

AGING IN PLACE

# Architect draws global inspiration

## Universal design for seniors and the disabled ignited career-long passion

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Susan Ruptash is passionate about universal design.

"I'm normally a very quiet person," she says, until the subject turns to building homes people can age well in.

One of five principals at Quadrangle Architects Ltd., she says she always wanted to make a difference, but wasn't initially interested in residential construction.

But, after working on Humberview Housing Co-op — which won her firm a CMHC award for Innovative Housing for Persons with Disabilities in 1992 — and seeing the difference it made in people's lives, she was hooked.

"That's what ignited my career-long passion," she says.

Now the "go-to" person on staff, she champions universal design in all projects the firm undertakes.

Sometimes, "getting out of the way" is what's needed. By asking clients what they need and truly listening to them, you can build homes that allow them to age in place.

"Don't have the unit fight them and they'll be able to stay there," she says.

While using levers instead of knobs, installing large windows with low sills and bathroom doors that open out have been part and parcel of housing for the disabled, much more can be done.



At Woodside Mews, a life-lease community for the elderly, the homes have design features to allow seniors to age in place, such as an at-grade entry.

### People no longer accept that they'll have to move as they age

She points to Woodside Mews, a life-lease seniors' community Quadrangle designed in Oakville to provide independent living for the elderly. Features include a covered porch, which can be enjoyed in inclement weather, and no front step to impede access. An elongated window, instead of a peephole, means people in wheelchairs or with other mobility problems can see who's at the door.

A full bathroom downstairs allows residents to age in place, while another one upstairs can be used by able-bodied residents and guests.

Quadrangle's work on the Candy Factory, Toronto's first true condo loft, showed the advantage of open design. Even as the market squeezed units smaller, architects were able to adapt, designing small spaces that work.

In the same way, once consumers start demanding universal design, "the developers will respond instantly," Ruptash says.

People no longer accept that they'll have to move as they age. There's a desire to stay in familiar surroundings, close to friends and support networks.



This sumptuous shower has been designed to allow users to stand or sit in comfort. It could also easily accommodate a wheelchair user.