



**Mobile Unit**



**bottom shelf.**

**Look! no  
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Rolling Inspiration

**ACCESSIBLE ENVIRONMENTS** - Spring 2006

My articles have been concentrating on public spaces and places; Recently several of my projects have been about more private spaces, and it is really interesting to realize that just about everybody likes to customize their own spaces: even if it is just their own space at the office. I have also believed that if the environment suits disabled people it'll suit everybody. But this is not always so. Ramps are sometimes useful, and sometimes an obstruction. It has to be carefully worked out so that this does not happen. Ramps are used extensively in Industrial environments because of the use in the same environment of wheeled vehicles. And this is not considered by industrialists as a big deal. The knitting together of these elements is the important thing. Regulations don't ask industrialists not to use stepped floors. It's done because it's useful and practical.

French doors which have 2 narrow equal doors might appear to be okay, but they are difficult for everyone, including disabled people. Aesthetics taking so little account of practicality are not acceptable. Sliding folding doors have become hugely popular; part of the reason must be because they give one a 100% opening instead of the sliding door option which gives only 50% opening. However this type of opening should not forget that before you can do the 100% bit, or even the opening of the first leaf, in a domestic environment you have to unlatch the 'standing' leaves. This isn't really easy for a huge range of people except if you use an old-fashioned piece of door furniture called a 'cremone'. I usually recommend that the first (opening) leaf be the same size as a normal standard folding door, so that that can be used on its own. The other doors can then all be of equal size, so that a regular rhythm is formed aesthetically.

Single garages are also not easy for most people. It isn't really the single garage door standard size opening that is the problem, but the side spaces, especially if you are a wheelchair user, or have a bad back. In a house in Pietermaritzburg, which had what was called a 'tandem' garage, where it houses 2 cars end to end, an opening on the side was used. Instead of having to make the whole building wider (more expensive, time consuming and reduction of space in the adjacent area) A standard roll-up garage door was used with a remote control operation, so the side of the garage could be opened, at the right place, at the touch of a button after the entry door was closed. It appears to work perfectly from an access point of view as well as the security aspect. The outside of the garage area, that is the driveway immediately before the entry, is often neglected too. If this is level, it is easier to access the car there (if one needs to) and it is safer to leave a car on a level area than on a sloped one.

In a Kitchen the standard height of a counter top is 900mm. This is not at all suitable for a wheelchair user. However many able bodied people use 760mm to 800mm high counters as a small part of the Kitchen for having breakfast or the childrens' supper. Of course the under counter area is usually filled with fixed cupboards. Cupboards as mobile units are quite fashionable now in small kitchens especially, so this is ideal for wheelchair users too. The other really useful small kitchen device which are a godsend for wheelchair users are pull-out counter tops: they can be mounted on drawer sliders. Drawers for storing of crockery, pots, pans, dishes etc are also an easy solution to eliminate inaccessible shelves which are not a favourite of any housewife. Pantry cupboards which are only 300mm deep from top to bottom with the top being at 1,5m so it is accessible to most people is a great space saver too. Clear glass fronts to cupboards are also a trick to use, especially top cupboards, so that a treasure hunt does not have to be embarked upon every time a not often used item is required.

There are many more tricks which seem to be taking the interior design world by storm, thank goodness, so it is not difficult to persuade able bodied people to go for these brilliant ideas which are not high maintenance or gadgets for making the most of any space.

Joan Seirlis Pr Arch  
PO Box 216  
Gillitts 3603  
Tel: 031 7672968  
universaldesign.co.za