

**The**  
**Empty**  
**Nester's**  
**Guide**

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**to Designing Your**

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**Forever**  
**Home**

*How to Plan for the Adult Lifestyle  
You've Always Wanted by Creating the  
Empty Nester Home of Your Dreams*

*“The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.”* LAO TZU

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Becoming an empty nester can mean big changes in a couple's lifestyle and purpose. Fewer daily responsibilities often means more time together and greater personal freedom. Many see their new kid-free status as an opportunity to create a new lifestyle in a different setting.

**In this next stage of life will you be...**

**...traveling the globe?** If so, you may want a turnkey townhouse or condo that offers a well-appointed place to land between trips, and staff to maintain the grounds and shovel snow whether you are home or abroad.

**...dreaming of a design custom-fit to your taste and needs?** You might look for an older home in an established community that's ready for a gut renovation.

**...eschewing square footage in favor of luxury design?** Why not downsize to a smaller detached house? Forgo the spare bedrooms and spaces you never use in favor of high quality furnishings, fixtures, and finishes.

**...exploring a more lavish way of living in a larger home?** Perhaps after raising your family in a modest house and having reached a level of increased affluence you're ready to leave everything behind and start over again. This may mean new appliances, furniture, and art that suits your evolved taste and level of sophistication.

In each of these scenarios there are many decisions to consider. What are the features you want in a home? What kind of investment are you prepared to make? If this is your forever home, how can you plan for aging in place in a style that will suit you now and for years to come? If these questions seem daunting, don't be discouraged. We're here to help you start your research and point you in the right direction.

## WHAT YOU'LL FIND IN THIS GUIDE

This guide is designed to help you start planning for the home of your dreams, a home that lets you celebrate a lifetime of hard work, not one that feels like a hospital with clinical fixtures, devoid of style. We work with clients like you everyday, reviewing the details of their designs, explaining the process, and making sure they've considered everything that makes aging in place a beautiful possibility. In this guide we share those valuable insights so that you can make informed decisions and articulate yourself to the professionals you work with along the way.



# Form and Function for Your Dream Home

*"We don't stop playing because we grow old.  
We grow old because we stop playing."* **GEORGE BERNARD SHAW**



***The screened in area (roller screens open up when the bugs are gone) has a ceiling fan and infrared heater. This covered portion of the deck is level with the floor inside- making easy accessibility.***

It's often said that you don't know what you don't know. With that in mind, when planning for a new home you may find yourself asking, "is there anything I'm forgetting?" It's hard enough to make a complete list when you know what you need. Building the home where you'll spend your retirement means the start of a new life with more free time than ever before and often in a new locale. This can make for a lot of variables and unknowns.

When working with our clients on these types of projects, we like to draw attention to often-overlooked

opportunities and potential roadblocks alike. Once we establish what you should plan for, we also talk about the things you could include that you might not have thought of before.

With that in mind, here are our top five lifestyle considerations for empty nesters:

**The Master Plan** — Has a snoring spouse been keeping you up at night? Some couples may want separate places to sleep. This could be 2 separate equal suites, or a Master and a Junior Master, or add a separate small sleeping/sitting room adjacent to the master. Separate closets are popular requests if space allows.

**A Home for Your Hobbies** — Find a convenient, easy to access spot for heavy or bulky equipment such as golf clubs or other sporting equipment.

Creating a fitness area at home will make it more likely that you'll keep in shape if going to the gym isn't part of your routine. Do you love to play bridge, or want to get back to playing piano? If you have a grand piano and think you might get back to playing it, lets figure out where it will go as it can't easily be tucked into a corner.

**The Great Outdoors** — With more time to truly savor and enjoy your day, you should also think about your favorite ways to enjoy the outdoors. Consider including some or all of the following features:

- A screened in porch is a welcome addition in our mosquito infested area.
- Infrared heaters or a fireplace can extend the use for many months of the year.
- A ceiling fan will help keep you cooler in the summer.
- Outdoor fire pits, kitchens and beautifully designed patios provide extended outdoor living and entertaining.

### **Entertaining and Visitors**

Start by thinking about how you like to entertain:

- Do you like to dine in a formal dining room?
- Do you prefer to grill and hang out on the deck?
- Will you host large family events?
- Do you prefer smaller gatherings?
- Will children and babies be coming to stay?
- Consider the sizes of rooms, the types of accommodations and storage that will be needed, and the amount of separation for noise control during gatherings. For those staying overnight, consider how you can make them feel comfortable and semi-independent.



