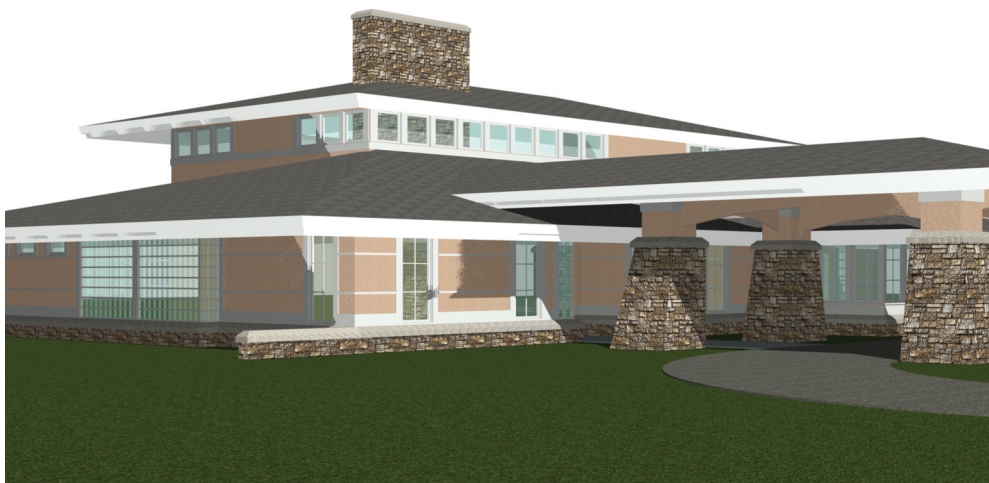


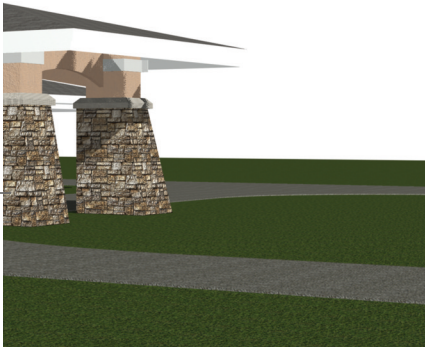
*Making it happen*  
**Kitchen first**



Illustrations by Patrick Manley,  
Manley Architecture Group

# on design list

by Rosemarie Rossetti, Ph.D.



Rosemarie  
and Mark  
break  
ground for  
their new  
home.



Kitchen illustrations by  
Brian Pickard, Pickard  
Design, Ltd.

In my opinion, the most important room in a house is the kitchen. This room is not only for food storage, preparation and cleanup, but is also a social gathering spot. It is important to design a kitchen right to avoid future remodeling, and to make life easier. When family members have disabilities, this often results in physical limitations that impact mobility, independence, and access in the home.

My home intensified my disability after my spinal cord injury in 1998. My kitchen is the room that gives me the most frustration, since I use a wheelchair to get around. No longer am I totally self sufficient when cooking, because there are items I can't access and must rely on my husband, Mark Leder, to get them.

For the past nine years I have been dreaming of a new home. Soon construction



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will begin on our home that has been carefully designed by our architect, Patrick Manley; kitchen and bath designer, Mary Jo Peterson; interior designer, Anna Lyon, and my husband, and I. The Universal Design Living Laboratory ([www.udll.com](http://www.udll.com)) will serve as a national demonstration home to showcase universal design and green building practices.

The universal design features will enable me to have better access in the kitchen. To insure there is adequate space for me to turn around in my wheelchair, the architect drew in five foot diameter circles on the kitchen floor plan. These circles confirmed that my wheelchair would not be colliding with the base cabinets and appliances, and that the kitchen would be large enough for Mark and me to work side by side.

In the design process, it was determined that the sink, cooktop and appliances needed to be positioned in convenient locations to facilitate meal preparation and cleanup. We selected a design with an L-shaped arrangement of the countertops and a center island.

My husband is six foot four inches tall, and we needed to consider his height and comfort level at the countertop. Seated in my wheelchair, I am four foot two inches tall. Traditional countertops are 36 inches high, and not at a comfortable height for a seat-

ed person to chop food. We decided to place our countertops at 34 inches to be more ergonomic for me, and not a strain on Mark's back.

For me to get close to the countertops, it is important that my wheelchair footrest clear the toe kick area at the base of the cabinets. For this reason, we selected the KraftMaid Passport series cabinets that have a nine inch high by six inch deep toe kick at the base. This will get me about two inches closer to the countertops, compared to cabinets without this toe kick size.

These cabinets will have C or D shaped handles on the doors and drawers making it easier to pull them open. The wall cabinets will be hung a few inches lower than traditional cabinets, since the countertops are lower. We will install Hafele articulated shelves in these cabinets so they can be pulled down low and be reachable from a seated position. The drawers and shelves will be able to be fully extended so items in the back can be accessed.

The cooktop and sink will also be 34 inches high and will have knee space under these areas so I can pull in closer. There will be a pot filler on the wall behind the cooktop so that it is more convenient to add water to the pans. The controls for the cooktop burners will be front mounted for safety reasons so that anyone cooking

does not have to reach across the hot burners. The controls for the ventilation light and fan will be mounted at countertop level so they are within my reach. The dishwasher will be elevated about eight inches above the floor, making it easier to load and unload.

The center island is eight feet by five feet and has one end 48 inches high, while the other end is 30 inches high, allowing space for a work surface to chop food and informal dining. The microwave and oven will be installed within my reach at the end of the island that is 48 inches tall. Both appliances have side hinges allowing for easier and safer access from a seated position. Gaggenau is one of the

only ovens available with a side hinge; however there are many brands of microwaves with side hinges.

Kitchen design is a job for professionals. Select a universal design expert who understands how space planning will impact your life. Let your needs be known and communicate how you want to work in the space that is being planned. Your access and independence can be enhanced with proper planning.

*Rosemarie Rossetti, Ph.D. is building a national model universal design home in metropolitan Columbus, Ohio. She is a speaker, trainer, consultant, and author. [www.RosemarieSpeaks.com](http://www.RosemarieSpeaks.com) To learn more about the Universal Design Living Laboratory go to: [www.UDLL.com](http://www.UDLL.com) \**



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