



Home elevator sales going up

Some buyers want convenience; some are planning ahead

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KATE GOODLOE/Special Contributor

Baby boomers are thinking about the future.

As more of them set their sights on new homes they can live in for the next few decades, builders are adding features with that goal in mind. And residential elevators are a big part of the movement.

Not long ago, elevators were rare, but manufacturers say demand has surged in the past few years. Builders are installing them in entire developments, and individuals are retrofitting their homes.

Stacie Sorenson, director of marketing for Waupaca Elevator Co. in Wisconsin, says that until recently, the company sold most of its home elevators to people with mobility problems.

Now, she says, that's only 20 percent of their business. The rest comes from "lifestyle" sales for buyers who want the convenience, though many are preparing for future mobility restrictions, she says.

Installation can cost nearly \$20,000, yet business is expanding rapidly. Waupaca's sales have risen 20 percent a year for the past three years, Ms. Sorenson says, and other companies say they've seen similar growth. Part of that is because elevators are going into more midpriced homes.

Philip Russell, vice president of Elevating Systems & Services in Farmers Branch, says his company used to install elevators in homes priced between \$500,000 and \$1 million. Now builders of \$275,000 homes are including them, too.

"If they've got a three-story townhouse, putting in elevators opens the marketplace so that empty-nesters and baby boomers can buy the house," Mr. Russell says. "After you're 60, you don't want to be climbing those stairs."

There are also ways for buyers who aren't ready to invest in elevators yet to keep the option open.

When having a new house built, contractors say, buyers should ask to have their closets "stacked," so they have a second-floor closet directly above a first-floor closet. This creates a natural place to install an elevator later.

Builders can also create an elevator shaft for future use. That involves reinforcing walls of the "stacked" closets and ensuring that plumbing and electrical wires don't run through the floor areas.

The cost is about \$1,000 to add a shaft during house construction, says Bill Slease, owner of Tapestry Custom Homes in McKinney. The shaft can be finished as a closet or for storage until homeowners are ready for an elevator.

In new homes, the elevator is usually installed toward the end of construction — in part so crews don't use it to carry materials around the worksite, says Ms. Sorenson.

Peggy Simmons, 67, of Dallas, built her home in 1983, but at that time, she says, "it would never have occurred to me to put in an elevator."

During a remodel a year and a half ago, though, she had one installed so she and her husband could stay in their home at least another 10 years. Now, several neighbors have them, and more are considering installing them, she says.

"Ideally you won't ever have to use it," Ms. Simmons says. "But it's there, if it ever came up."

Source –Dallas Morning News

http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/classifieds/news/homecenter/realestate/stories/051407class_homeelevators.6aa8a421.html

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