

Ron Wickman : Shopping for a House

00;00;00;00 - 00;00;32;05

Karen Brown

Hello and welcome to another edition of Real Life Renos: The Podcast. As always, I'm your host, Karen Brown. And today we are doing a follow up to the series that we started last week about accessibility and house hunting and the sorts of things we ought to look for. And today we are going to look at the actual house hunting piece.

00;00;32;08 - 00;00;44;00

Karen Brown

And our guest, of course, is Mr. Ron Wickman, who is a barrier free specialist in the architectural field, and he joins us from Edmonton. Welcome back, Ron.

00;00;44;02 - 00;00;45;16

Ron Wickman

Thanks so much.

00;00;45;19 - 00;01;02;25

Karen Brown

So we want to talk about house hunting and really the basic challenges that anyone faces when looking for a home are centered around affordability and what community you want to live in. Is that right?

00;01;02;28 - 00;01;31;19

Ron Wickman

Absolutely. Yeah. So affordability is the biggest issue, right? So I've I've spent a long career now working with clients who are looking for homes and they really they really want something first

and foremost to meet their budget and then secondly, they want they want to live in a community that provides for their specific needs. They might have school aged children.

00;01;31;21 - 00;01;34;21

Ron Wickman

They might want to be in their work, that sort of thing.

00;01;34;24 - 00;01;46;23

Karen Brown

Right. And when we add in the complication around the need for accessibility, that can be quite a challenge for some people.

00;01;46;25 - 00;01;54;29

Ron Wickman

Yeah, no pun intended, but the challenge gets ramped up.

00;01;55;01 - 00;02;21;14

Ron Wickman

It does, for sure. First and foremost, again, most people will see a disability. These aren't in the same income bracket as your average, you know, your average family. So we're already starting at a bit of a deficit from that end of things. And and then finding something that you could either renovate or find a lot to build new.

00;02;21;16 - 00;02;30;26

Ron Wickman

Finding an existing house that would already meet your needs as somebody with a disability is next to impossible.

00;02;30;29 - 00;02;56;01

Karen Brown

Right. But that doesn't mean that people should be discouraged by it because there are solutions to mitigate all kinds of issues. And we're going to get into that a little bit. But what else should people be looking at in terms of what they need in a house? Like I'm thinking they should be looking at their needs not only today, but down the road.

00;02;56;03 - 00;03;29;10

Ron Wickman

Yeah. Yeah. So so again, you know, even you're right, you're you're most typical average family without any member with a disability tend to look at the here and now. So we tend to focus on what can we afford now definitely in our in North America, I can speak a bit more confidently about about, you know, growing up in Canada and being in North America, that we we have a tendency to buy for what we can afford today.

00;03;29;12 - 00;03;56;04

Ron Wickman

And then we think about what we can afford later. And it's not uncommon for us to to think that in our lifetime we'll probably move three or four times. And that's just kind of the way we think. And that's a normal situation. And the idea of building homes that you could grow in, homes that are flexible to accommodate your changing needs is not something that's really in our DNA.

00;03;56;06 - 00;03;58;02

Ron Wickman

As North Americans.

00;03;58;04 - 00;04;21;09

Karen Brown

Right? That the changing need piece is quite important with the cost of housing escalating the way it is, do you think that we need to be looking at houses that will do us for longer, that maybe we can look at the community and our lives and where our lives might go and look at how the house might change to meet our needs in the years ahead.

00;04;21;11 - 00;04;47;03

Ron Wickman

Yeah, absolutely. And you know, it's funny that just as you ask that question, I'm thinking, you know, all the way back to when I started my practice and in 1994, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, they held a competition which they called flex housing. So the economy wasn't super strong. And CMHC is an organization that tries to promote innovative housing.

00;04;47;05 - 00;05;19;22

Ron Wickman

And they were taking this opportunity to encourage designers and builders to come up with clever ideas that would adapt to changing households and sort of a new demographic. And and they came up with this competition, which they called flex housing. It's a term that you can if you go to the CMHC website, you can look it up and they talk about housing that is adaptable, affordable and accessible.

00;05;19;24 - 00;05;53;29

Ron Wickman

And in in 1994, I had just become registered as an architect and I entered the competition. And the idea of adaptability wasn't really about accessibility. That was a separate category. Adaptability was speaking in terms of, again, in 1994, more and more people were working out of their home. More and more children in their

late twenties, thirties even were moving out of their family home or shudder.

00;05;54;02 - 00;05;56;15

Karen Brown

Now they go away, but they come back.

00;05;56;17 - 00;06;29;11

Ron Wickman

And and and parents of of adults in their fifties and sixties were moving back in to the into a home. So this whole idea of of a multipurpose house multigenerational house was was talked about way back way back when. And my my two did not get into too many details, but my particular competition entry was one where it took my own family.

00;06;29;11 - 00;06;57;15

Ron Wickman

As far as the idea that I was working on under the house, we had three small children. So I thought, well, you know, my wife and I could afford a kind of starter home, so could we buy a small home that could accommodate our needs and then as as potentially a family grew and changing, it's like I'm thinking about kids that aren't moving out, parents that are moving back and having a home office.

