

Hopes, Dreams & Wishes for Accessibility in 2024

00:00:00:00 - 00:00:29:03

Karen Brown

Welcome to another edition of Real Life Renos: The Podcast. I'm your host Karen Brown. And for those who are new to the podcast, I'm an aging in place and accessibility strategist. Today we're going to talk about our hopes, wishes and dreams for accessibility in 2024. And to do that, I am joined by one of my favorite guests, Ron Wickman.

00:00:29:18 - 00:00:39:04

Karen Bown

Ron is an architect who spent his career working with accessible design, and he joins us from Edmonton, Alberta. Welcome, Ron.

00:00:39:09 - 00:00:41:35

Ron Wickman

Thanks. It's great to be back.

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Ron Wickman

Actually, I'm kind.

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Ro Wickman

Of.

00:00:42:59 - 00:00:44:41

Ron Wickman

One of my hopes would be to.

00:00:44:45 - 00:00:46:02

Speaker 1

Do more of these this year.

00:00:46:04 - 00:01:10:06

Speaker 3

So we can make that come true. Absolutely. We are going to start off by taking a look at a document that contains survey results. It

was a survey that was done by the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada. It's rather lengthy, so we won't go through all of it. But Ron, if you'd like to speak to this, I think it's a really interesting article.

00:01:10:13 - 00:01:17:43

Speaker 3

I read the whole thing, as did you, and it's all marked up because we were having an email conversation back and forth about it.

00:01:17:48 - 00:01:20:57

Speaker 2

Yeah, Yeah. It's, it's quite interesting. When I, when.

00:01:20:57 - 00:01:24:06

Speaker 1

I read the article myself.

00:01:24:11 - 00:01:24:44

Speaker 2

I was.

00:01:24:56 - 00:01:27:44

Speaker 1

Pleasantly surprised that the.

00:01:27:49 - 00:01:29:01

Speaker 2

At the.

00:01:29:06 - 00:01:30:29

Speaker 1

Results.

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Speaker 2

Meaning that a.

00:01:32:36 - 00:01:43:13

Speaker 1

Vast majority of of Canadians are very interested in, in making our built environment more inclusive and.

00:01:43:18 - 00:01:46:19

Speaker 2

Inclusive is a pretty lofty word.

00:01:46:23 - 00:02:07:06

Speaker 1

It doesn't always relate to just accessibility or disability issues, but inclusion for everybody and that means everybody. So I think most people are well aware of of issues that are happening, especially here in North America, with people of of.

00:02:07:11 - 00:02:07:36

Speaker 2

Different.

00:02:07:42 - 00:02:14:21

Speaker 1

Skin color, that sort of thing. But I find that a lot of times our discussions.

00:02:14:26 - 00:02:19:26

Speaker 2

About inclusive, inclusive activity doesn't always include.

00:02:19:26 - 00:02:20:33

Speaker 1

People with disabilities.

00:02:20:33 - 00:02:23:16

Speaker 2

So I think that this study.

00:02:23:16 - 00:02:24:59

Speaker 1

Does show that.

00:02:25:04 - 00:02:25:37

Speaker 2
A good.

00:02:25:37 - 00:02:53:29

Speaker 1

Number of people really want us to as architects, to to weigh in and do a better job of making our our built environment more accessible for people with disabilities. Other issues like climate fighting, climate change, I think is has been around for a little while now more than 25 years. But it's also at the forefront of of our thinking.

00:02:53:43 - 00:02:54:37

Speaker 1

These days.

00:02:54:37 - 00:03:01:05

Speaker 1

And the other thing that I certainly I was very interested in when I was in school as well.

00:03:01:10 - 00:03:03:18

Speaker 2

Is this idea of.

00:03:03:23 - 00:03:34:36

Speaker 1

Engaging people when we design as architects as well. So a lot of times I think and too often we think that because we've been trained, we know better and so we just design accordingly. But nobody knows better what they need than the people who actually use the spaces. So certainly my work, which is focused on people with disabilities, I can't design without including my my clients in the design process.

00:03:34:36 - 00:03:45:07

Speaker 1

So that's something that certainly is is high amongst younger architects entering into the into the profession.

00:03:45:07 - 00:03:47:31

Speaker 2

So very optimistic.

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Speaker 1

In my thinking as we move forward

00:03:50:00 - 00:04:00:02

Speaker 1

towards creating a more a more inclusive, socially engaging and environmentally friendly built environment.

00:04:00:02 - 00:04:16:57

Speaker 3

One of the statistics, if I remember the number correctly from reading through this, just to speak to what you said about involving people in the process of all the people who had ever commented on a development in their community, 46% of them didn't feel like they were being heard.

00:04:16:57 - 00:04:23:32

Speaker 1

Only 7% felt like anybody was really paying attention to what they were saying, which is kind of sad.

