

Ron Wickman : Bathrooms

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

Karen Brown

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

00;00;24;27 - 00;00;26;08

Ron Wickman

Thanks. It's great to be here.

00;00;26;11 - 00;00;48;05

Karen Brown

Our previous two podcasts at the end of this little series are mini podcasts, I guess we'll call them looked at specific renovations to a home's entry and the vertical movement within a home. In the last of our three focuses, we're going to look at a really important room that everybody will need to use the bathroom. Tell us the issues and help us work through the solutions.

00;00;48;05 - 00;00;49;19

Karen Brown

Ron.

00;00;49;21 - 00;01;15;23

Ron Wickman

Sure. You know, the first thing the first thing I'll say is that if I could change the building culture in in one way, it would be to get the buy into to build bathrooms like wet rooms. So we'll get

into definitions of that or what, what I mean by that. But even more so than the no step entrance, the vertical access.

00;01;15;25 - 00;01;46;21

Ron Wickman

It's the hardest thing to deal with in reno ... renovations especially is getting the bathroom to get to a state where somebody with a disability can use it. So bathrooms have just historically been built relatively small to accommodate somebody who is standing. So as soon as you find yourself with a mobility aid, like a wheelchair walker or whatever else you might be using the existing bathroom just will be a huge challenge.

00;01;46;21 - 00;02;15;26

Ron Wickman

And to make a bathroom bigger can be very, very difficult. You might end up losing one of your bedrooms in the house. You might have to add on. But it's definitely the one thing that I would say is is going to make or break your ability to to renovate for sure. So in new housing, if you can just get builders to start building bathrooms to be like wet rooms and they don't have to be overly large, they just have to be built like a wet room.

00;02;15;26 - 00;02;39;23

Ron Wickman

And I guess by that I do mean literally waterproofing the room. So the whole floor is waterproof, the walls are waterproof, and you can tile generally you would tile the floor, utilize the walls and and there you are, you have a done and when it comes to having a shower area, you can then design the floor so everything just slopes to a drain.

00;02;39;26 - 00;03;00;15

Ron Wickman

So you eliminate any kind of curb or step within the bathroom itself. You know, somebody would have to step over, which is what we're most commonly used to here in Canada. You would just be able to walk right in if you wanted to this shower or this wet room area would be big enough that you could stand in it and shower.

00;03;00;17 - 00;03;28;03

Ron Wickman

You could sit on a bench if you were somebody who had just trouble standing for a long period of time. And then you could even wheel right in in a shower wheelchair and even have some a caregiver or an attendant help you in the shower. So so this kind of thing, once you've done it, your future renovations just become so much easier.

00;03;28;05 - 00;03;41;22

Ron Wickman

They would be basically cosmetic. Maybe you just get tired of your tile pattern that you created and you put new tiles in or something like that, but the room will forever be adaptable to whatever need you you have in the future.

00;03;41;23 - 00;03;56;03

Karen Brown

It can get wet no matter what part of it. It it won't matter at all. So wet rooms are very common in Asian cultures. They just have not really translated here in quite the same way. But you're right, they are abundantly practical.

00;03;56;05 - 00;04;20;12

Ron Wickman

Yeah, and for the most part it, it. It hasn't. It hasn't been as popular here because in Canada, we in North America, we build with wood. So we build wood floors and we don't want our wood floors to get wet. And I know we put we put vinyl or whatever we put on top, but even tile, you know, with the grout, the water can get through the grout and, and then damage our wood floors.

00;04;20;12 - 00;04;48;20

Ron Wickman

So we've always been afraid of doing the wet room because we build in wood and in Asia, Europe and many other parts of the world, they use concrete, generally speaking, to build wealth. So they're definitely not nervous about about water, like we are. And in my history of doing the shower areas, I've been doing homes for people who use wheelchairs for, again, 30 years.

00;04;48;22 - 00;05;20;05

Ron Wickman

Yeah, it was a real big problem that the technology wasn't there, the understanding wasn't there. So often you would just you would just go, okay, let's build a let's build a bathroom with a curb, a shower, and we'll put the tile over the floor. And then five years later, the homeowners going down, we got problems. I think because my floor seems kind of saggy and weird and the tiles breaking up and then you you pull the tile off the floor and the wood is all damaged and there's structural issues and and all of that.

00;05;20;05 - 00;05;44;06

Ron Wickman

Right. So in my work that I, that I do with the Workers Compensation Board, for example, we actually they actually had a policy that if if a homeowner, the injured worker wanted to have

tile on their floor, they would have to sign a waiver that alleviated WCB of any responsibility for damage to the floor. So that, again, that's about 30 years ago today.

00;05;44;06 - 00;06;09;24

Ron Wickman

The technology is is incredibly good. And you do a rubber membrane on the floor. All of the things I talked about in the no step entrance where we just protect the wood from from water you can do in a wet room bathroom. And in essence we're really just kind of using flat roof building technology to put on the floor of a bathroom.

00;06;09;24 - 00;06;40;02

Ron Wickman

So it's everything. It was completely waterproof and everything just slopes to a drain. And it's easy to keep clean. It's it looks it can look as fantastic as you want it to look, depending on your budget and your, you know, your style, preference, it can be anything you want. And having said that, though, I just want to make mention of the fact that historically accessible design started based on kind of what we call a medical model.

00;06;40;05 - 00;07;07;01

Ron Wickman

And that's still that's still strong on lots of people's minds. So they see accessibility in bathrooms in particular as a kind of when they're accessible. It's kind of a medical thing, but it looks institutional, it looks like a hospital setting. And so people have that on their minds. And I get that all the time when I have somebody who was, let's say, injured in a car accident and they've spent since the car accident, they've spent their time in a hospital and they haven't moved back home yet.

00;07;07;03 - 00;07;24;24

Ron Wickman

And almost always the first thing they'll say to me as well, you know, in my new bathroom, at home, my renovated bathroom, it can't look like what the bathroom looks like here in the hospital. And I said, Well, it won't. It'll look like how you could if you wanted it to, but it could look like it could look like anything you want, right?