00;06;57;18 - 00;07;29;17

Ron Wickman

You could start to add on to your house slowly as and in fact, what happened with my design was the idea that this this couple that buys the house in the beginning could then separate the house into to not not physically separate them, but have a wall between the two parts of the house. And then they could have

like a rental suite so that the couple could buy the house in 1994 and continue to live in the house in 2023.

00;07;29;19 - 00;07;53;23

Ron Wickman

But they would have like a rental unit or a unit for a child again, that is at home or a parent that's at home. So all of a sudden there's all these kind of really cool, flexible ideas. And I was really excited about it. I was, you know, I was just out of school. I had lots of, I thought, innovative ideas, a lot of energy.

00;07;53;26 - 00;08;16;00

Ron Wickman

And and I was kind of naive to the market and how it actually worked and what really moved people to to buy houses that they do. And then just one last thing. The house was open to the public for a month. And this is this is kind of back to my point about our thinking about living in homes for the long term.

00;08;16;02 - 00;08;39;07

Ron Wickman

Many, many people approached and talked about the house as this idea of living in it for your entire life. And if it was just one person that mentioned it, I wouldn't have thought much of it. But so many people said to me, Well, that's just not the way it works. You don't buy a house and continue to adapt it and build on it and separated and have this all this flexible space.

00;08;39;09 - 00;09;02;00

Ron Wickman

You just move. So you you buy into a community that's for young families, starter homes, then you to move into the community or neighborhood where there's homes that have children and then

you move to a retirement village. So this idea that we just constantly move is just something that's ingrained in our in our DNA and the way we are as as buyers.

00;09;02;00 - 00;09;17;02

Ron Wickman

And I just think that's such a sort of unusual way of thinking. And I think it is now in 2023, people are really starting to think about this idea of this is like something again in a in a big way.

00;09;17;05 - 00;09;37;25

Karen Brown

I agree. And your house plan would probably find greater favor now. But as you were speaking, I was thinking, you know, if everybody's moving into a neighborhood with young children, the young children all grow up together and everybody is at the same stage of life all together. So even what they were saying to you doesn't kind of make sense to me every bit.

00;09;37;25 - 00;09;48;25

Karen Brown

Like, why would you move to another neighborhood when the neighborhood you're in is already at your same life stage? More or less that okay, that's that's what they were thinking. That's that's fine. That's fine.

00;09;48;28 - 00;10;11;09

Ron Wickman

The only the only time and especially today, now that we've lived through this pandemic, the only time you really don't want to move, really don't want to move is when you are, you know, in your late seventies, eighties, cause you don't you're the next

option. This, like long term health care is not not desirable by anybody. So everybody just wants to stay in their home.

00;10;11;11 - 00;10;35;19

Ron Wickman

And again, the problem is you didn't have the the idea or thinking, you know, 30 years prior or 40 years prior to build a house that you could actually live in when you were in your eighties. And so now this house has multiple levels and stairs everywhere. Spaces are cramped. You just can't really adjust your house to fit your your new, new needs.

00;10;35;19 - 00;10;37;17

Ron Wickman

As somebody who is aging.

00;10;37;20 - 00;10;55;02

Karen Brown

And they're building on thirty-three foot lots, it's you know, it's it's really challenging. So if you were looking for your first house now, knowing what you know now, but going back to that younger age when you were first looking for a house, how would that change your search for a house?

00;10;55;05 - 00;11;25;09

Ron Wickman

What is that? Yeah, that's a great question, because ideally I know what I would do, but the practicality of, you know, finding the right you know what? I guess I would I would I would try to find a vacant lot that I could build a house on that would allow me to to design and build something that I would, would accommodate my my family's needs for now and way into the future.

00;11;25;11 - 00;11;53;00

Ron Wickman

But there really aren't neighborhoods that are designed with that sort of mentality or that thinking. And so the reality I, I, I think for now I'm speaking very specifically about Edmonton, which I think could translate into many other cities. Calgary for sure. I happen to live in a neighborhood that is still considered a mature neighborhood, but it was built on big lots.

00;11;53;00 - 00;12;19;02

Ron Wickman

So we have a 50 foot wide lots, 120, 130 feet deep. So it's quite a substantial lot. We have a fairly big front yard. We have had a bungalow on the house when we bought it, not a bad sized backyard. So it's it's a house that we could do a lot of things with in terms of renovating.

00;12;19;04 - 00;12;19;20

Karen Brown

Umhm

00;12;19;22 - 00;12;50;10

Ron Wickman

We did. We did do a renovation in 2000 and I'm glad that we did. At that time, I, I thought maybe if I wait a few years that prices will come down. No, really, Never, never, never, never happens. It just always keeps going up. So, you know, we did something that today I just simply couldn't afford. It would just be well over \$1,000,000 to do the renovation, and it would be sort of dumb to even try to keep any part of the house.