# Accessibility and Safety

Attractive Solutions to Living Independently Longer

*“The trick is to age gracefully and make it look great, so that everyone looks forward to it.”* **EMMA THOMPSON**

No one likes to contemplate the physical limitations that might come with aging, but if you're truly building your forever home, now is the time to plan for safety and accessibility. The truth is an accident could limit your mobility at any time, so why risk inadequate fore-planning when creating this forever home? With the help of an informed design professional your house can be safe and beautiful, without feeling like a retirement facility.

Each year, over 8 million emergency room visits are due to slips, trips, and falls and, as many of these accidents occur in the home, they are preventable to a certain degree. **Here are some tips for safety and accessibility throughout the home:**

- Use **slip-resistant flooring** materials like textured porcelain or stone, rubber or linoleum tile, or wood floors with anti slip finish.
- **Area rugs can be a tripping hazard**, especially for those whose walking ability is impaired. Although more common in public facilities than homes, rugs can be recessed into a wood floor or tiled area to create a flush surface.
- **Doorways and pathways should be wide enough** for someone using a walker or wheelchair to navigate safely.
- **Sliding and pocket doors** are a good option to avoid large swinging doors that impede easy passage. Self-closing hardware is available for sliding doors.
- For swinging doors, **lever handles** are easier to use than knobs for anyone who experiences difficulty with their hands or wrists. They also come in handy if your hands are dirty or full.

***Pocket doors are not only easy to open, but can slide out of sight, creating uninterrupted openings.***





# Bathrooms

Your ideal Spa, at home

Bathrooms are one area where your ability to function independently is especially valued. Grab bars in particular seem to be a sticking point for many of our clients. The good news is there are many options that are attractive and safe. Many safety features serve multiple purposes — like towel bars and toilet paper holders with integrated grab bars — and can be incorporated into your overall design scheme in a deliberate way. **Other tips for the bathroom include:**

- If you don't want **grab bars** now, put blocking in the walls — and have a sketch of the location — or put plywood behind all the walls in the bathroom so they can be easily installed at a later time.
- A deep soaking tub is easier to get out of than a standard tub. With the **deep tub**, you can sit on the edge with your feet placed solidly under you rather than out in front, as you would to get out of a shallow tub.
- Large showers without doors and/or curb-less entry allow for easier access for walkers, wheelchairs, or the assistance of an aide. **Curb-less entry** and slip-resistant flooring can also reduce the risk of accidents in the space.
- A **seat in the shower** can be useful for those who have trouble standing as well as making life easier for women shaving their legs. A handheld shower installed near the seat will also help in these situations.
- An enclosed or **confined toilet area** makes it more difficult to access if one needs either mechanical or



*Mosaic tile makes a great non slip floor. The flush shower floor (no curb to step over) reduces tripping hazard and allows for easy wheelchair or walker access. The tub deck extends to provide a bench in the shower. The shower door could be removed for easier access in the future.*

personal assistance. Including an electrical receptacle by the toilet allows for easy washlet installation should personal sanitation become difficult. Leave room to retrofit an electronic bidet later if personal sanitation becomes more difficult and make sure to include wiring for an electrical outlet.

- **Toilets with a higher seat**, also known as “comfort height,” make it easier to get up and down. (On the other hand a lower seat is said to be better for people who have trouble with bowel movements.)

*Grab bars can be attractive, not just functional. And this one adds a convenient shelf.*



## The Kitchen

Comfort zone, danger zone



The kitchen can also be quite challenging as time goes on if not designed with aging in place in mind. **Our tips for the kitchen include:**

- Design your kitchen to have **different counter heights**. A table-height counter will allow you to sit in a standard chair while you work, whereas standard height counters require a stool.

*Rather than counter height seating so commonly found at islands, the table as part of the island provides a lower work surface for someone who might need to be seated while preparing a meal.*



*Pantry cabinets at the far end provide ample storage that can be easily reached by people of all abilities.*

- Cooktops with **controls at the front** will be easier and safer to use than the ones with controls on the side.
- Maximize cabinet **storage at easy-to-reach heights**. Tall upper cabinets are hard to reach and can become impossible to access for the physically impaired.
- **Pull out drawers and shelves** make it easier to access items stored in the back of the cabinets.
- Use **easy to grip hardware**. (Pulls instead of knobs)



# Lighting

## Some of Our Favorite Bright Ideas for Your Forever Home

*"A room is like a stage — if you see it without lighting, it can be the coldest place in the world."* **PAUL LYNDE**

Anyone who has held a candle (or their phone) up to a menu at a restaurant knows that retinal deterioration is a part of the aging process. Studies show that a sixty-year-old needs twice as much light as a thirty-year-old. So, naturally, lighting is particularly important when designing for aging in place.