00;07;24;24 - 00;07;55;16

Ron Wickman

Just pick your tile. But it is it's hard for people to visualize what that might look like, right? Because again, all they're all they're basing their their thoughts on are what they see, and that's usually in the hospital. So in the bathroom, a lot of people have this vision that the bathroom has these very institutional looking grab bars, these these sort of hospital like sinks, these stainless steel toilets, like just, you know, just kind of like not a very pleasant space to be in.

00;07;55;19 - 00;08;18;26

Ron Wickman

So that's the biggest thing I find that I have to convince clients and other people, builders even that again, we're not talking about anything unusual here except we're just building the floor of the bathroom. So it's all basically one level and it all slopes to a drain. So as soon as you get your head around that, then you can the bathroom can look like whatever you want it to look like.

00;08;19;00 - 00;08;35;11

Ron Wickman

So so we have to get over this idea that we're just focusing on medical the medical model or just safety, and we can bring esthetics into into our design thinking when we're when we're when we're doing a bathroom.

00;08;35;13 - 00;09;02;00

Karen Brown

Anybody who has travelled pretty much anywhere outside of Canada or the U.S. in Europe, this kind of shower is what they build. It's standard. And you can, whether you travel there in person or you travel through Google, European bathrooms, these are the pictures that you will see and they are absolutely gorgeous. I should put a couple of them in our show notes just to show people.

00;09;02;00 - 00;09;16;08

Karen Brown

I mean, the design esthetic may or may not be what you would choose for yourself, but you will see that they are just regular looking bathrooms that are beautifully done and grab bars don't have to look institutional.

00;09;16;10 - 00;09;48;16

Ron Wickman

You know, just you remind me, too, of something that just a recent experience I had in my trial just in Alberta. I have to travel a lot for for my work. And I stayed at a hotel in Calgary, which was by the airport. And one thing I've really noticed is, is how the hotel airports in particular have really ramped up their their esthetics, like they really are making their spaces much nicer for the, you know, the travelers that might have to stay overnight and want to be near the airport.

00;09;48;16 - 00;10;08;15

Ron Wickman

So it just was a convenient location for me. And I stayed in a kind of boutique hotel and, you know, the service or a fancy breakfast in the in the morning. And but my hotel room was really, really nice. And it wasn't quite I wouldn't say it was like a wet room, but, you know, it had like glass doors in it.

00;10;08;21 - 00;10;34;02

Ron Wickman

It was tiled and it was like beautifully done. And and so if you want to look at what a wet room could look like, if you have the benefit of traveling a little bit, you'll start to recognize it in the in the hotel industry. Like they've they've all sort of collectively have have raised the level of of what a standard room, you know, affordable room should look like.

00;10;34;04 - 00;10;39;18

Ron Wickman

And so we just have to get that to translate into our single family residential housing as well.

00;10;39;20 - 00;10;46;18

Karen Brown

Right. What kind of space is generally required in order to create a totally accessible bathroom?

00;10;46;20 - 00;11;14;16

Ron Wickman

The the one really key number that people should keep in mind is the five foot or 1500 millimeter turning circle. So if you ever look at floorplans of somebody that is saying that their house plan design is is wheelchair accessible, they'll show these turning

circles all over the place. Right. And and so you'll see it in the bathroom.

00;11;14;16 - 00;11;41;11

Ron Wickman

And that's a that's a very good guide and it's become very much the the number that we use as a standard. The reality is it is just a number. My dad in his manual wheelchair could have easily turned in in 1200 millimeters or four feet of space. And somebody in a larger power chair probably could use 800 millimeters or whatever that is in feet and inches.

00;11;41;13 - 00;12;04;19

Ron Wickman

So even even in our building, our national building code, I just was in a meeting yesterday and we're going to be raising that. That number is going to be going up from 1500 millimeters to 1700 millimeters. So that that's that's a recognition that more and more people are using different types of wheelchairs and a lot more power wheelchairs are coming out.

00;12;04;21 - 00;12;16;17

Ron Wickman

So so that's something to keep in mind. Now, having said all of that, in a bathroom, you're not going to be showering with a power wheelchair, right? Hopefully.

00;12;16;24 - 00;12;19;10

Karen Brown

Well, that would be that would be challenging.

00;12;19;13 - 00;12;21;02

Ron Wickman

It's not a good idea. Let's put it that way.

00;12;21;02 - 00;12;21;11

Karen Brown

All right.

00;12;21;15 - 00;12;45;19

Ron Wickman

So so you're if you're in a power wheelchair, you'd likely get transferred into what they call a shower wheelchair. And so the shower wheelchair is much like a manual wheelchair. So again, you can go back to the five foot turning circle. So in a perfect scenario, I'll always design my bathrooms with a space that has that can accommodate that five foot turning circle within it.

00;12;45;19 - 00;13;16;07

Ron Wickman

So that that would become my shower area if I have the space, if I'm building a more luxurious home or working on a more luxurious style home, that five foot turning circle will be on its own. It'll be the shower and then the everything else will be outside of that in a in a in my more affordable housing, which is, which is what I more commonly do, that five foot turning circle becomes the only five foot turning space that could accommodate somebody in a wheelchair.

00;13;16;07 - 00;13;46;26

Ron Wickman

So you, you enter the you enter the bathroom, you use the shower space to turn around in, you shut the bathroom door and you gain access to the toilets or the sink as well. So typically the smallest bathroom that we do is four or five feet by eight feet,

which accommodates a bathtub, toilet and a sink. And and that's very common in houses from the fifties to, to today.

00;13;46;27 - 00;14;07;21

Ron Wickman

We do see a lot more homes now with on suites and so on. But your your your typical family bathroom will be this style, right? This five foot by eight foot and you can renovate that. You could take the tub out and make that a shower area. But it is very tight. It's it's only only in the smallest wheelchair can somebody sort of navigate in a space like that.