00;12;50;10 - 00;13;14;25

Ron Wickman

We just tear down and start over. But, you know, we we did design something with we added a second story to the house and then I took all my learning from school and my my experience up until then, up until 2000, to design a house that I felt I could have now and forever for and and that's proving to be true.

00;13;14;27 - 00;13;38;01

Ron Wickman

You know, that that we now have a house that my wife and I can stay in as long as we want it. It'll it'll meet all our needs as we age. But more than that it's a house that has become flexible for of not as not a shrinking family, but a growing one. So our kids are are having children of their own.

00;13;38;04 - 00;14;03;18

Ron Wickman

So we're we're at three three children, three grandchildren, two more on the way. So surprisingly, I never thought I would say this, but I'm planning a small addition to the front part of our house. And just to get a little bit more space, because now everybody's coming over here for Thanksgiving and Christmas and all that sort of stuff.

00;14;03;20 - 00;14;28;18

Ron Wickman

And the reason that we we meet here is because the house is so accommodating and flexible. The kids can come easily. There's no steps at the front door so they can just push their baby carriages in. There's lots of space to leave stuff around. And, you know, we have four bedrooms upstairs. So. So yeah, this house, this is it has been sort of custom fit for us.

00;14;28;18 - 00;14;38;20

Ron Wickman

But the reality is it's it's a great house for so many families and so many different types of living arrangements.

00;14;38;22 - 00;15;11;03

Karen Brown

To just to refresh people's memories from our previous podcast, you did the step free entry renovation largely because of your father's needs. Your father was in a wheelchair and and wasn't able to access your house without a great deal of difficulty. And so now we see the needs that he had matching the needs that your children and your grandchildren have in terms of how to get into a house quickly, easily, safely and with as little hassle as possible.

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

Karen Brown

Isn't that remarkable? You know, we talk in terms of accessibility and it's it's not accessibility, really. It's life. It's doing life and having a house that meets our needs.

00;15;21;09 - 00;15;43;08

Ron Wickman

That's such a fantastic point, right? Because it's so true. And and, you know, talking about our our marketplace, you know, you use that term accessible and real estate and you're trying to sell your house, this one that's accessible, I can almost guarantee that that's going to cause increase and people are going to see that it's something other than what it is.

00;15;43;11 - 00;16;01;10

Ron Wickman

So coming up with the right term, the right way to to to to market accessible housing, again, I'm saying that word is is quite vital unless we get enough people understanding what accessibility truly needs. Right.

00;16;01;12 - 00;16;01;24

Karen Brown

Right.

00;16;02;01 - 00;16;29;08

Ron Wickman

But yeah it's it's it's it's yeah it's it's I'm at the point now where it's again it's no longer me talking about things in the abstract. I'm experiencing them as as I go and it's a I'm not going to lie it's really it's really nice to of the 58 now and you know, like when I was in my late twenties and thirties, I was actually making some kind of sense.

00;16;30;02 - 00;16;45;21

Ron Wickman

I was I was saying something that actually was meaningful and and it's coming to be true. Right. And and so, you know, in those days, I was often, you know, people would often say I was a little bit ahead of my time maybe, but and I'm not the only one. There's lots of there's lots of people out there.

00;16;45;21 - 00;17;09;07

Ron Wickman

But it's nice to to know that you were on the right track. And and I really felt like in those days that this is this is these are good ideas. These are really, really valuable ideas. And again, it's it's sometimes frustrating when you when you see what's being built

compared to what, you know, could be done and how much better it could be.

00;17;09;10 - 00;17;19;03

Ron Wickman

Yeah, somehow we haven't really infiltrated enough these the current market to to make a real effective dent in the market.

00;17;19;09 - 00;17;48;22

Karen Brown

Right. So you touched on the language that is used to market houses but there is language that is used with builders and with realtors as well as the home buying public. And it doesn't always meet up. People aren't always understanding the same things from the conversations. So I want to let our listeners know that we are going to touch on language and the differences in the words and the terms as we as we move forward.

00;17;48;22 - 00;18;19;19

Karen Brown

In fact, we're going to follow this podcast with three other short podcasts on specific areas of a house that you might want to look at. And we'll maybe have a more in-depth conversation about language with those. So as an architect, Ronnie, architects are not typically chosen to ride around with the general public and and find houses. But if in fact, I hired you to help me find the right house knowing that renovations might be needed or would be needed, what would you be looking for?

00;18;19;22 - 00;18;54;27

Ron Wickman

Yeah. So before before I answer that question, I just again, back to the terminology. There's, there's three three keyword that I

also want to bring into the conversation, and that is choice change and adapt. Okay, So those three words are really important. And, and what I mean by ADAPT is I grew up I grew up with a parents who who used a wheelchair, and he always had to adapt to the built environment the way it was.

00;18;54;29 - 00;19;27;16

Ron Wickman

So it was never designed for him. It was always designed almost against him. And so he had to figure out ways to to make it work. And and obviously that had a tremendous influence on myself growing up as a child. See, seeing this for myself and just knowing that there's something terribly wrong about all of that. And that sort of led me to when I went to to architecture school and I started working on my master's thesis that led me to this this word choice.

