

Under One Roof

Planning a home for extended family

Forget the traditional household with two parents and two children: More and more people are living in multi-generational homes. Today, one in six Americans lives in a multi-generational household. Many of these households are made up of baby boomers caring for elderly parents.

The circumstances for generations living together can vary: College graduates return home while looking for a job. Parents of young children look for help from grandparents. Young married couples live with one set of parents while saving for the purchase of a home.

It can be difficult to foresee these

circumstances, but you may be wise to at least consider them as you plan your dream home. Even if you include a suite for a parent or grown child and the need doesn't arise, you'll be able to accommodate guests with ease and have another amenity to promote when you sell the home.

Start the process by talking with your designer about the suite's location. "Commonly, the in-law suite is located on the main floor in case there are accessibility issues at some point," says Janie Murnane, president of Design Basics. "In a ranch, it should be separated from the other bedrooms." Keep these factors in mind as you proceed:

Check your local restrictions.

Some municipalities do not allow homes to have "apartments" with separate outdoor entries or full kitchens.

Plan for privacy.

Will the in-law or "guest" suite provide a private entry and bath? Will it be separate enough that loud televisions or music won't disturb the rest of the household? "Privacy is one of the most important features to consider," Murnane says. "A home that provides private spaces for each generation and comfortable, common gathering areas offers the best of both worlds."

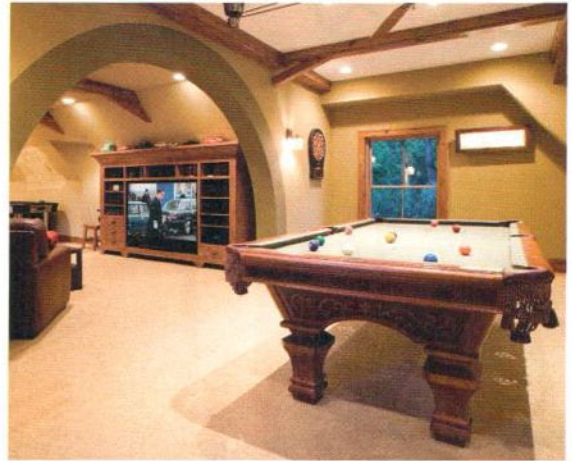
Remove barriers.

If your suite will accommodate an aging relative, make



OPPOSITE: A quaint guesthouse makes a private retreat for visitors or a family member joining a household.

LEFT: Grandparents and young grandchildren can interact in this spacious loft suite. **RIGHT:** Adult children who return home would appreciate having their own entertaining area, like this game room. **BOTTOM:** To make good use of every inch, the island in this in-law suite serves as a media cabinet, breakfast bar and food prep space.



it as accessible as possible. Avoid stairs and make halls and doorways wide enough for a wheelchair. Look for lever-style door handles and faucets that are easy for arthritic hands to operate. Plan for plenty of lighting.

Provide some independence. A kitchenette, or at least a microwave, small refrigerator and coffee maker, will allow relatives to take care of some of their own meals. A separate thermostat makes it easy for those staying in the suite to be comfortable. Seating space, or at least a bedroom large enough for a chair or table, makes a suite more of a “home.”

Consider the big picture. Try to envision how the added residents will affect the home overall. Will there be enough parking or garage space? Will relatives have their own outdoor living space? Will the suite offer living space or will the home’s living space be communal? Would it be possible or preferable to locate the suite in a guesthouse or outbuilding?

Whether your multigenerational



arrangement is permanent or short-lived, keep in mind that generations have much to learn from each other, and time spent together can help forge close family bonds. Generations Unit-

ed, which represents more than 100 local, state and federal organizations in trying to improve multigenerational living, offers more information on its web site, www.gu.org.