00;14;07;23 - 00;14;09;23

Karen Brown

Right. So it's doable.

00;14;09;25 - 00;14;28;28

Ron Wickman

It's doable, but it's it's you know, it's not recommended. And for a lot of people, it just it doesn't work because of just the size they are. And the size of a wheelchair that they that they use. So so again, if you use that five foot turning circle as your guide, you can start to layout the the bathroom space that way.

00;14;28;28 - 00;14;55;01

Ron Wickman

So I generally will say that you should think about something that's that's in the order of ten feet by ten feet. So a hundred square feet would be the kind of space that would allow you to do a fairly nice and generous bathroom with a not only the shower area, but a bathtub as well. So you could have the shower area, the bathtub and a toilet and a sink in a hundred square feet.

00;14;55;04 - 00;15;24;28

Karen Brown

Right. If you guess quite often there are couples and one of them may require the curb shower and the other may enjoy a bath. And so you want all of those functions, and particularly if somebody is trying to create a bathroom on a on a main floor, if they've got a two-storey house and they want to move the the bedroom and the bathroom, all the functions to the main floor, they might have to scoop some room from a laundry room or a storage room or a dining room, something like that, to create that ten by ten space.

00;15;25;00 - 00;15;25;15

Ron Wickman

Correct. Yeah.

00;15;25;17 - 00;15;26;16

Karen Brown

Right.

00;15;26;16 - 00;15;36;16

Ron Wickman

And this might be a good time to, to also mention, because I get asked this a lot too, and I'm sure some of our listeners would be would be thinking what about those bathtubs with doors.

00;15;36;18 - 00;15;37;25

Karen Brown

Yeah.

00;15;37;28 - 00;16;08;21

Ron Wickman

And what I'll say about that is the bathtub with a door is okay for somebody with a mobility issue like a senior, somebody who's older, maybe a bit more frail and just have trouble stepping over the over into a bathtub is nervous about falls and that sort of thing. I, I myself, I do not recommend it for anybody who uses a wheelchair.

00;16;08;21 - 00;16;40;22

Ron Wickman

So if you're it kind of goes back to this, the idea we talked about in the in the vertical circulation episode, the chair lift versus the stair platform lift. So I do not recommend a bathtub with a door for somebody who who is in a wheelchair and cannot use their legs. Right. So I don't know how you how you can really transfer like open the door, transfer into the tub and and get in and out when you can't use your legs at all.

00;16;40;27 - 00;17;05;17

Ron Wickman

So it's important for somebody to recognize. And the the technology with the tubs has has advanced always the biggest complaint has not been so much about accessibility but but the fact that you have to get in the bathtub so that it can fill up with water. So you're kind of sitting there likely without any clothes on waiting for the tub, for the tub to fill up.

00;17;05;17 - 00;17;25;06

Ron Wickman

And then and then you're doing the same thing when the tub's emptying. So you can't open the door until there's no water in the tub anymore. So a lot of people complain that they're wet and cold by the time they can actually exit the tub. So. So these are

these are things I just want to mention, because sometimes people think, well, that's great.

00;17;25;06 - 00;17;34;29

Ron Wickman

We can just take out the tub in our existing bathroom and put in this tub and we're good to go. And I would be careful about that. I'd think a lot about that one.

00;17;35;01 - 00;17;59;09

Karen Brown

I would like to add to that conversation just a little bit by saying that I think a lot of people might choose that option as a bit of a stop gap because they think, okay, I've got this issue now, so we'll just avoid any major bathroom renovations and we'll get this tub with a door. People need to start thinking longer term and looking down the road with whatever their challenges may be.

00;17;59;09 - 00;18;23;24

Karen Brown

And you may be throwing good money after bad to do that. You may as well do it so that whatever happens, your lifestyle is accommodated and your safety is something that is more uppermost in your mind for the long term. I you know, I don't know. I'm not a big fan of the tubs with the doors now. I've had people say, but they drain in 15 seconds.

00;18;23;24 - 00;18;44;19

Karen Brown

Well, that's that's great if you, like you pointed out, you still have to sit there while it fills up. And they are only good for certain people in the population. You know, why take a little bite? Just just do it and have the bathroom that you are going to need for

the long term because you are spending your hard earned money.

00;18;44;22 - 00;19;06;10

Ron Wickman

Yeah. And you know, I. I would say I'm going to very I'm going to say very general thing here. Something I'm not sort of attacking the building industry, but the building industry more than the design industry is inclined to do whatever the client asks for. Those of us in the design world might get you to double, you know, double think what you're saying or wanting.

00;19;06;12 - 00;19;30;00

Ron Wickman

So given what you just said about the tub when I have a client that feels very strongly that they do want this, this tub with the door, I'll always highly, highly recommend and design the space so that a shower could be there as well. So my thinking is that you'll probably grow out of the tub, right? And you'll get to a point where you can't use it anymore.

00;19;30;02 - 00;19;50;27

Ron Wickman

But you won't have to worry about it because you got the drain in the floor and you've got plumbing in the wall and you can make that a shower space quite easily because again, usually need space around the tub just to enter in the tub anyway. So just you're just adding an extra drain in the floor and some extra roughing plumbing at the very least.

00;19;50;29 - 00;20;10;11

Ron Wickman

And you're you've kind of created this future proofing for your for your house. And most of my clients don't don't argue with me on that. And and again a very good builder will point that out to a client as well. But a lot of builders, you know, they just want to get on with it and they'll they'll just say, okay, if that's what you want, I'll give it to you.

00;20;10;11 - 00;20;28;25

Ron Wickman

Right. And they don't necessarily do as much research into the pluses and minuses of the products. And that's why you do hire people like myself and yourself as as consultants to to help you weigh the pluses and minuses of all of these of all these areas and features.

00;20;28;27 - 00;20;51;02

Karen Brown

One thing that I tell people when their homes are being renovated, even if they're building brand new, it is so beneficial to go in there rather regularly and take pictures so that you know where everything is behind the walls. And I'm thinking in particular of backing, because if you ever want to put up grab bars, you cannot be putting them into drywall.