00;19;27;19 - 00;20;01;04

Ron Wickman

And when it comes right down to it, my dad and others, everybody just wants to have the ability to make their own choices. This does relate to us looking for houses and house hunting, right? And and what influences Often our decision making is our ability to look at change as a positive or negative thing. So how we how we think about change is something that that does affect us in terms of us looking looking for homes.

00;20;01;06 - 00;20;26;14

Ron Wickman

So so with that in mind, when I am asked to, to talk to people or give my \$0.02 about what they should be looking for in houses, you know, the first thing I would say is, is look for a bungalow if

you can. So there the choices are somewhat limited there. There are less and less bungalows being built today.

00;20;26;14 - 00;20;56;28

Ron Wickman

So you probably are looking at an older neighborhood for bungalows. They generally cost a little bit more money. So again, that's sort of limiting your your your choices. And secondly, I would say stay away from anything that's like a high level or a split level. So right away it kind of on the two sides of the spectrum. One is the bungalow being the best and the worst being the split level or bi level.

00;20;57;01 - 00;20;57;10

Karen Brown

Right?

00;20;57;16 - 00;21;09;12

Ron Wickman

And then your two story house is, is in between that. So for a two storey house, this is often a house that can be quite easily adopted as well.

00;21;09;12 - 00;21;15;22

Karen Brown

So and see people don't think that people see a two storey house and think you can't do that. Yeah. Yeah.

00;21;15;26 - 00;21;48;01

Ron Wickman

They automatically, they automatically think that that's going to be a problem. So, so generally speaking, the big thing I say is, you know, you're when you first house hunting and let's say you

do you target a neighborhood that you really like. Just go for a walk or a drive and start looking at houses. The first thing I tell people to do is, is just look at that relationship of the entry floor level to the ground.

00;21;48;04 - 00;22;13;24

Ron Wickman

So if you look at if you look at it and you see that it's less than two feet, 600 millimeters, I don't know what language I should be seeking in my for younger people, I guess the metric. But yeah, so, so it's around two feet, which again in older neighborhoods you'll see quite, quite often that's that's a pretty positive thing.

00;22;13;24 - 00;22;19;08

Ron Wickman

That's a, that's reason to at least venture into the House and see what it looks like from there.

00;22;19;11 - 00;22;25;05

Karen Brown

So if the front door is two feet off the ground or less, this is this is positive. Okay. Yeah.

00;22;25;08 - 00;22;32;21

Ron Wickman

So if you see a house and it's got ten steps to the front door, just keep going.

00;22;32;24 - 00;22;33;05

Karen Brown

Right.

00;22;33;09 - 00;22;52;20

Ron Wickman

Don't even don't even don't even think about it really. Now, having said that, the problem is for a lot of people with disabilities, they don't have they don't always have that choice. Right? Sometimes they have to buy a house like that because it just happens to be the only one that would sit there, their budget. Right. And then they and then they realize, well, you know what?

00;22;52;21 - 00;23;11;05

Ron Wickman

It's going to have to be there's no way I'm going to be able to do this without some sort of addition to the house and adding a new entry that would allow us to have an elevator in there. And and so there's all kinds of ramifications to that. But the relationship of the ground to the to the entry floor level.

00;23;11;07 - 00;23;29;28

Karen Brown

Right. I'm a big believer that people should be able to have the dignity of entering through the front door. I also understand that that's not always possible and that's the situation that you just mentioned. If if there are a bunch of steps up to the porch, you might have to have a lift off of the garage or some other sort of accommodation to make that happen.

00;23;30;00 - 00;23;53;11

Ron Wickman

Yeah. So, so that I just reminded you of something. I guess I'll, I'll just say it now. But you know, this word dignity. I, I grew up at a time when that was it was a tricky word for my dad. Right. So just to share with you an example of his dignity going to

friends homes, there was a reason why he always liked having people come to his house.

00;23;53;16 - 00;24;22;19

Ron Wickman

Right? So he could use his house quite easily. So first thing we would do going to a friend, family member members home would be me trying to get him up the stairs so he would be approaching the stairs from the back. So I would grab the handles handles in the back of his wheelchair. He would grab the wheels of his wheelchair and he would be trying to propel himself up as I was pulling on him.

00;24;22;22 - 00;24;43;14

Ron Wickman

So any any slight letting go or whatever, he's going flying down like he's not hanging on to anything other than the wheels of his wheelchair. Right. And we do live in a winter city. So sometimes we were doing this in icy conditions and so on. So first and foremost, to see him getting into the house is it's not super dignified.

00;24;43;17 - 00;25;11;16

Ron Wickman

And secondly, once we're at that level, just navigating through the house to get to a table that we can sit and have coffee at or maybe dinner even that, you know, that's probably moving furniture around, getting things out of the way, all that kind of stuff. There's no thought about getting to any other level. So, you know, people could go downstairs like my dad couldn't or upstairs if there was a two storey.