00:04:23:37 - 00:04:55:38

Speaker 2

It's that's right. And again, the I think what what happens is certainly in my experience as a let's say, just a citizen when when things are happening around the city, initiatives here in Edmonton, there's been a lot of talk about bike lanes, for example, and changes to public transit. And so on. That kind of that kind of information is out there in kind of social media.

00:04:55:43 - 00:05:19:14

Speaker 2

And then they have work work shops, I guess you could say, or open houses where people can come in and and raise their concerns and give their give their opinions. But by and large, you

have to be pretty savvy and know what's going on in the city to know that these events are happening and and then they're not always, you know, that open, really.

00:05:19:14 - 00:05:45:54

Speaker 2

They're like, that's one day, maybe during the day people work. So so often, I think the bureaucratic people, the city administration thinks, well, you know, we are making it available. You can weigh in and give your opinions, but it's not really as open as as one might think. And then in defense of all of that, how do you get people to to an open house and so on?

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Speaker 2

A lot of people just don't unfortunately, don't really care as much about things until it really, you know, kind of hits their backyard, so to speak. So it just overall, we just need a more kind of engaging community spirit to to get our get our cities to be more socially responsible and environmentally friendly and certainly more inclusive.

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Speaker 1

I also feel that voter turnouts give us a lot of information. Just if we look at the numbers, the voter turnouts have been really low. And at the municipal level, which is the level of government closest to the people, it those low numbers really tell me how much they think it really matters what their vote is and decisions are going to be made and they're just going to go on with their lives and and yeah, they don't turn up for budget meetings.

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Speaker 1

I mean, at my local council, maybe one or two people come and sit in the gallery for the budget meetings and that's about it. And it's not that people don't care what their taxes are, it's they feel that it's I think it just doesn't matter. But if we were more engaged, it's sort of a rock and a hard place because I feel like if people were

more engaged, then they would do a better job of electing people who truly represented what the community wants.

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Speaker 1

Instead, especially in small communities, we elect based on who is popular, who talks to you in the grocery store, who's your buddy that you went to school with and grew up with? You know, that kind of voting is the wrong way to look at it, in my view.

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Speaker 2

Yeah, you're absolutely right. And my my my background has been in in politics and and activism just because of the nature of how I grew up with a father who did use a wheelchair and was a civic politician and a provincial MLA here in Alberta, an activist. So it's it's in my blood. And I've kind of steered away from becoming a politician.

00:08:01:11 - 00:08:33:04

Speaker 2

But I'm very political in my in my the way that I work as an architect and the way I engage our are our politicians. So I am personally quite active in talking with with various politicians and try to get them to to buy into a lot of these ideas. But by and large, I think they're certainly more than ever in my in my view, this feeling of hopelessness amongst the vote voters is certainly there.

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Speaker 2

And it seems no matter what we do, the the the politicians are just going to make decisions that benefit them or whatever. I'm not even sure what their what their goals are anymore in terms of what what our cities could look like and and what our culture could could be like. Right. So it just we seem a little bit lost right now in that in that sense.

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Speaker 2

And I don't know how to I don't know how to get us back on track now.

00:09:08:16 - 00:09:24:14

Speaker 1

That's okay. It's a you made a good segue way just a few seconds ago. We were going to talk about hopes and dreams. So when you're talking about wanting things to be different, what would your number one hope dream wish be for 2024?

00:09:24:19 - 00:10:16:14

Speaker 2

It it's it's this idea of education for sure. And that's been that's been at the core of my hopes. And as I start to begin every new year is like how do we educate people? And I remember way back in the mid-nineties, the 1990s, having been the author of what's called a flex housing project, which Canada works, and Housing Corporation had a competition where they asked architects and builders to come up with ideas on how to create housing that's more adaptable, more flexible for different, a different variety of family types, multi-generational housing, people working at home garden suites for parents that are coming back to live with their children, children that aren't leaving their home,

00:10:16:14 - 00:10:45:23

Speaker 2

and of course, being accommodating for people with disabilities, especially as they age and, you know, 95, I remember doing a talk at a CMHC function where I was asked whether this flex housing concept is a is a trend or niche market. And and I said it's it's a niche market right now. But in the next five years I believe it'll be a trend.

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Speaker 2

That was roughly 1995. So my my thinking was that by 2000 we'd be, we'd be all over this flex housing idea and all of this. Well, it's 2024 and we're we're, we're still not there. So so I guess the the education first and foremost is looking at kind of global concept of educating as many people as we can.

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Speaker 2

So that would include our politicians, our decision makers, builders and developers, other architects and designers, the general public, the building industry, the subtree, the trades just really try to educate in the most global sense possible. And my my, just quickly, my second hope is seeing as a kind of said it already is again, this idea of the next five.

00:11:46:23 - 00:12:21:27

Speaker 2

So now, you know, 2024 by 2029, 2030, let's say thereabouts, can we can we achieve this goal of of having this higher education? And something I've been saying for the last number of years now is that I think a big missing piece in this education is that we still haven't achieved a critical mass of people who really understand what what inclusion, what disability issues are really all about.

