;33;13 - 00;17;53;29

Ron Wickman

So not live with you, but visit you. So yeah, you can stay for a few hours, have more than one cup of coffee and be able to use the bathroom, that kind of thing. So that's very important to keep in mind when we're talking about the no step entrance. You, you can do the the entrance without steps at the side.

00;17;53;29 - 00;18;21;06

Ron Wickman

If you again, if your house is close to the front yard. I've done this in some mature neighborhoods here in Edmonton. So the front door. Yes. Has a sidewalk that leads to the front door. There's a kind of porch at the front and some steps that get you on to the porch and then into the door. But then the sidewalk has a sort of a secondary sidewalk that leads to the side of the house, and that takes a little longer.

00;18;21;06 - 00;18;41;27

Ron Wickman

But you get to the side and you're you're at the grade level. So there's no I'm sorry, at the main floor level. So you're there are no there are no steps and you can gain access that way. So. So and then if you really needed to from the front, you could also have it wrap all the way around to the to the back.

00;18;42;03 - 00;19;03;07

Ron Wickman

Or if, if you really were in a tight spot and you needed that extra, that extra room. So so for that reason I do, I personally I like corner lots for for single family houses because it offers you more options in terms of the way you can landscape and and locate doors strategically to have that that no step that no step entrance.

00;19;03;13 - 00;19;28;00

Karen Brown

Right. And for some people neither of those things will be a solution and they may have to enter through a garage and we can talk about lifts in the podcast that we're going to do about vertical movement within the house. So any anything that we talk about in that podcast, which is the next one we're doing, will apply to entering a home from a garage as well.

00;19;28;02 - 00;19;29;10

Karen Brown

Mhm. Right.

00;19;29;12 - 00;19;29;29

Ron Wickman

Yeah.

00;19;30;01 - 00;19;39;13

Karen Brown

But this is just such a positive thing for people, It allows them to successfully carry on with their lives.

00;19;39;15 - 00;20;03;16

Ron Wickman

Yes, absolutely. Yeah. And you know as you were talking I was thinking about a house that I did about ten years ago for, for a couple that wanted to age in place. So they actually only moved three doors away from where they were living. But the gentleman had had some health issues and they lived in a house with the actually ended up inside.

00;20;03;16 - 00;20;23;23

Ron Wickman

There were six levels within the house, so there were stairs everywhere. And he was like, wow, I can't I can't do this anymore. So they found this lot and we built the house. Every, every house on the in the neighborhood had front car garages. And we actually built the garage floor. So it was level with the main floor as well.

00;20;23;25 - 00;20;51;27

Ron Wickman

So you could drive into the garage and just gain easy access into the house or the exterior sidewalk led you to the front door, which was also had no steps at the entrance. And he he would often talk about all the, you know, added benefits and their previous house, the driveway slope down towards the garage and he said just pushing snow to the street was hard for him.

00;20;52;00 - 00;21;01;13



Ron Wickman

But now the other way that we did it, the driveway sloped up to the garage floor. So he just had to push the snow down. It doesn't seem like a big deal, but.

00;21;01;16 - 00;21;02;24

Karen Brown

It's a huge deal.

00;21;02;26 - 00;21;25;03

Ron Wickman

If you live in Edmonton. Yeah, it's sometimes you get, you know, anywhere in Canada, really, you get this snow that is sometimes hard to push, right? So anything that helps you is is a is a good thing. So, you know, those are really good strategies and they were very, very aware that at 60 they wanted this house to be there forever home.

00;21;25;03 - 00;21;42;14

Ron Wickman

They didn't want to have to move ever again. So they did it all. They did. They they did the no step entrance. They have an elevator in their house and they have the the wet room bathrooms as well. Right. As as well as all the other features that we won't be really talking about as much.

00;21;42;16 - 00;22;06;13

Karen Brown

Right. You know, the story that always makes me want to tear up a little bit is when I think of your children and the experience they had with your house and with their grandparents because your father was never able easily to get into your house. And I remember you telling me that at Halloween he would just drive

into the driveway, honk his horn, and the kids would come out and get the candy and he'd drive away again, and that would be the end of that.

00;22;06;13 - 00;22;15;20

Karen Brown

But then you put in the no step entry and tell us about your children and their ability to engage with their grandparents after that.

00;22;15;22 - 00;22;44;22

Ron Wickman

Yeah, that that that is a great story. And I kind of talked I've talked about it enough that I don't actually well up anymore but I do yeah it's I mean I become a grandpa myself, so I completely understand now his passion and, and his, his love of his have his grandkids. I completely get that. And yeah, we when we had the bungalow, he it wasn't just Halloween either.

00;22;44;22 - 00;23;10;25

Ron Wickman

It was literally every Saturday was his day to go out and do some shopping and and when the grandchildren the grandchildren were around, he he would always get treats for them. So typically on a Saturday, he would drive up to our house seat, park on the driveway. He'd phone, and one of the kids would answer. Often, I think they started to figure out they were young, but they figured out that it's likely going to be him and they're going to get some treats.