00;25;11;18 - 00;25;39;09

Ron Wickman

And then the worst was when if he stayed long enough and you had to use the bathroom, it was more often than not, it was him literally sitting in his wheelchair in the hallway being an account and orienting a toilet or my mom pouring it in the toilet for him so he couldn't even get in the washroom. And so, yeah, in time we found that my dad just became more and more resistant to going out to visit.

00;25;39;11 - 00;25;50;02

Ron Wickman

He stayed at home and had people come visit him because that just doesn't work, right? And today I think people would find that hard to believe that that's kind of what he used to do, right?

00;25;50;09 - 00;26;13;00

Karen Brown

It's still what people have to do. I mean, when you look at a dignity issue and you look at the houses that are being built on lots with three foot frontage, they are all straight up and a lot of areas seem to be addicted to these parched communities. So there are many, many stairs getting up. So, you know, that is what you and your father and your mother dealt with.

00;26;13;00 - 00;26;35;04

Karen Brown

It is still what people are dealing with. So, you know, this is good if people are looking at not only their own needs, but the needs of people who may come and visit them, parents who are aging, the fact that they might have strollers or I mean, as we discussed in the last podcast, everybody seems to have these, you know, Cadillac strollers these days.

00;26;35;04 - 00;26;52;18

Karen Brown

They're almost cars of their own, I think you said. And that's that's true. So just the whole business of getting into a house we take for granted all of these stairs and this is just how we do it. It's not the easiest thing in the world and it is not how we should do it.

00;26;52;25 - 00;27;18;03

Ron Wickman

Yeah, that's it. Yeah, exactly. And, and yeah, depending on depending on my day, frankly, I, you know, I often feel like we've come a long way since I was born in 1964. And sometimes when I'm helping somebody find a house to to modify or renovate, I still feel like we're sort of back in the Stone Age or something, you know, that we just haven't really made much progress at all.

00;27;18;05 - 00;27;51;26

Ron Wickman

So I try to try to stay positive in all of this. And, you know, we slowly make progress, but it just it just seems agonizingly slow, right, to make that progress. And just thinking about that, too, the idea of influencing our our decision making and the choices that we have to find homes is is our again, comes down to this understanding of the built environment and how well the built environment exists to allow people with disabilities to get around.

00;27;51;26 - 00;28;15;07

Ron Wickman

So in a previous podcast we talked about curb cuts and how that's changed the very nature of the way we get around in our urban environments. And so again, that no, the no step entrance, the entrance that's easy for somebody in a wheelchair. And we

we've demonstrated and talked about the fact that it benefits so many other people of young families with baby carriages and so on.

00;28;15;10 - 00;28;49;23

Ron Wickman

So so that just kind of taking taking on the sort of normal way we build should be happening. And, you know, still we're still not there yet, but slowly getting there. I think like today what is really helping homebuyers is, is technology. So they more and more technology now, they can they can they can better find out what their what their options are through Googling and all this other other ways of doing things.

00;28;49;23 - 00;29;18;28

Ron Wickman

So their search becomes a bit more, more broad and easy. But at the same time, when you it's got to be done by people that know same. So that would be sort of the third thing that's really important is that people with disabilities need to be able to engage with people that know what they're talking about. So right, if you're looking for a house and you type in houses that are accessible and you might get a whole list of things that come out of their houses that come up.

00;29;19;00 - 00;29;31;03

Ron Wickman

And I know having gone through that experience that often there is like somebody put a piece of plywood on the stairs and and they've called it accessible.

00;29;31;06 - 00;29;31;15

Karen Brown

Right?

00;29;31;15 - 00;30;01;06

Ron Wickman

It's so careful, careful what you call accessible. And that that just turns people off, too, right? They just sort of see well, that's that's what accessibility is. And I don't want it. I want to be part of it. The other thing, too, is when you're house hunting and you see homes that have been adapted to at least make the entrance accessible and you've got stairs or or or more, what you often see is a big wooden ramp, not typically professionally designed or anything landscaped or anything like that.

00;30;01;06 - 00;30;24;07

Ron Wickman

So you just have like your friends and family or neighbors that have helped you build this ramp, wooden ramp that frankly often looks terrible. You know, and again, that's our impression of what accessibility is. So. Right. Yeah, it's it's a it's it's it's a big it's a big challenge that way. But you can you can start to see that as you learn more.

00;30;24;07 - 00;30;45;20

Ron Wickman

You can start to see that certain neighborhoods were designed mostly with bungalows and mostly with two stories or bi levels or split level. So you can, with the use of technology, you can start to target your your the areas that you think would be good to to live in. And and I am talking about looking for homes that you can purchase and then renovate.

00;30;45;22 - 00;30;51;03

Ron Wickman

So the new housing is is a whole nother a whole nother discussion.

00;30;51;10 - 00;31;05;14

Karen Brown

Right okay so let's pretend we have found a lovely neighborhood and there is something of a selection of bungalows where the the entry door is, you know, two feet or less off the ground. What's the next thing you're going to look for?

00;31;05;16 - 00;31;29;27

Ron Wickman

So once I once I get inside the house, then then I, I look at first thing I look at it are the stairs. So let's say yeah again. Let's say it's the bungalow. So I would look at how the stairs, stairs work and I know we'll be talking about this more in detail, but generally I'm, I'm just going to look for a set of straight stairs, straight down to the basement level.