00;20;51;04 - 00;21;11;13

Karen Brown

You need to know that there's something there that they can go into. And I think also of a mutual friend of ours, Ron, who was building her accessible bathroom, and the contractor put backing in her shower, but only down to about a foot above the ground level. And then when her shower seat came, that third.

00;21;11;19 - 00;21;12;03

Ron Wickman
Bracket.

00;21;12;03 - 00;21;37;22

Karen Brown

Bracket, the bracket went below the one foot level. So they had to go to the outside of the bathroom, cut a hole in the drywall, finish putting the backing on like people need to plan for the future. So one thing that homeowners I always encourage them to do, tell your contractor that you want backing behind the walls all the way around your bathroom so that you can put a grab bar in wherever you might need it to be.

00;21;37;24 - 00;21;45;20

Karen Brown

And if you have the opportunity to take pictures before the wall gets closed up, take those pictures so that you know exactly what's behind those walls.

00;21;45;23 - 00;22;16;21

Ron Wickman

Yeah, Yeah, That's a that's a great idea. It's interesting that you mention that, too, because I just last week I was at a a new client of mine. It was at their house and their daughter has some, some physical disabilities and they redid their en suite to have a curb, a shower area. And what I really loved about their story was that he actually, for the most part, the dad who's not a builder, basically built the shower area.

00;22;16;21 - 00;22;39;18

Ron Wickman

So he's sort of like the the the epitome of what I've been talking about is like you have to sometimes stretch yourself and learn for

yourself and do your own research. And that's exactly what he did. Right. And just along the lines of what you're saying about the backing, he said, Yeah, we put backing, we put backing for future grab bars for our daughter because she's going to grow.

00;22;39;18 - 00;23;16;25

Ron Wickman

She's only ten right now. Right. Right. And I said, oh, okay. So your walls are all tiled. So do you know where that backing is? And he goes, Oh yeah, I did the drawings like I took pictures I have. I know exactly where all the backing is. So what's been interesting in this day and age, 2023, well, actually, from 2020 to now, costs of various items like wood and plywood in particular is just escalated to to, you know, like sometimes plywood is more expensive than titanium.

00;23;16;25 - 00;23;35;16

Ron Wickman

I think it's just it's crazy how expensive it is. So builders are in a very positive way. They're always looking for ways to build cost effectively. Right. So I have lately been talking with a lot of builders who are saying, you know, Ron, is there any way we can do this without going floor to ceiling with the with the plywood?

00;23;35;18 - 00;23;57;25

Ron Wickman

And I went, doesn't it isn't it just easier and and they would always say, yeah, it is easier, but the plywood is just so expensive right now that it's actually more cost effective to start cutting the wood and and and doing these extra sort of construction techniques so that still you can have like a wall that's ready to put tile on.

00;23;57;27 - 00;24;24;09

Ron Wickman

Right. Because if you put plywood only on a certain part of the wall, then you got to have strapping and so on. And I'm like, so the labor the labor doesn't even come close to the cost of the lumber. And they're going right now. Yeah, that's the problem. So it's really interesting in working in this market because you're you're just looking at different ways to, you know, and I think the market will get to a point where it'll just be easier to put the plywood, you know, back floor to ceiling.

00;24;24;09 - 00;24;42;10

Ron Wickman

But that's a good example that you mentioned about, you know, because I would I would often say, yeah, you know, you can be, you know, maybe a foot a foot and a half above the floor without backing, because what are you going to need there? Right. But you're right. A flip down shower seat may have that bottom bracket that needs it.

00;24;42;13 - 00;24;52;11

Ron Wickman

So you really have to you really have the I guess the the the lesson is you really have to think this through. And that is hard when you don't when you don't know, when you don't know what the future holds, right?

00;24;52;14 - 00;24;53;13

Karen Brown

That's right.

00;24;53;15 - 00;25;03;06

Ron Wickman

But these are all lessons that I hopefully people are getting from this podcast is that they they they have to really think this stuff through as much as they can. Right.

00;25;03;09 - 00;25;04;07

Karen Brown

Right.

00;25;04;09 - 00;25;25;07

Ron Wickman

And not always rely on the expertise of others. And I would say that even of myself, like don't always don't always take whatever I say as the you know, the end all be all because for me, I you know, I just learned something new about stair platform lifts yesterday. Right. And I've been at this a long time, so I'll never say that I'm the, you know, the person that knows.

00;25;25;07 - 00;25;33;12

Ron Wickman

All right. And I now I can just sort of coast the rest of my career and just do it work off of what I've learned. I'm just constantly learning myself.

00;25;33;14 - 00;26;06;10

Karen Brown

And people should not only consult with people in the trades or people like you or myself, but consult with an occupational therapist or their own doctors if they're dealing with some sort of a condition that is going to progress. Talk to them about what that might look like ten years down the road, 15, 20 years down the road, so that when they're doing this kind of remodeling or building, they can accommodate that right from the get go and

they won't have to go back and do it again and and incur that extra cost.

00;26;06;12 - 00;26;35;28

Ron Wickman

Yeah, yeah. And you know, again, that's why I'll go back to the, this idea of the wet room because once you've done that, you know 90% of your bathroom is good to go. And so you know one, one thing we haven't really talked much about is counters and sinks in the bathroom. But at the end of the day, if the if the bathroom is big enough and has the curb less shower area, if you have to raise or lower a sink for whatever reason, that's not really the end of the world.

00;26;35;28 - 00;26;38;29

Ron Wickman

That's that's not too terribly hard to do.

00;26;39;01 - 00;26;40;17

Karen Brown

Same with the toilet.

00;26;40;19 - 00;26;57;09

Ron Wickman

And same with the toilet. You can always change out. I do that frequently. Somebody you know, they have your regular height toilet, which is about, you know, maybe 15 inches, and they need something that's about 18 inches. You take one toilet out and you put the new toilet in and it's that's not really it's not really labor intensive.