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Speaker 2

And in our in our world of climate change and sustainable issues design, we have achieved a critical mass. So when you have the media out there talking about the issues or interviewing experts, they themselves have quite a good understanding of the issues. So the the conversation between somebody, a reporter, let's say, and an expert is more engaging, more informative because there's a real dialog as opposed to somebody just saying, Well, what do you think?

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Speaker 2

Or tell me what you know? So it's it's not one sided. And I'm hoping that we can I can get to a point where I feel like I'm no longer just educating. I want to be in a position where I feel like I'm being educated myself. So I want to be in a group of peers who have a similar understanding as myself so that we can really dig deep into the issues and come up with very good and clever solutions.

00:13:31:37 - 00:14:02:49

Speaker 1

That's a noble wish and I would certainly hope that that would come true and it's actually very closely aligned with pardon the honking. I'm actually in a very active construction zone right now, and it sounds like the stock truck may have shown up so. Well, we'll just keep on going. So my number one wish would be that homeowners and tenants alike would educate themselves about the possibilities that are available to them.

00:14:02:54 - 00:14:28:56

Speaker 1

As we've discussed before, we have this stock of old houses that have not really changed in terms of building methods and the barriers that are inherently built in houses for decades and decades. So people are having to deal with houses that actually have a lot of potential to injure them. There are things we can do to alleviate that, and the information is out there.

00:14:28:56 - 00:14:49:45

Speaker 1

It's it's perhaps harder to find when people hire people like you or like me. It's second nature to us and we can certainly tell them. But that's not something that everybody is going to do. Instead, what I find is that people become frozen with fear. They just they don't know which way to go. They don't know what decision is best.

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Speaker 1

And so they do nothing. As I say to them, often not making a decision is making a decision. And I think that what maybe governments at all levels need to understand is that if we build homes that actually allow people to live safely, independently and with dignity, they can stay there longer. There's there's an effect on the health care system.

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Speaker 1

I think, in terms of the illnesses that people have, the injuries that people have, the that that the need for long term care would reduce that, you know, people would perhaps only have to leave their homes for the last year or two of their lives when they may need more care or highly specialized care. They that that would be for me if people would take the time to educate themselves.

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Speaker 1

There's a lot of good material out there. They can listen to these podcasts. We've done podcasts on entry and bathrooms and vertical access that give people a ton of information. So those kinds of things I think would be really cool. I think my second wish aligns with yours very well, also, that governments at all levels would embrace accessible, visible and adaptable housing.

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Speaker 1

As as I have said to you online and offline, when a project comes to a municipality or a county and they put restrictions on them like we want 20% of the homes to be accessible or 10% to be visible, the builders don't like that, and they'll just go down the road to the next municipality or county that doesn't give them those restrictions because of course they're in business to make money.

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Speaker 1

Completely understand that. However, that's not necessarily building the way that people need. As as I just said, we haven't changed our methods in a long time that the flex housing that you brought up, you would call it flex housing, I call it adaptable housing. I think we're talking about exactly the same thing.

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Speaker 2

Yes. Yeah, we.

00:16:56:17 - 00:17:18:52

Speaker 1

Are this business of a home that people can buy. And I mean, housing is expensive. So once you're able to get into that, do you need somebody to help pay the rent? Well, why don't we build a section, a self-contained apartment? You could take down the wall at some point if you wanted to, or leave it up, whatever that a tenant could be in and help pay the rent.

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Speaker 1

Maybe as your children get older and come home from college or they're working their first job and they need to save money, that's where they could live. Maybe mom and dad ultimately move into that space while an older child takes over the main house. And then that is generational living, which is gaining in popularity. There are so many more things that we could do, if only we would embrace flex housing.

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Speaker 2

And yeah, and just to talk a little bit more about flex housing for those that don't know it, the term flex housing was coined by a gentleman who worked at Cantor Mortgage and Housing, and it really encompass encompassed three words which was affordable, adaptable and accessible. So adaptable in the sense that you just talked about. So not not just for adaptable to accommodate somebody, let's say, who goes from walking around to being in a wheelchair but adaptable in the sense of how we can live.

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Speaker 2

So this idea of having a home that lends itself to having a a suite for for a mom or dad that comes to live with their kid, their adult kids, or the adult child who is in university and can't or doesn't want to move yet. Right. So people working out of their home again in 1995, these were a bit more novel.

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Speaker 2

And in terms of their their thoughts and it was it was quite popular and CMHC really promoted it for a good it's a good ten years maybe. And after about five years, it started to sort of fade a little bit. And the CMHC then focus its attention on on sustainable issues and climate change and so on, creating net zero housing, that sort of thing.

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Speaker 2

And it's only been, again in the last five years or so that a can emerge in housing, as has approached me now, younger people that are just reading about flex housing for the first time asking me what what I know about it. And I go, I don't quite a bit about it. So so but the flex, the flex housing concept has become more of an issue today because of our aging population.