00;31;30;00 - 00;31;42;21

Ron Wickman

Right. So if I see, if I see curved stairs or anything with a 90 degree or 180 degree turn, then I know those stairs will be hard to adapt for anybody using a wheelchair.

00;31;42;24 - 00;31;50;08

Karen Brown

Okay, so if we haven't been able to find the bungalow, if we have found a two story house, same thing. You're looking for the same thing. Straight stars.

00;31;50;10 - 00;32;08;25

Ron Wickman

That's right. Yeah. And then? Then if you find a nice two story house that you really like, then you're. Then you're looking, you're looking at a spot or you're looking at the stairs to see how easy they are to adapt. And that's absolutely the that's at a very general level. The thing you want to look at is just what's the run of those stairs?

00;32;08;25 - 00;32;25;08

Ron Wickman

So straight run up stairs is what you look for. And generally you beyond that, you need to see that there's lots of space at the bottom of the stairs up to ten feet. So if you get to the bottom of the stairs and then you have to do a sharp left or right, it's and that's a problem as well.

00;32;25;09 - 00;32;32;20

Ron Wickman

So you need lots of space at the bottom of the stairs and lots of space up at the top of the stairs. And that will be able to accommodate lifts.

00;32;32;23 - 00;32;35;20

Karen Brown

You're talking about a stairlift or a chair lift, depending on how ...

00;32;35;21 - 00;32;58;08

Ron Wickman

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Yeah, a stair lifts. Yeah, right. There's two types. There's two types of stairlifts and we get more into this and another at another time. But one would accommodate somebody sitting on the chair. That's probably what we're used to seeing in commercials. The other is what they call a stair platform

lift. So it's an actual platform that folds up against the wall and folds down.

00;32;58;08 - 00;33;06;00

Ron Wickman

You wheel onto it on your wheelchair and it takes you down the incline, up the stairs or up to climb up the stairs right.

00;33;06;03 - 00;33;16;01

Karen Brown

Okay. So if we've got a two storey house and the staircase isn't exactly what you need, we still don't need to cross it off the list.

00;33;16;04 - 00;33;50;15

Ron Wickman

No, no. And that, but the other thing too with, with any house is so the stairs are what I look for. And today what I also look for is the sweet spot for elevator. Right. Residential elevator. And and so obviously the size of the house will determine the ease of doing that. So a thousand 1200 square foot house likely isn't going to have a slot within the house itself that would allow for the installation of a STAIRLIFT.

00;33;50;21 - 00;34;14;15

Ron Wickman

And and again, we'll talk more about this. But bottom line is think of a space. Think of a square space six feet by six feet. And that's that's what the elevator's going to take up on the main floor in the basement. And on the second floor if you have a two storey house. So you have to find a spot that would actually take up that kind of space on all levels of the House.

00;34;14;17 - 00;34;45;25

Ron Wickman

So houses we're usually talking about in addition, at least an elevator shaft edition and and bigger houses, we can often find a good spot within the house itself. And some of your two story houses are older eighties, eighties, style, 90 style, two story houses often have fairly generous foyer entrance foyers that sometimes have a 90 degree or 180 degree stairs, curving stairs.

00;34;45;28 - 00;35;06;24

Ron Wickman

But there's usually a space somewhere in there that you can maybe add the elevator by. You know, a two storey is really tricky because it has to be that again. See that sweet spot where it's it's, it's not, you know, landing somewhere in the inappropriately in the basement. So you got to find that great spot in the basement that's also right on the main floor and then also right on the second floor.

00;35;06;24 - 00;35;19;17

Ron Wickman

So it is or else and I'm adding an elevator to a house because the original design wasn't designed to think about even think about the the elevator in the beginning.

00;35;19;19 - 00;35;26;03

Karen Brown

Okay. So if we've checked off entry and we've checked off vertical, what's the third thing you look for?

00;35;26;05 - 00;35;49;08

Ron Wickman

And then the third thing and the biggest thing, as is the bathroom. So most homes aren't they don't design bathrooms

that have any real generous space. So they're they're relatively tight. See your typical and again, I'm talking sort of before the well into the eighties, I guess. But your typical bathroom is a five foot by eight foot space.

00;35;49;08 - 00;36;17;28

Ron Wickman

So that's enough to accommodate a bathtub, a toilet in a sense, and usually like a 22 foot four inch or two foot six inch door. And so those bathrooms are near impossible to to modify in any meaningful way somebody who uses a wheelchair. So as soon as you have something like that, now we're talking about moving walls. So structural issues, you probably got some plumbing issues.

00;36;18;00 - 00;36;41;03

Ron Wickman

And if you have like a like the house I grew up in was a three bedroom, 1100 square foot bungalow. So the only way to increase the size of the bathroom was to either add on or to to take over one of the bedrooms. So now your three bedroom house becomes a two bedroom. And for me, that's not a big deal.

