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Home Elevators Give Rise To New Thinking On Accessibility

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By KATHY BROCK

When Claire Adams and her husband designed their 6,459-square-foot home 20 years ago on a large corner lot on the west side of Portland, they had a few requirements. They wanted a three-level Tudor-style home with plenty of elegance and space for their children and grandchildren to visit for years to come.

But the feature that was most important to them, Adams says, is hidden behind a door that appears much like a closet -- **an elevator**. Her husband had arthritis in his legs and would have struggled with stairs. "We couldn't have lived here if we'd not had the elevator," she said.

At 87, Adams still sprints up the staircase, taking advantage of the elevator mostly for groceries or moving heavy things. But now that she's on her own, Adams is downsizing. Her three-bedroom, 4.5-bath home -- located on more than half an acre -- is listed for \$849,900 with Peggy Hoag of Prudential Northwest Properties.

In-home elevators may be a convenience or a necessity that offers residents more living choices. Even if a homeowner doesn't mind stairs, an elevator can make it easier for them to host visitors who use wheelchairs, scooters or are infirm. And even the healthiest folks are glad to have an elevator when faced with an occasional injury or heavy load.

There are many types of elevators, but most multirider lifts are rated for 500- to 750-pound capacity. "They're the new-age thing," said Jennifer Venable, a broker with John L. Scott Real Estate. "They're coming in style."

Some young, healthy families are also opting for elevators so that they may live in the same location as they age, she added. Because of shrinking lot sizes and rising land costs, developers are building up rather than out, said Venable. She predicts that homebuyers will see more elevator options in new homes. In fact, she's currently listing an eight-rowhouse project in St. Johns -- Cathedral Park Village Townhomes -- that features in-home elevators.

The builder, Larry Cowlshaw, has a similar project cued up in North Portland. He's also penciled out two single-family homes in Oregon City, 15 live-work townhomes in Beaverton and two homes in West Linn -- each with its own elevator.

Only three homes are still available at Cathedral Park, which should be completed by late August. The units range in size from 1,696 to 2,204 square feet and in price from \$429,000 to \$450,000.

Located near the Willamette River just off North Charleston Avenue, the townhomes have three bedrooms and 2.5 baths. Larger units have a bonus room and more spacious garages. "They're really cool views," said Venable. "You get the river and (St. Johns) bridge."

Chris Rozell purchased one of the units. She and her 9-year-old daughter, Alabama, are anxious to move in. "I just was ready for something new," said Rozell, 37.

"The elevator just put it over the top. With having four levels, the elevator really appealed to me -- not that I'm lazy." In fact, as soon as they move in, Rozell said she's looking forward to going for three-mile runs in nearby Forest Park, which she'll be able to see from her townhome. She and her daughter will each have their own "floors," with considerably more privacy than in their current home, a two-bedroom bungalow. Rozell also sees the townhome as a good investment. Even if she doesn't stay there forever, she said, she sees great potential resale value in the home's elevator and "killer" view.

Builders are banking on the popularity of elevators, too.

On the east side near Stark Street and 128th Avenue, the new Calico Place development will feature an elevator in each of its 18 condominium units, according to co-listing agent Al Syverson of Portland Metro Realtors. Expected to be complete in spring 2008, the condos range in size from 2,100 square feet with three bedrooms and 3.5 baths to 2,600 square feet with four bedrooms. Prices range from \$325,000 to \$395,000.

"The demographics we're looking at are the baby boomers," Syverson said. "We don't have room to put in one-story homes. Lots are smaller and more expensive nowadays."

In addition to an elevator, each home at Calico Place will also feature an audio/video intercom system that allows residents to see visitors at the door and let them in remotely.

Going up?

Buyers in the market for detached single-family homes with elevators may have to look a bit, but they can be found. Working with a buyer's agent who has members-only access to the Regional Multiple Listing Service (RMLS) database is the surest bet. However, public-access options with more limited results can be

viewed at www.homebridge.org or www.rmls.com (click "yes" on accessibility when entering search parameters).

Kathi Rota -- a broker with Windermere/Stellar Group -- is listing a four-bedroom, 3,747-square-foot contemporary home in Washougal, Wash., for \$500,000.

The home's four levels are served by an elevator.

"Just about any kind of family can be in there," said Rota, from an elderly homeowner who wants an elevator to avoid stairs, to parents of teenagers who would prefer the kids' bedrooms be on a different level than their own.

Decks on the top two levels offer a tranquil, southern-facing view, Rota said. "It's sort of a European-Swedish contemporary design," said Rota, with a vaulted ceiling and decor that includes deep reds, greens and gold. Other than the carpeting in bedrooms, she added, "all finishes are marble, wood or granite."

Rota also soothes concerns that potential buyers may have about elevators. A far cry from a rickety elevator in a high-rise tenement, the Washougal home lift was manufactured in 2003. "You don't feel like you're in an old building," Rota said.

Rachel Reynolds, a principal broker with Coldwell Banker Barbara Sue Seal Properties, is listing a custom-built house on Southwest Mapleridge Drive in Portland with an elevator.

The four-level "ultra-contemporary" home is built into a hillside and offers fabulous west-side views, said Reynolds. Built in 1983, the five bedroom, 5,126-square-foot home is priced at \$899,900.

The spacious home is bursting with high-end contemporary details, from the colors and angles of the floor plan to its square-seated toilets. "They just paid for top-of-the-line for everything," said Reynolds.

Although many of the home's features draw attention, said Reynolds, **the elevator has produced the most buzz among potential buyers.**

"It's the most fun thing," she said.