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Speaker 2

So now it's being recognized that, these are all really good ideas because we have hit at certainly a critical mass of older people out there now that we're going, wow, this is like a real there's a real housing issue here, right?

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Speaker 1

So right.

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Speaker 2

So now these issues are sort of coming back again. But, you know, for me, I guess it just it seems a little bit unfortunate that it it it I have this feeling that we're like starting over again, Right. Like, I have to reeducate people about flex housing because the ones that started it are retired or, you know, passed, passed on, you know, that kind of thing.

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Speaker 2

So it is a little bit tricky sometimes to go, wow, okay, we got to try this one again, right?

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Speaker 1

We could we could actually modernize the concept a little bit by not having the flex part of the housing of the house built into the house because so many municipalities and counties now are wanting and allowing one to or even in some cases, three additional homes on the same property. So, I mean, there's nothing more bizarre to me than somebody saying they've got a granny suite and it's in the basement.

00:21:04:59 - 00:21:09:45

Speaker 2

Yeah, yeah, that's right. That just hits and they're wrong.

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Speaker 1

But if there was a granny suite at the back, that could be the flex. And if only I know builders want to build on these three foot lots, if only on that first floor, they would build a den or even a dining room that could eventually be transitioned into a primary bedroom and a washroom that has a euro shower.

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Speaker 1

Because that sounds way sexier then. Yeah, barrier free shower or even a wet room. We've talked about wet rooms before. If if only they would do that sort of thing. There's more flexibility.

00:21:48:28 - 00:22:24:06

Speaker 2

Yeah, exactly. And that's it's those are really great points. And that sort of brought to my attention again reminded me that the the big shift in this flex housing concept with the current members of Kinder Morgan Housing is that they do think about it as a multi-family housing situation rather than the single family housing situation. So in 1995 we were completely focused on this idea that we could make single family homes more adaptable, more affordable, more accessible.

00:22:24:11 - 00:23:00:31

Speaker 2

Today, conditions are such that that's a big challenge, especially that affordability bit right to single family housing. So CMHC now is saying in terms of the flex housing concept, it really does relate to multifamily. So low rise apartment buildings, condos, taller condo buildings. And they're really focusing their attention on that and and realizing that the single family house is still something that's not attainable by by a lot of people anymore, unfortunately.

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Speaker 2

Yeah.

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Speaker 1

Right, Right.

00:23:03:27 - 00:23:32:55

Speaker 2

And just one other thing. I just wanted to add that I think is really important to your your hope, your first one up about educating the public, the people who are want this this kind of housing. You mentioned something about, you know, just having having like a a no step entrance, for example. We've talked about this issue before in our in podcasts that we've done previously.

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Speaker 2

But, you know, essentially not having steps at the front door so pretty much anybody can get in, but that includes somebody using a walker, somebody in a wheelchair, a young parents pushing a baby carriage, somebody carrying a bike, people carrying furniture. All of these things make life easier if you have no steps at the front door, what happens is your your your buying public might read an article or see see a feature on the news and they go, that's no step entrance, That's a great idea.

00:24:06:32 - 00:24:25:47

Speaker 2

And then they go to their builder and they say, I'd like to I'd like to build a house without steps out the front door. And the builders will actually say, you can't do that. The code doesn't allow you to do that. So again, that goes back to that lack of education and the homeowner doesn't have the knowledge to challenge what the builder saying.

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Speaker 2

So then they go ahead and build the house with steps and the builders are wrong there. You know, I'm not saying every builder of course not. But a lot of builders will do that either because they really don't know that it can be done or they just don't want to learn themselves. Right. They just want to get the sale and get it built and.

00:24:44:35 - 00:24:45:28

Speaker 1

Cookie cutter.

00:24:45:32 - 00:24:58:06

Speaker 2

And make their money, you know. So it's it's that's the challenge that you're talking about. That's that's, you know, obviously something that I've been working on as well for for quite a length of time.

00:24:58:11 - 00:25:02:54

Speaker 1

Right. Right. What would be your third wish?

00:25:02:59 - 00:25:49:33

Speaker 2

Yeah. Well, first first, I'm going to just go back to my second wish, because I the second wish is a bit more specific to to this idea of education. And what I'm really interested in today as an architect is, is dealing with the the idea of accessibility. And, and for me, accessibility relates to people with disabilities. So in my own definition of things, when we talk about inclusive housing or

inclusive design or even universal design, we really are talking about all people anywhere, you know, age 8 to 80 kind of thing.