00;23;10;27 - 00;23;30;27

Ron Wickman

So. So he would phone and they would they would, you know, before I knew what was going on, they would run out the door. And, you know, again, before we built the second story to our house, my my office space was in the basement. So I sort of hear this from below. And the door opening. And I'm like, Oh, I better get upstairs because I don't know what my kids are doing escaping.

00;23;30;29 - 00;23;52;18

Ron Wickman

And they would, yeah, they would run out and he would have treats for them and at the very best they might, you know, say hi and chat with him for a bit. But that visit was very short lived and I would come out and say hi to him. And sometimes I just did. By the time I got up the stairs and out the door, he was already backing up and on his way.

00;23;52;18 - 00;24;11;29

Ron Wickman

And so I didn't even get to see him. And I was extremely close to my father. So the day that we finished our house and the doorbell rang and and he, he came in, he was able to just come in was, was not only a great day for him and a great day for my kids, but for me as well.

00;24;12;00 - 00;24;33;21

Ron Wickman

Right. So yeah, I did. I ended up writing a little children's book about that whole experience and hoping to relay to other children that and hopefully they would ask their parents then after they read the book that they'd go, Yeah, how come we don't have a house like this where Grandma and grandpa can come over and

visit? Because grandma and grandpa generally tend to be pretty giving, right?

00;24;33;25 - 00;24;34;07

Karen Brown

Okay.

00;24;34;10 - 00;24;59;03

Ron Wickman

Compared to the parents. So, So the grandkids generally liked their grandparents a lot. So yeah, that that, that really was that kind of emotional experience that, that you that you get from doing this sort of simple this, this simple construction technique of just doing the no step entrance. Right. Right. And and the Father's Day has just come and gone now.

00;24;59;03 - 00;25;20;05

Ron Wickman

And and this year I asked my kids to write right in a card. So just get me a card and write in the card. Some memories they had of their their experience growing up in a house that was a little bit different than the rest of the the rest of the neighborhood. So, yes, visually, our house is a little bit different.

00;25;20;05 - 00;25;47;06

Ron Wickman

It's it's more contemporary. It's got flat roofs. It looks a little bit different than most of the other houses. But on the positive side, it it also is incredibly energy efficient and it also is tackles with all of these accessibility issues as well. So I asked them just to sort of just to get from them some ideas of what they thought, and I thought I'd just share a couple of sentences.

00;25;47;06 - 00;26;09;18

Ron Wickman

My my son wrote in his card. He says, I was in fifth grade when my dad decided to renovate our bungalow into the two story barrier free home. He was able to convince my school to let us go on a field trip to the house during construction to see some of the features and construction processes. My class talked about the field trip for months.

00;26;09;25 - 00;26;32;15

Ron Wickman

Me and my house were hot topics at school. I became a legend at Retail Park, so that was the elementary school. So that was great for class. So it was very successful. And you know, we talked about all kinds of things with the house. But, you know, big thing was this experience that he was able to share with his his classmates about how grandpa could come over and and and visit.

00;26;32;17 - 00;26;56;18

Ron Wickman

And then during construction, he he said he says, I crossed the threshold of our new no step entrance and the rest is history. I saw a ramp, a skateboard and those kids and this long story, so I won't get into this part. Those kids with low ambition sitting in the Hobo Hut, we grabbed the scraps from construction and began building ramps and rails out of grab bars.

00;26;56;20 - 00;27;26;23

Ron Wickman

And he talked about his his short, short but successful skateboarding career where with with this sloping sidewalk. So and then and then he closes by saying 3520 which is our address

will always feel like home to many. And as Jake, Jake Chacko, a good friend of his once said this is our house. So not only was it in his mind, his house, our house, the Wickman house, but all his friends that came over felt really at home as well.

00;27;26;23 - 00;27;52;27

Ron Wickman

So, you know, it really does say a lot about adding these these features that just make everybody feel welcome, right? So that's like, I think the true definition of of inclusion. And so what I take from that is that my kids understand that a house can be more than just a shelter. It can be a place that is very welcoming, not just to your own family, but to to other members of of other families.

00;27;53;00 - 00;27;54;06

Ron Wickman

So, yeah, it's a great story.

00;27;54;06 - 00;28;18;03

Karen Brown

I think that is a perfect place to bring this particular podcast to a conclusion. So we will thank you for your insights into how to resolve the problem of getting into a house. I will invite our listeners to stay tuned for our next podcast, which will be all about vertical movement within a home. So until then, join us the next time and thank you for listening in.

00;28;18;03 - 00;28;57;00

Speaker 1

Real Life Renos : The podcast is a production of Reno Studios. Executive produced by Karen Brown. This is Real Life theme music and lyrics by Jane Carmichael, recorded at Swamp Songs

recording studio in Lucan, Ontario. Engineered by Matt Weston.  
Thank you for tuning in.