00;26;57;09 - 00;27;07;05

Ron Wickman

It's very cost effective. So so it's the space that is important to create the space that's, you know, kind of big enough to make this all work.

00;27;07;08 - 00;27;32;02

Karen Brown

Now, you used the term curbless showers. This is something I definitely want to bring forward because when homeowners are talking with builders, there are all kinds of terms that are applied to these kinds of showers, and they have a different meaning to different people. So a curbless shower can also be known as a rolling shower, a euro shower, a step free shower, a no step shower.

00;27;32;02 - 00;27;49;22

Karen Brown

You hear all of them we're talking about exactly the same thing. So make sure that when you're talking to your contractor or designer or whomever about this, that you start off understanding that this is what the term I'm using actually means. This is what I want.

00;27;49;24 - 00;28;07;15

Ron Wickman

Yeah. And a lot of times what I'll do, too, for the, for the especially the the sub trades and the builders for their benefit mostly I'll say things like curbless wheel in shower.

00;28;07;18 - 00;28;08;29

Karen Brown

Ok, can't get any more clear than that.

00;28;09;02 - 00;28;37;03

Ron Wickman

Wheelchair accessible shower and I know fellow advocates and activists that I talked to talk about the importance of language. And I go I know I'm not using language that you prefer, but I'm being very, very blunt and and and to the point for a trade that just doesn't have the experience and hasn't sat around the table and talked about, you know, should we say accessible or universal or inclusive.

00;28;37;03 - 00;28;50;08

Ron Wickman

And, you know, they just don't have those benefits. They just go, this is a shower unit and I'm going to install it or, you know, this, I'm going to build a shower with a curb and that's that. That's the way everybody does it. So if you say curbless, you don't quite know what that means all the time.

00;28;50;27 - 00;28;54;20

Ron Wickman

They'll still they'll still build it with a curb. It just won't be as big as what they're used to.

00;28;54;22 - 00;28;56;25

Karen Brown

And then you still don't have the shower you want.

00;28;56;28 - 00;29;15;24

Ron Wickman

That's right. To me that's curbless and no, no curbless is like no curb and it's like what do you mean by that And then you know you'll say well even if you say it's wheelchair accessible, they'll go, well can't you just do like a little ramp over the curb? No, no, you

can't really. Right. And and so no matter what you say, I guess it's it's difficult.

00;29;15;26 - 00;29;35;05

Ron Wickman

And this is something that we should talk about, too, that's really, really important is the fact that in a bathroom there are many, many different trades working in the same space. So you have your plumber, you have your your, the way the floor is framed. So you have people who are doing the the woodworking and the frame framing.

00;29;35;05 - 00;29;58;24

Ron Wickman

You have the plumbers, you have the electrician, the people doing the tile work. So all of these people have to be on the same page, and that's where you really need a good general contractor or, you know, site foreman to make sure that they're always consistently saying the same message to everybody. And so in new house construction, what I'll always do and design is a floor system.

00;29;58;29 - 00;30;19;11

Ron Wickman

So whether that's the main floor or the second floor, if it's a two-story house, is all I'll do the joist space in the bathrooms so that they're actually smaller and lower than the rest of the floor level. So let's say I use 12 inch floor joists for the floor system. I would use nine inch floor joists where the bathroom is.

00;30;19;11 - 00;30;49;07

Ron Wickman

And then that there's a there's a three inch difference. And then we would fill in the bathroom space so that everything then slopes. And generally I would slope from the door getting into the bathroom slope from the door to the drain. And that allows me then to easily do a curb less shower or no, you know, no step shower or wheeling shower, whatever we want to call it, in renovations that can get a little trickier because it can be hard to start cutting out floor parts of the floor and putting in smaller choice.

00;30;49;09 - 00;31;15;23

Ron Wickman

There's just you know, there's more labor involved in that. So we're always looking for economical and effective ways to to do the shower curtain shower in a in a renovation that just just makes it a bit more challenging than when you're doing new construction, which again, just goes back to the point if you just if everybody just started doing these showers and these bathrooms like wet rooms, then that's one thing we never have to worry about in the future.

00;31;15;23 - 00;31;20;04

Karen Brown

Right. And what's the slope you want in the curbless shower to the drain?

00;31;20;07 - 00;31;47;12

Ron Wickman

Well, I use something that's similar to a flat roof slope, which is a quarter inch to a foot. So it's very, very gentle. And you know what I found again, seems simple enough when I'm drawing it up and, you know, thinking about it in my head. So I know I'm not the guy that's actually doing doing the construction, but they

come back to me and they go, you know, if the drain is here and the door is there, I'm at a quarter inch to a foot.

00;31;47;15 - 00;32;05;29

Ron Wickman

By the time I get from the drain to the door, I'm like two inches above the drain. So now I've got like a two inch difference from the at the door, from the bathroom floor to, let's say the bedroom floor if it's an en suite. So then you have to really start thinking about thinking it through. And this is again, what I'm talking about with renovations, right?

00;32;06;02 - 00;32;33;26

Ron Wickman

That two inches is easy to deal with when you're building a new home and doing the floor system, as I just earlier explained. So So yeah, with renovations, we're we're always looking at different ways to to to address and deal with the the location of the drain in the shower area. There's a product out there and again, we don't we're not trying to support or promote any company out there.

00;32;33;26 - 00;32;58;05

Ron Wickman

But one of your more well-known companies that do the curves of showers is called Schluter. And they they recently introduced what they call the trench drain. And this is something important to mention because a lot of people do get confused when they research the trench drain. And the trench drain effectively allows you to do a floor with one slope.

00;32;58;11 - 00;33;20;10

Ron Wickman

So there's still this a central drain, but the whole floor system drains to the trench. And then within the trench itself, it then drains to a to a central drain, which is underneath a great. So trench drain looks much like you'd see in a like an underground parking at the bottom of underground parking. There's that big trench that catches all the water that's coming down the drive or driveway.