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Speaker 2

There's an urban design firm that calls themselves 8 to 80. So when when I speak of accessibility, then I speak of it as specific to people with disabilities and and so I'm trying to make sure that other designers, especially and architects, because that's my profession, understand this concept, so that when they do get involved in issues around climate change and fighting climate change with their designs, dealing with disaster relief, which is a lot of disaster disasters are happening because of climate change and and most importantly for me is this issue around affordable housing in our quest to create more environmentally friendly buildings, create housing quickly after a natural disaster, or like a fire or flood

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Speaker 2

or create affordable housing. What often happens is that the needs of people with disabilities are forgotten because all of the other issues sort of rise to the top and they're hard enough, right? So if I come along and say, well, you know, what about what about people in wheelchairs, it's like, man, that's just you've just added another layer to this that just makes our quest to find solutions that much harder.

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Speaker 2

Right? So that's that's kind of what I talk about the next five years. I'd like to really hone in on those issues specifically.

00:27:19:31 - 00:27:32:54

Speaker 1

And you used a really funny analogy when we were talking a couple of weeks ago about the Stanley. I think this is this is a great time to repeat that on our podcast.

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Speaker 2

Yeah, yeah, it is kind of funny. Yeah. Because I, it is I and now I'm hearing like since we we spoke a couple of weeks ago, people are paying astronomical amounts of money to get these cups like it's just it's really bizarre. I know and and I think what some and again I'm not the expert on Stanley mugs but.

00:27:58:53 - 00:28:00:28

Speaker 1

It was the analogy.

00:28:00:32 - 00:28:27:09

Speaker 2

Yeah apparently they're like incredibly durable they they keep your liquids inside cold or hot forever and so not only are they sort of style I don't know maybe stylish I guess, or they're they're you know, people want to have them because they're kind of cool, but they really work. And I think ultimately that's why people are really buying into them is is it really works.

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Speaker 2

And then after, you know, after something like this gains traction, then it you know, it almost becomes a bit of a style thing. Like you have to have one because you know, everybody else does. But when we were talking about that, I was I was saying that I would love to see that happen in this world of the no step entrance.

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Speaker 2

Like, could we create a buzz around the No step entrance that everybody sees the benefits of it and they just they have to have it and they're willing to even pay more money for it. Right. And and what I can tell you is that it does not cost more money to do a no step entrance. Once you've once you've overcome, you know, having done it a couple of times, it's always a little when you've never done something before.

00:29:15:21 - 00:29:25:19

Speaker 2

It just takes time to learn and and sometimes you make a bit of a mistake and it costs some money. But eventually you get to a point where it really doesn't cost anything more.

00:29:25:24 - 00:29:25:45

Speaker 1
Right.

00:29:25:51 - 00:29:52:28

Speaker 2
But then we want to get to that point. And the analogy I used in the building industry that is kind of, you know, I guess similar to the sort of Stanley, my concept is the engineered truss. So in my time, having graduated in the early, early 1990s and got into this architecture field, we were building houses with what we call dimensional lumber.

00:29:52:32 - 00:30:21:24

Speaker 2
So that's two by eight, two by tens to buy 12. So they're, they're, they're used for our floor joists specifically. And one of the common complaints about the floor joists was that in time because they're made of wood, they, they dry they dry over time when they're in an indoor environment and you put wood, wood flooring on top, your subfloor is wood and the wood.

00:30:21:24 - 00:30:50:19

Speaker 2
JOYCE And you nail them in and eventually you start getting little creaks and and sounds that as you walk on the floor. And these seem to be really annoying for people that owned houses like that and the engineered floor truss came along and it doesn't shrink it's it's an engineered it's it's engineered. So that was the original idea of promoting this floor system.

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Speaker 2
They called it the silent floor system. So no more squeaks. And that was really how it was promoted. And I think a lot of people were like, Yeah, okay, that's great. But when you looked at how

much extra would cost at the time, it was about three times the cost of dimensional lumber. And it was only after some people started using these these engineered floor, Joyce, that they realized, well, you can actually span greater distances with these trusses.

00:31:20:41 - 00:31:52:21

Speaker 2

So you would eliminate bearing walls or tell the posts in your basement. The the middle of the trusses were open to get some heating duct work through the truss space, electrical wires and so on, plumbing lines. So all of a sudden you could have in your basement a sort of smooth ceiling without little bump downs and and bulkheads and that sort of thing.

00:31:52:25 - 00:32:25:59

Speaker 2

And a lot of people thought, well, that's that's that give my basement a more stylish look. And that's kind of a great thing. And then the of course, the trades, the plumbers, electricians, the heating contractors, they found it much easier to work with. And thus it reduced their their hours and their fees to do the work. And so all of a sudden within I graduate in 1991, so in 1991, it's all dimensional lumber engineered trusses are more expensive.

00:32:25:59 - 00:32:56:33

Speaker 2

So they're only for people that are willing to spend the money on them. By 1994 95, it had almost completely shifted to the engineer truss and they were now on par, if not cheaper than dimensional lumber. So in a very short period of time that thought that whole part of the industry completely shifted because again, I would say there was a critical mass of people understanding all of the benefits of of the truss.

00:32:56:33 - 00:33:21:36

Speaker 2

So it wasn't just it was benefiting the builder and they were making more money or it was benefiting somebody in the in the buyer, it was benefiting everybody overall. So everybody saw the the the

value of this. And again, I would go back to the no step entrance or you call the euro bathroom or I call it the wet room.