00;36;41;05 - 00;37;02;16

Ron Wickman

But I know that I'm I'm in the 10% there. 90% of your your homebuyer does not want to give up the idea of being able to resell the house for as a three bedroom, not a two bedroom, or are convinced that there they're not going to get their money back if it's considered a 22 bedroom house.

00;37;02;21 - 00;37;03;18

Karen Brown

Right.

00;37;03;21 - 00;37;38;01

Ron Wickman

So that really does the market really does influence the way we think. And by which I again, find them a little bit odd, but especially when you're somebody with a disability, the value of living in a house that makes your life easier is it's just a number that I can't even I can't even determine. Right. And the idea that you would live in a house that doesn't accommodate you very well because one day you think you might sell, it just seems like a real not the way I would approach it anyway, let's put it that way.

00;37;38;04 - 00;37;46;08

Karen Brown

Right. So we need to think more of investing in our lives and a little bit less about investing in our pockets.

00;37;46;10 - 00;37;47;13

Ron Wickman

Yeah, yeah, that's the way.

00;37;47;13 - 00;37;53;09

Karen Brown

To put it. I suppose you might use that. Okay, So I.

00;37;53;11 - 00;38;21;18

Ron Wickman

I think that's, you know, and you know, some projects that are, are not always happy to start with anyway. You know, you need somebody who has M.S. or even to me even worse to I'm trying to be careful with my language but ALS is just one of those traditions that I just think is is devastating to hear you have it.

00;38;21;20 - 00;38;45;29

Ron Wickman

You're given a real good chance that you're going to live beyond two years. Your your brain does not change or your smart as ever like your body just shuts down. And, you know, often I do work for for people that that are diagnosed with ALS and and we talk about renovations and their and they're they keep saying resell they keep talking about resell.

00;38;45;29 - 00;39;07;14

Ron Wickman

And I'm like I see I wouldn't care. Like, I just would build this thing to accommodate my needs because I like if I'm only going to get two years, I'm going to live those two years as best I can. And I don't want to be thinking about compromising that for the sake of resale. I certainly don't tell my clients that.

00;39;07;14 - 00;39;15;21

Ron Wickman

I mean, I don't give my own my own opinions on that. But I do find it. I do find it personally. I find it a bit of an odd way to approach it.

00;39;15;23 - 00;39;38;28

Karen Brown

I talked to a lot of people these days who are older individuals, sometimes a couple, sometimes a widow or a widower, and they still live in the original family home, which is large, and it's just becoming too much to manage. I'm sure that houses like that that are are two bedroom with some sort of a barrier free entry or a modified entry of some sort.

00;39;39;00 - 00;39;40;25

Karen Brown

There would be a market for that.

00;39;40;28 - 00;40;07;05

Ron Wickman

I Yeah, I think so for sure. You know it's it's again you know a lot of people I see as they age, they just keep trying to adapt and there's that word again right adapt to to the house that they have and they you know and generations are different. But I think the generation of my my own parents are are like fiercely independent, just starting denial that they're getting older.

00;40;07;05 - 00;40;17;28

Ron Wickman

And so they just continue to to use theirs. And they don't want to add grandpa to their bathroom because they don't want their friends and neighbors to see that they might be having some issues. And.

00;40;18;00 - 00;40;18;24

Karen Brown

Right.

00;40;18;26 - 00;40;22;10

Ron Wickman

You're 85, you know, like we know.

00;40;22;12 - 00;40;39;01

Karen Brown

Well, you know, isn't it better? But isn't it better to have a grab bar? It's better to have a grab bar than a roll later. I mean, if you

want to out yourself, if you will, like you don't want to injure yourself in the process of trying to do your life.

00;40;39;04 - 00;40;57;21

Ron Wickman

It's true. It's true. And, you know, again, it's just it's got it. We've got to get to that point where where we all get over that, because I'm, you know, people don't think that other people are going to say negative things about them having grab bars in their bathroom if people haven't done that to them. So it's not making this stuff up.

00;40;57;21 - 00;41;28;09

Ron Wickman

So, you know, obviously there have been friends and family that might have said something, Oh, you got to grab bar in your bathroom. Are you having issues? You know, so, yeah, it's it's it it is again, sort of a bit of a cultural thing. Right? And it just goes it just all goes back to the way we address and think about accessibility and and people with disabilities and and that certainly in my time has the attitudinal change has been quite dramatic from when I was young to today.

00;41;28;11 - 00;41;55;13

Ron Wickman

We're still not quite there yet. Right. Right. Have to stop. We have to stop thinking that people with disabilities are somehow broken and and it's in a bad place because they're not right. They just have you know, we all have challenges in our own in our own ways. And and so, you know, for somebody in a wheelchair, maybe some of the things are a little bit harder, but they're they're just made increasingly harder because we don't build we don't build it to accommodate accommodate them.

00;41;55;16 - 00;42;14;23

Karen Brown

Well, you know, my young grandson would probably benefit from a grab bar to get in and out of the bathtub. You know, he's he's little. And just having that steadiness. But also allow me to point out that there are some really beautiful grab bars out there now. And I think that's a function of the market saying, look, we don't want to look like an institution.