00;33;20;14 - 00;33;26;27

Karen Brown

And they're usually against a wall of a shower instead of in the centre. I'm a big fan of trench drains.

00;33;26;29 - 00;33;45;01

Ron Wickman

And those those trench drains are great. And again, in new construction, if you if you think about a bathroom that's like a sort of longer rectangular bathroom, the doors at one end and the trench drains at the far other end, then everything just slopes right from the door to the drain. And then you can use large format tiles, too.

00;33;45;01 - 00;34;08;04

Ron Wickman

And that's that's where Schluter has addressed people's concerns about esthetics. So now you can have like 12 inch by 24 inch tiles on your whole floor system and you can make it look very, very luxurious. And esthetically pleasing and have this beautiful floor system and the trench drains are quite, quite attractive as well. So that works really well.

00;34;08;04 - 00;34;27;09

Ron Wickman

And, you know, so I started in my renovation work, I started saying, well, let's just do trench drains because they're so much better. But what I found is in renovation work, because of the sloping and the inability to sort of dig into the floor system, all of a sudden the trench drain becomes a little bit more difficult because it's it's at one end, right.

00;34;27;09 - 00;34;49;23

Ron Wickman

And then you still have to get that slope. So so I've been kind of in my renovations. I've been saying, well, we really should do the central drain because you can keep your floor, your overall floor level lower and you can get covers, you can get specialty metal covers for the circular drain, or you can even get a square one and then just sort of cover it with tile.

00;34;49;28 - 00;35;12;28

Ron Wickman

So it looks like part of the tile floor. So again, the industry I guess my point is the industry is taking note of people's desire to have this all look really, really nice. Right. And so they're keeping that in mind, right, with all of this. But these are some of the challenges that I've, you know, learned in the last just in the last three years when the trench drain started becoming more and more popular.

00;35;13;01 - 00;35;38;18

Ron Wickman

And that's really coming from the United States, where, again, the population of people in the in the United States over 65 is I think, 70 million or something like that. So, I mean, that's higher than the population of Council of Canada. So people say, well, why don't you do more curly showers in Alberta? And I'm going,

well, we're at like 4 million people in Alberta and and maybe 10% are over 65.

00;35;38;18 - 00;35;52;16

Ron Wickman

So we just don't have the same market for it and the same demand and. Right. So it's a little slower to to reach where we are. It might be becoming more and more popular in Ontario where where the population is a bit higher.

00;35;52;20 - 00;36;13;08

Karen Brown

I want to add one note about a circular drain for people who use shower chairs in particular, and that is that a circular drain in the traditional center of the shower can mean that you won't have all four wheels of your shower chair on the floor all the time. That can be a little bit on the dangerous side.

00;36;13;08 - 00;36;31;25

Karen Brown

So safety is important and you want to mitigate that. And maybe the way to do that is to get the cover that you spoke of or the tile piece that lets the water drain. But just be aware of that. The circular drain may not be a solution for you if you use a shower chair just from a safety perspective.

00;36;31;27 - 00;37;08;00

Ron Wickman

Yeah, that's a good point. And I'm thinking, you know, going back 20 years or more, when I started doing and working on these shower areas without curves, the the, the trades were so nervous about water getting outside of the shower area and then kind of pulling outside of the shower area that they would often make

they would exaggerate the slopes in the shower, which made it really, really difficult and not very safe for people in their wheelchairs.

00;37;08;03 - 00;37;35;14

Ron Wickman

Even standing in the shower became a bit a bit of an issue. So so with the new waterproofing systems and I mentioned Schluter as one of them, but there's there's a few others out there. It's given it's given the trade. It's much more confidence that you can do these low slopes and still very much protect your your wood substructure from from any any water issues.

00;37;35;19 - 00;37;56;12

Karen Brown

Right. Wedi is another company that a contractor that I work with prefers. So I'll I'll link to both of those companies in the show notes. And again, we're not sponsored by anybody. So, you know, do your research and if if you and your contractor find a company that provides a product that will work for. Brilliant. Let's talk ...

00;37;57;10 - 00;38;26;29

Ron Wickman

I'm sorry. Sorry. Just just to add to that, because that's a that's a great point. I find that the contractors I've worked with that do a lot of these shower areas, they they've actually found themselves using sort of a mix and match. So they might use like a Wedi shower base, but Schluter wall system. And so they've become so sophisticated and experienced in what they're doing that they know the the benefits of each and every supplier of product.

00;38;26;29 - 00;38;32;18

Ron Wickman

And that's great, right? So if you can find a contractor like that and perfect, you're really in a good place. Yeah.

00;38;32;18 - 00;38;54;18

Karen Brown

Yeah. Let's touch on price just a little bit. What would a person look to spend roughly? And again, this is June of 2023, so, you know, prices as of this point in time. Let's talk about a wet room. Let's talk about a curbless shower. What kind of pricing would people look at?

00;38;54;20 - 00;39;20;26

Ron Wickman

Yeah, you know, in in in new house construction, I talked about this in terms of the no step entrance and the the extra costs related to having that no step entrance. The the discussion around the shower areas and the wet room is quite similar in that sense. So again, builders that I've worked with on several occasions, they'll always tell me the first time they do it is more expensive.

00;39;20;26 - 00;39;45;12

Ron Wickman

So they'll say, you know, one good example is a duplex. I worked on about five or six years ago and they did they did a main floor bathroom on one side with just a kind of store bought shower unit, like a fiberglass shower unit. And then they did the other bathroom, which as a wet room with all tiles and everything.

00;39;45;14 - 00;40;05;04

Ron Wickman

So I asked the contractor, you know, what was the cost difference between these two bathrooms? And he's he said, and again, I have to be careful about this because, you know, it does depend on the tiles you pick and so on. But they did go with a like a bit of a higher end tile. But he he said it was about \$4,000 more to do the the wet room concept.