00:33:21:41 - 00:33:40:05

Speaker 2

You know this idea. Yeah. The euro shower like the idea of creating a bathroom that's like a big wet room. Right? We've talked about that one, too. And those two are just key to our building industry, if we can. Those two things, if they were just standard, it would be a game changer for sure.

00:33:40:19 - 00:33:44:53

Speaker 1

So we've got to make everybody want it the way that everybody wants a Stanley.

00:33:44:58 - 00:34:09:00

Speaker 2

Correct? Exactly. Yeah. Yeah, exactly. Yeah. I've been I've been trying to figure that out. But if anybody is listening and has some marketing ideas, you could probably you could probably make a lot of money doing this. Right. So it I think it'll come, but it's just like, how do we speed up the process right to so that we can just be there a lot sooner.

00:34:09:05 - 00:34:40:40

Speaker 1

Right. Well that may segue into my third wish, which is around a federal announcement that was made in December. And I'll just show the announcement. There it is. They're reviving a wartime housing program. Now. I remember wartime houses. My grandmother had one and as I recall, there weren't a lot of different designs. Hers was two bedroom, one bathroom, a kitchen, and then an open living and dining space.

00:34:40:40 - 00:35:06:22

Speaker 1

There was a basement. So what the federal government is proposing to do is come up with a catalog of homes. Now, as they note here, in many instances, these homes were built in a period

of about 36 hours. So they want to bring forward a catalog of pre-approved design ideas and then give them to builders. Now, let me just scroll down here a little further.

00:35:06:22 - 00:35:41:33

Speaker 1

There's a picture of some of them. Yeah, they were just tiny little boxes. So they're looking at pre-approved designs for multiplexes, for mid-rise buildings, student housing, seniors residences and other small to medium scale residential properties. And these will include garden suites and laneway homes and different kinds of houses that will solve today's challenges. So my wish would be that these would be accessible or at the very least adaptable because they are single.

00:35:41:33 - 00:36:07:27

Speaker 1

STOREY For the most part. I mean there's a multi rise, but they're single storey in and of themselves. The it's the washroom primarily there as well as the no step entry for the things that are such as garden houses and, and the like. But having the euro shower or a wet room, probably the wet room would be more in keeping with the budget numbers that they want to stick with.

00:36:07:32 - 00:36:33:38

Speaker 1

That would be my wish is that these designs would at the very least include, if not all, be accessible, keeping in mind that the people who are going to be using these will want barrier free living to keep them healthier and safer, longer and again, to to reduce that impact on the health care system.

00:36:33:43 - 00:37:01:12

Speaker 2

Absolutely. Yeah. That I mean, that that totally ties, you know, back into what I was saying about that's my second wish right as the. Yes. Is that we we come up with these great ideas and these initiatives to tackle issues around affordable housing, for example. But we can't forget that we need to make sure that they're

accessible. And when we're building new, there's no reason to think that we can't do it.

00:37:01:17 - 00:37:24:56

Speaker 2

And the the the wet room bathroom concept, yeah, it would be kind of tight for somebody in a larger wheelchair. But if you take your very basic bathroom, which is typically five feet by eight feet, that's a toilet, a sink and a bathtub, if you turn that into a wet room. So it's just a toilet, the sink and a shower area.

00:37:25:01 - 00:37:53:39

Speaker 2

You're not you're just you're just making it a wet room and you're not making the space bigger. So you're not making the house bigger. And if you if you just make sure that you grade your land so that there's no steps at the door, you're done. Yeah. It's it's and I think I think using the term adaptable probably in terms of the kind of a marketing idea makes more sense to people.

00:37:53:39 - 00:38:11:10

Speaker 2

I still think there's a stigma around this idea of accessibility being about people with disabilities and far too many people go, I'll never get there. Like I'll never I'll never be there. Even when I'm 90. I won't be, you know, I won't have a disability. I'll just be 90.

00:38:11:15 - 00:38:22:40

Speaker 1

Yes, they would. You know, I was thinking that firm that that you mentioned that calls themselves 8 to 80 should call themselves first it was really just a death would be far more appropriate.

00:38:22:45 - 00:38:49:06

Speaker 2

And and I you know I'm I can't help but think of a quote I heard from her name is Elinor Smith. So she started the concept of visit ability. And I read in one of the articles that that she wrote. So she started the visibility concept in the eighties in Atlanta. And she

said, you know, I know step entrance helps everyone and hurts no one.

00:38:49:11 - 00:39:00:20

Speaker 2

So you can't really I mean, you can follow the no step entrance, I guess, but, you know, stairs just only make it a little bit harder for so many people. Right.

00:39:00:25 - 00:39:02:14

Speaker 1

And a lot harder for others.