00;42;14;25 - 00;42;37;10

Karen Brown

So the more beautiful grab bars that come in, you know, bronzed oil and black, I mean, they they can match your decor. They're just gorgeous and they are out there. People just need to not need them in a hurry. Like to come home from rehab, for instance, because let's say they fell and they had to go to rehab and they can't come home until their bathroom is adapted.

00;42;37;10 - 00;42;49;12

Karen Brown

Well, then it's hurry, hurry, hurry. If you prepare for this, well, first of all, you may not have fallen. If you had a grab bar, but if you have the time to prepare for it, you can find some really beautiful stuff.

00;42;49;15 - 00;43;20;02

Ron Wickman

So it's so it's so true. And you know, the market, the our market here in Canada has really been driven by what's happening in the States as well. So. Right. You've got a you've got a population more than all of Canada of people over 65 in the United States. So there really is a big market. And when it comes to things like

grab bars complimenting so you can you know, you look at bathroom accessories and you can get a matching grab bar to your toilet paper holder and your and your towel bar and all that.

00;43;20;06 - 00;43;44;23

Ron Wickman

Everything's all looks the same. Yep. It's really nice that that does make a big difference for people for sure. And that is that definitely is coming because the market is especially in the states is quite large. Right and right. And so people that are sort of 60 years old and older have been driving the market for a really long time.

00;43;44;23 - 00;43;49;04

Ron Wickman

So it is still back to that supply and demand. Right?

00;43;49;07 - 00;43;50;21

Karen Brown

Right.

00;43;50;23 - 00;44;06;24

Ron Wickman

That's dictating it. But it hasn't really again, the attitude is, well, you know, we'll just we'll find all these adaptive features to add to the house the way it was built. Whereas my approach would be, let's design the house so we don't necessarily need buyers everywhere, you know, all this kind of stuff.

00;44;06;26 - 00;44;07;06

Karen Brown

Right?

00;44;07;11 - 00;44;31;06

Ron Wickman

So that's that's a real that's a real big thing and kind of an attitude that we need to change, which takes which which takes both sides. So the builders and the buying public to both buy into that idea that this is this is good and it will have good resale value and it'll, you know, all that kind of all those sorts of things that influence why we buy what we buy.

00;44;31;12 - 00;45;02;07

Karen Brown

Right. So we are going to do a series of three short podcasts that will be released following this one one on the entry to a house, one on vertical movement within a house and one on bathrooms. So Ron is going to talk to us about the kinds of specific things that home buyers and realtors and gosh, maybe even builders should be looking at and including the questions that you should ask during the search.

00;45;02;09 - 00;45;06;06

Karen Brown

Is there anything else you want to add, Ron, before we wrap this one up.

00;45;06;08 - 00;45;33;17

Ron Wickman

No, I don't think so. I think that's I'm looking forward to that. Actually. I just I just spent some while I've been spending a lot of time with a particular builder here in Edmonton that we've been doing quite a bit of work together and, you know, we're building a new infill house that's just nearing completion and another new house for within an architecturally controlled community in kind of the deeper Southwest.

00;45;33;19 - 00;45;57;05

Ron Wickman

And he was just mentioning to me, which I this is this is great to sort of finish with. And then we can carry on our conversation and the other podcast. But he was just saying, like the infill house is designed for this idea of aging in place. So this idea of being a home that you are anticipating 20 years, 30 years down the road, the other house has been designed specifically for somebody who uses a power chair.

00;45;57;08 - 00;46;32;01

Ron Wickman

And so for the builder who is not completely new to all of this, but is kind of experiencing these new builds for the kind of first time he was just sharing with me how the approach from each of his each of the clients and I designed both houses so each of the clients just what they want and what they are willing to kind of do in terms of, you know, in that most also have no step entrances or have elevators have wet room bathrooms.

00;46;32;04 - 00;46;58;29

Ron Wickman

But again, just the style and approach that they have to ultimately to the build I think is really, really interesting because now we're really getting into the depths of of now we have homebuyers that are and homeowners that are a little bit more savvy and understanding of the subject. But even then, you know, working, working through all of that is is is somewhat of a challenge.

00;46;59;01 - 00;47;03;19

Ron Wickman

And lastly, just making sure all the sub trades are on site.

00;47;03;22 - 00;47;04;19

Karen Brown

Right.

00;47;04;21 - 00;47;16;26

Ron Wickman

For the builder, that's a huge, huge challenge is just, you know, you have hundreds of people coming to that site over the course of building it. And to have everybody on the same page is just such a tremendous challenge.

00;47;16;28 - 00;47;38;18

Karen Brown

We had a bit of a discussion about the sub trades in our previous podcast around the history of accessibility so people can go back and and have a listen to that. We talked about it in a bit more depth, but okay, well, join us again for our three specific podcasts on these various subjects of entry, vertical movement and bathrooms.

00;47;38;20 - 00;47;44;09

Karen Brown

And until then, thank you for joining us and we will see you next time.

00;47;44;09 - 00;48;23;08

Speaker 1

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