00;40;05;04 - 00;40;31;26

Ron Wickman

And he's going well you know I mean the shower unit was less expensive than than doing tile work all around. We could have brought that cost down more if we picked a less expensive tile. But we you know, we're we're targeting a certain market. So you are looking at some added costs because you are buying a fiberglass shower unit is less expensive than tiling, tiling the floor and wall and water waterproofing it.

00;40;31;26 - 00;41;12;00

Ron Wickman

But it's fair to say, you know, a couple thousand dollars probably to do one over the other. But, you know, to to have to redo a bathroom at some point in the future is is sometimes not even doable or, you know, \$30 or \$40,000. So, you know, again, that goes back to the point that we're both making is people should do their research and think a little bit more about their future needs and if somehow we could get it into the culture that the buying public would see or would demand this kind of thing, you could almost make it a selling feature of your house.

00;41;12;02 - 00;41;24;24

Ron Wickman

We're not there yet, but I see a day when that would be something where you could say, Hey, I you know, I have a house

with bathrooms that are wet rooms and suddenly you could sell your house for more because people actually want that kind of bathroom.

00;41;24;26 - 00;41;52;27

Karen Brown

I think language is a big part of this conversation, too. If we stopped calling them accessible showers or curbless showers and called them euro showers, everybody would want one. Yeah, it's just the concept that it creates in your mind about what it possibly is. So if you're doing a renovation and I realize a bathroom renovation can go from, you know, inexpensive to really expensive in a heartbeat, depending on a lot of the choices you make.

00;41;52;29 - 00;42;06;03

Karen Brown

But for somebody who's looking at doing a renovation to an existing bathroom and they need a curbless shower, what area do you think they should be looking at in general for money?

00;42;06;05 - 00;42;09;06

Ron Wickman

On average, I would say about \$30,000.

00;42;09;10 - 00;42;10;08

Karen Brown

Okay.

00;42;10;10 - 00;42;32;00

Ron Wickman

Yeah. So I get you're right, though, it does depend \$30,000 is the number I would use for completely gutting the bathroom. So

we're starting with a bathroom that's big enough to be able to convert into the wet room. But you're basically taking out it might have a tub and a small shower. Let's say separate tub and small shower.

00;42;32;07 - 00;42;35;18

Karen Brown

And vanity and toilet, the whole nine yards. Take it all out now.

00;42;35;20 - 00;42;52;06

Ron Wickman

Take it all out completely. Redo the floor system, the wall system, all you know, all waterproof new new sink and vanity, new toilet and then your shower area. Yeah. \$30,000 is something you shouldn't be shocked about.

00;42;52;08 - 00;42;57;26

Karen Brown

That is not hugely more expensive than doing a traditional bathroom renovation.

00;42;57;29 - 00;43;27;20

Ron Wickman

I don't think so. I mean, I haven't done a traditional one, so I. But I mean, I suspect it's about \$30,000 if you got any bathroom and redo it. All right. Whether it's whether it's shower, shower area or not. So, you know, again, a lot of people just don't have that kind of money. So that's when they do start entertaining the idea of just taking the bathtub out and putting in a shower, a shower unit.

00;43;27;20 - 00;43;48;11

Ron Wickman

Right. That would have a maybe a 1 inch curb on it. That of thing. I've even seen I've even seen something where you can cut out a notch in your existing bathtub and you effectively convert your bathtub into a shower. Right. Because it it can't fill up anymore. So you just have this opening on the side of your bathtub.

00;43;48;13 - 00;44;12;06

Ron Wickman

And it can be it can be done, you know, in a day. You can get these things where you you you can take your tub out and put in a shower unit or, you know, within a day as well. Right. So there's there's these very simple probably less than less than \$5,000 to do. But that's certainly not that's that's that might effectively help you right now.

00;44;12;06 - 00;44;14;04

Ron Wickman

But that's not a future.

00;44;14;07 - 00;44;16;15

Karen Brown

It's not curbless, either. I mean, it's going to have an acrylic base.

00;44;16;17 - 00;44;26;21

Ron Wickman

You know, it's not curbless at all. No, no, no. So if you're in a wheelchair, it's just like I know it's no starter for you. You have to think about something else. Yeah. And yeah, for sure.

00;44;26;27 - 00;44;49;27

Karen Brown

Allow me to point out too, that a lot of the people that I deal with, I'm sure a lot of the people that you deal with are people who have something happen to them. They fall and they break a hip, they have a car accident, something happens and they've been to the hospital. Now they're in rehab. But they cannot go home until they can get in and out of their house and until they have a bathroom that they can use to clean themselves.

00;44;49;29 - 00;45;14;05

Karen Brown

So that's when you end up with the ramps outside that nobody really wants to see. And that's when you end up with bathrooms that look institutional. So for any of our listeners who are listening to this podcast, if you are considering doing a bathroom renovation, please, please, please think long term. Think about what your needs may be. Even if you don't see it now, you don't know what's coming ten, 20, 30 years down the road.

00;45;14;05 - 00;45;22;04

Karen Brown

And if you intend to stay in that house, make sure it's a house that you can age in or that your disease can progress in and keep you safe.

00;45;22;10 - 00;45;46;03

Ron Wickman

Yeah. And you know, having said all of that, too, I just can't help but think that this is where the government should be supporting people, too. So everything we're talking about is, you know, given the fact that you have some income or some money to spend right. But many, many people just simply don't have the funding to allow them to do that.

00;45;46;03 - 00;46;15;13

Ron Wickman

And there should be some help from government. They certainly government certainly is helpful when it comes to energy retrofits to a home. So they should be able to do this with with with issues around aging in place and accessibility as well. Right. And somehow it just doesn't it doesn't seem to gain the same attention. But again, a \$30,000 renovation to a bathroom is is almost not doable for for many people in our population.

00;46;15;13 - 00;46;36;12

Ron Wickman

And so they just do whatever they can to to, you know, make it work, but it just doesn't work, you know, as well as it could. Right. And and in some respects, it just doesn't work at all. But you just learn to live with something that's that's your normal. You don't you don't know what it could be like.