00:39:02:19 - 00:39:27:53

Speaker 2

But yeah, there's no advantage to stairs, really. And I would argue the same thing about the the, the sort of this idea of the curb less shower area or the wet room, you're not really hurting anybody. You're you're just making a much more flexible bathroom space. You're not really changing the way you use things, you know, other than the fact that, you know, we're used to kind of having bathtubs all the time, too.

00:39:27:55 - 00:39:57:51

Speaker 2

So that's a bit of a thing. But it it shouldn't be that hard to to sort of sell those two features really, a kitchen is is a whole nother issue that there's a big difference between and I would say an adaptable kitchen and an accessible kitchen where, you know, accessible kitchen, you would have a lot of space underneath the counters open and therefore you lose a lot of valuable storage space and so on.

00:39:57:51 - 00:40:31:31

Speaker 2

So that's a bit of a tricky thing. But you can make you can make your kitchen cabinets adaptable. So you can have cabinets, sinks and cooktops where you can pull them out if you need to or put them back in if you want to, that kind of thing. So again, it just needs some it needs some creative thinking, but a lot of the stuff,

once once it becomes more commonplace, like the engineered floor truss, once it becomes commonplace, it really becomes equal on par with, you know, just your standard costs of everything else.

00:40:31:35 - 00:40:34:41

Speaker 1

Do you remember a show called Bewitched?

00:40:34:46 - 00:40:36:11

Speaker 2

yeah.

00:40:36:16 - 00:41:06:08

Speaker 1

So it's on the like the oldies channel and I will occasionally watch it. I think I've probably seen them all 15 times, but it still amuses me early on in that series, Samantha had a kitchen with an oven in the wall and a stove that came out and she could push in. I have never seen that anywhere other than in that show.

00:41:06:14 - 00:41:33:45

Speaker 1

But what a great idea. Well, of course you can't leave the elements on and push it back in. But regardless, the concept of being able to stow the things that you don't need. Fantastic. And I, I did hear several years ago that condos were being built in downtown Toronto that didn't really have kitchens at all. They had a microwave because who lives in downtown Toronto that actually cooks?

00:41:33:49 - 00:41:54:10

Speaker 1

And now with air fryers and that you can just sit on the counter that can do virtually anything an oven can do. Yeah, I mean, we're coming up with so many cool things, but there are a lot of cool things that already exist, like euro showers and wet rooms and no step entries that we could we could do to make people's lives.

00:41:54:23 - 00:42:00:19

Speaker 1

So much better. Tell me what you're going to focus on in the next year ahead.

00:42:00:24 - 00:42:35:55

Speaker 2

Yeah, so it's kind of it's it's we've already kind of talked about it already, but the idea of what I would call small victory. So I would say it's fair to say about myself that I've always thought big in terms of my goals, right from being a young person. This idea of making the world more accessible, right. And I've come to the realization as I've as I'm going, I'm in my 60th year, I guess you can say that's a pretty goal.

00:42:36:00 - 00:43:06:57

Speaker 2

Yeah. And it's sometimes I feel like I'm just being my head against a wall. So I'm taking more joy. And I have been for the last year or so, more joy in what I would call the small victories. So just acknowledging that I I'm not always changing the world, but I'm helping out a client who has a disability and we're making there that that person's house more accessible, that family's house more accessible allows them to do more things.

00:43:07:02 - 00:43:34:44

Speaker 2

One of the comments that I always take great pride in is when a client tells me that their three hour morning routine in the bathroom has been cut down to a half an hour a day. So that's two and a half hours every single day of their lives. Now that is given back to playing with their kids, enjoying enjoying life, and not having to deal with the obstacles of a, you know, poorly designed bathroom.

00:43:34:49 - 00:44:05:43

Speaker 2

So those those I guess in my mind, those were more insignificant victories as I've been practicing as an architect, and I'm starting to realize that I should value those victories, those those subtle changes more because they really are they're really helping. Right.

And I'm not going to change another architect's mind by saying, well, this is this is what you need to achieve.

00:44:05:48 - 00:44:39:45

Speaker 2

But if they can achieve a small, a smaller goal in their design, so they're designing an industrial building or a small housing project, at least talk to your clients about making it more accessible and what that might look like. And maybe you don't you don't do it all, but you do some things like the no step entrance. Maybe the house isn't super accessible inside, but you've got that no step entrance or or that, you know, And again, the wet room would be a great thing as well.

00:44:39:50 - 00:45:12:07

Speaker 2

So yeah, I'm kind of just trying to embrace and I think this has a lot to do with just being older. Just embrace the day and enjoy the day and try to try to do that education bit. We kind of one day at a time too. And I think that's that sort of changed my perspective a bit, helped me kind of calm down and stress out a lot less about feeling like I'm not really helping.

00:45:12:12 - 00:45:34:57

Speaker 2

So I'm sometimes my own worst enemy when I am very critical of my own, my myself with these things. So just really, really enjoying, enjoying the the day and trying to at least make sure I like this podcast, you know, just make sure I take time out of my day to do something that is feels to me worthwhile.

00:45:35:01 - 00:45:39:35

Speaker 2

It feels like I'm giving back in that way.

00:45:39:40 - 00:45:59:23

Speaker 1

Right? Sounds like you have some very worthwhile goals because you're right, changing the life of one person and knowing that you made such a huge difference in their lives. Is everything Like you

can dine out on that for weeks. Really? I've done the same thing and had the same feeling. It's wonderful.

00:45:59:26 - 00:46:49:40

Speaker 2

Me Yeah, Yeah, it really is. And, and I've really in some respects and it's really, you know, it's changed my life for sure. But I've also gained some really long relationships and one that I just, I'm sure I've mentioned in a previous podcast, but one that just comes to mind which kind of ties all of my hopes together in a way and is an example of of that is is a house I did for for young man Daniel and it who you know it's somewhat of a celebrity himself and and become well known here in the city of Evanston brilliant young guy in his thirties now working on some productions of of media and putting

00:46:49:40 - 00:47:28:16

Speaker 2

together documentaries and and other other shows using his knowledge, he he ended up losing all four limbs to to a disease. I know his mom always corrects me, but I just see meningitis It's it's a it's a more medical term but essentially it's it's a form of meningitis. And we designed a house for him to interestingly enough, it ended up being a four level split home with ramps inside instead of stairs.

00:47:28:21 - 00:47:49:50

Speaker 2

And his life was so much better because he could just he could operate a joystick on his wheelchair and just get around everywhere in the house. And he and his mom, it's just them that share the house. And she she could just he could see mom go into my room and she could say, yeah, okay, fine, go ahead.

00:47:49:50 - 00:48:36:46

Speaker 2

I'm just going to finish getting supper ready, that kind of thing. There they were. Kitchen living area has been turned into a painting studio they both paint. Now, Daniel's a fantastic artist. He's taken up photography needs some help getting his camera

set up on his wheelchair. It's such a creative young guy, and I'd like to think that the house and the way he was able to grow up in the house offered him that kind of independence that gave him confidence to to take on the challenges of of just day to day living for a young a young person and his maybe are a bit more challenging because of his his missing limbs.

00:48:36:50 - 00:49:06:18

Speaker 2

But, you know, he figured out a way to make it work. And now he's thriving and doing well. His friends would always gather at his house because it was hard for him to come to theirs. It normalized the house was normal for his friends. They didn't think anything of it. So not only does Daniel understand and his mom understand what accessible housing is all about, but so do all of Daniel's friends and family and friends of of his mom as well.

00:49:06:18 - 00:49:31:10

Speaker 2

Right. And I class that I would teach. I'd bring bring my class to the to the home. And they would just often be stunned at how innovative and interesting the house is and the the young people some of Daniel's friends were interested in becoming architects or getting into the design field because their friend was Daniel and they grew up in this.

00:49:31:10 - 00:49:57:02

Speaker 2

Are they hung out in this interesting home? So it does it does go back to this idea of small, small, small little deeds or small pieces of work can have that ripple effect, right. In terms of reaching other people and then getting getting us to that critical mass of people that understand how to make better housing and a better built environment.

00:49:57:07 - 00:50:08:48

Speaker 1

Right. That's a lovely story to bring us to a conclusion on this podcast. Unless there's another wish or hope or dream that you want to sneak in.

00:50:08:53 - 00:50:11:39

Speaker 2

Yeah, I hope to see my grandkids today.

00:50:11:44 - 00:50:19:06

Speaker 1

Yeah, I know. That's everything, isn't it? They're so delicious when they're young and you've got some tiny ones I've got.

00:50:19:06 - 00:50:38:13

Speaker 2

Yeah, I've got the oldest one, I've got five and the oldest one is four. So there's, there's, yeah. I usually get a visit by either three of them or two of them or all five sometimes all at once. So it's let me tell you that that sure picks up my day when I get to see them, that's for sure.

00:50:38:27 - 00:50:43:59

Speaker 1

And you have to form those relationships now because there will come a time where it's not so cool.

00:50:44:04 - 00:50:45:07

Speaker 2

Maybe not.

00:50:45:12 - 00:50:50:03

Speaker 1

But they will lean on that relationship and they will come back to us later on. At least that's.

00:50:50:04 - 00:51:09:25

Speaker 2

I, I think so. I certainly I certainly feel that with my own kids, too. They like to they like to come over and hang out with with my wife and myself. So I'm not exactly sure how we did it, but we we we created a situation where our our kids do I feel like our kids really like us.

00:51:09:30 - 00:51:12:45

Speaker 2

So, yeah, that's pretty awesome.

00:51:12:50 - 00:51:31:14

Speaker 1

That is. Well, terrific. Well, thank you for joining me again on this podcast and thank you to all of the people who have joined us for this podcast. And I look forward to seeing all of you on the next podcast. The next episode of Real Life renews the podcast