00;46;36;12 - 00;46;57;18

Ron Wickman

Right. Right. And you know, to a certain extent I experience that with my dad. And there is the interesting thing about my father was, I mean, he had money to renovate his home. He just chose not to do it. Right. So he you know, as a as a person who was paraplegic, he used a bathtub for most of his life in his wheelchair.

00;46;57;18 - 00;47;25;11

Ron Wickman

So it was only until he started close to 60 that he realized getting in and out of the bathtub without his ability to use his legs just became impossible, you know, And he would need help. So the alternative all of a sudden became, well, I can get a lift, I can get

a ceiling left and it can pick me up from my wheelchair, pump me into the bathtub, pick me up again, or I can add on to my house, which is a much better option, and have this nice shower area.

00;47;25;11 - 00;47;48;25

Ron Wickman

And I like to share that story with other people because even my father, who spent 40 years in a wheelchair, was stubborn about this change and didn't think it would really be as beneficial. And even when his son, his own son and only son was telling him, Dad, this is going to work, this is going to be really good for you, right?

00;47;48;27 - 00;48;21;25

Ron Wickman

He needed to actually experience it for himself. And the day he had his shower from his wheelchair and his shower wheelchair, he was like I should have been doing this 30 years ago, should a would, and maybe my shoulders wouldn't be in the condition they're in now. Right. Right. And and I'm like, if I could only relay that to somebody today that's in their twenties and tell them that story, share that story with them so that they understand and appreciate that maybe I should listen to this guy and, you know, and follow through.

00;48;21;25 - 00;48;40;14

Ron Wickman

Right. So, yeah, it's it's hard sometimes to communicate to to people what the benefits are and sometimes to just simply have to experience it for themselves. But but it is hard, you know, and especially you're if you're of a low income, the options become so limited.

00:48;40;17 - 00:48;56;22

Karen Brown

Right. Let's end the podcast with another story that I know you have about somebody who experienced a tremendous decline in the amount of time they had to spend in their bathroom after they got it renovated. I like that story, and I think it will speak to a lot of people.

00:48;56;24 - 00:49;24;03

Ron Wickman

Yeah, Yeah. This is this is one that is a particular individual that I worked with, but it's it's a story that many of my clients have shared with me. And in case it was a client and she was diagnosed with ALS, this is many years ago now, and she was lucky enough and fortunate enough to live, I think 12 years after being diagnosed with ALS, which is which is a long, long time.

00:49;24;03 - 00:49;45;04

Ron Wickman

Yeah. Usually you're given about two years window and some people live, you know, quite a bit longer. But that's the reality you face when you get diagnosed with ALS. And and her and her husband asked me to to look at their house. And at the time they weren't even they didn't even know if they should renovate their house or just buy a lot and build something new.

00:49;45;08 - 00:50;07;23

Ron Wickman

And after about a half an hour of talking to them and looking at their house, I saw a very simple solution to their existing house. And I was just out on to the side of it and we were able to make an addition that provided her with an elevator and extra space in her master bedroom and the ability to create a larger bathroom.

00;50;07;23 - 00;50;32;29

Ron Wickman

And so very simple cost effective renovation that worked really well for them. And then she she wrote to me later talked about was like, what a huge difference it made in her life. And and she just all read what she wrote here. It's just a couple of sentences but she said the the the elevator gave us ready access from the street, the garage, the main floor and the upstairs.

00;50;33;01 - 00;50;58;26

Ron Wickman

So it was a two story house. Another benefit of a barrier free layout was the daily tasks like showering could be accomplished with less effort and in less time. A simple thing like having space for both wheelchair and caregiver in the bathroom, simplified many personal care routines. Having a well-designed home base to deal with basic needs freed, freed up more energy for work and play.

00;50;58;28 - 00;51;28;02

Ron Wickman

And it really struck me, and later on, the city of Edmonton used to have an awards program called the Mayor's Awards for Accessible Architecture. And and this house won an award and she did a little speech and she she became very tearful in in talking about how this experience of just being able to have a quick bathroom routine allowed her to spend more time with her kids and her husband, which she cherished.

00;51;28;02 - 00;51;48;09

Ron Wickman

Right. And and I can only I can only imagine what that would be like for somebody that every day now is waking up going, I don't know how much more time I have left. Right. I mean, most of us don't really think about that. But she had to. That's the reality she faced. And just being able to get ready for the day in a quicker and more convenient, easier, safer way.

00;51;48;12 - 00;52;11;28

Ron Wickman

Just just must just make that morning so much better and allow her to to have that energy to deal with the rest of the day and in a much more positive way. So, you know, again, it's not they they picked very expensive Italian fixtures. They had a very nice house and all of that stuff is nice, but nothing compared to to the ability to have this time.

00;52;11;28 - 00;52;29;24

Ron Wickman

Right. And that's what we really cherish. So That really has a strong effect on on myself as a designer and certainly a story I like to share with other designers and and sort of encourage them to take on projects like this as as worthy of of their attention.

00;52;29;26 - 00;53;00;08

Karen Brown

Well, that's a really good story to end with. And yeah, you can't you can't buy time and your quality of life is everything. So folks, we have talked about the history of accessibility. We have talked about what Ron looks for in terms of finding a house that is easily renovated for people. And then we've done shorter podcasts on the no step entry, vertical movement inside the house and

today's, which was a bit longer on bathrooms, but so much information there for everybody.

00;53;00;08 - 00;53;17;18

Karen Brown

And I would like to thank Ron for taking the time to do these podcasts with me and for you. It's been quite an experience. So I invite you to go back and listen to all of the podcasts that Ron and I have done together, and I'm sure that in the future we will do more, But until the next time.

00;53;17;21 - 00;53;56;09

Karen Brown

Thank you all for listening and we look forward to seeing you again. Real Life Renos : ThePpodcast 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.