### Quantity and Quality of Light

- Ensure that there is adequate light for **general illumination, avoiding dark spots.**
- Install **dimmers** to allow for bright light when needed, and softer lighting when the mood calls for it.
- Provide ample **direct lighting for task areas** such as under cabinet lights to **illuminate kitchen counters** or other work surfaces or reading lamps where needed.

### Glare & Contrast

- Glare increases retinal deterioration in people of all ages. Use fixtures with **shades or frosted glass to soften the glare of bright bulbs** and avoid fixtures with exposed bulbs.
- **Indirect lighting** produces less glare than the use of recessed down lights, also known as can lights.
- **Avoid shiny dark surfaces** on countertops and tables and even walls, as they can be a source of harsh reflections and glare. The darker the surface, the stronger the glare will be. Use light-colored, honed, and



*Exposed bulbs in the chandelier at left are a source of sharp glare whereas translucent shades are easier on the eye.*

matte or eggshell surfaces and finishes instead.

- Aging eyes experience reduced contrast sensitivity and require more time to adapt to sudden brightness changes. **Keep lighting levels uniform in adjoining rooms** so that your eyes don't have to constantly adjust and use soft lighting behind television and computer screens to reduce eye strain.

## Circadian Rhythms

- The natural cycles of light and dark, also known as circadian rhythms, impact our overall health. There is growing evidence that exposure to white or bluish light at night, like the light from smartphones and other electronic devices, negatively **affects daily biological rhythms, sleep quality, and our immune systems.**
- Consider an LED lighting system with controls to **change the tone of light through the day.** This can also be helpful for those who are either homebound or travel frequently and need help adjusting to jet lag.



*The color temperature of lighting (in degrees Kelvin) changes during the day.  
(Most residential lighting is 2700° - 3500°.)*

## Safety and Accessibility

- Make sure areas such as **stairs are well lit** and free of strong shadows.
- Use lighting and controls, like **luminous light switches and motion sensors**, to assist in “way finding.”
- **Place lighting and electrical controls** at 42” above the floor and electrical outlets at 18” (as opposed to the standard 48” and 12”, respectively) for more universal access.

By addressing these and other similar issues during the planning stages you can account for both comfort and safety for years to come.



# Cost Estimates

## Tips on How to Establish Your budget

*“Some people know the price of everything and the value of nothing.”* **GEORGE BERNARD SHAW**

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The most difficult question for architects, builders, and every other home design professional to answer has got to be, ‘how much will my project cost?’

At the pre-design phase, where you are now, there are untold variables and unknowns that it is truly impossible to provide an accurate answer about construction cost. This question is especially important with in a gut renovation or new build. No one should proceed in the planning of their dream home without a ballpark estimation for cost of construction. This cost will directly impact your overall budget and affect major decisions, like the size of your home, so you need something before you can continue with the design process.

To help you get started, we’ve developed a table that will help you calculate a rough number you can work with so you can start planning to build your new home.

### STEP 1: Sizing Up Your Project

#### How Large of a Home Do You Want to Build?

Square footage is the first thing that comes to mind for many homeowners. Most people, including realtors, consider interior or “conditioned” space in their square footage calculations of a home. But as the way we live changes, so do these calculations. While a foundation and basement are usually included in the square foot cost of the main house, finishing the basement with entertaining spaces, wine cellars, gyms, don’t come for free. These should be included in the square foot pricing.

### STEP 2: Making the Grade

#### Giving Thought to the Level of Construction and Finish for Your New Home

The level of finish and materials can significantly impact the cost of a home and so they should be carefully considered when creating your ballpark cost estimate.

We’ve outlined three levels — Standard, Upscale, and Luxury — to denote the level of quality that would be used to construct your home. Each level is associated with a different tier of construction and takes both the interior and exterior of your home into account from the ground up.

**Standard** — This will be a significant upgrade from a builder spec house, but still feature a cost efficient framing and roof design, standard levels of fixtures and finishes — including floor, wall, and ceiling finishes — and somewhat limited choices in window and door packages.

**Upscale** — This will get you a more custom, design forward home. You'll have more product and materials options — including exterior finishes, upgraded mechanical systems with increased energy efficiency, a larger selection of doors and windows, upgraded kitchens and baths, and more room for splurges like custom items and premium finishes.

**Luxury** — This is the range where you get into high-end, customized homes that get featured in the major design publications. While we included a range for what can truly be an extraordinary luxury home, keep in mind that costs can easily soar well beyond what is indicated as a starting point on our chart.

| <b>Level of Finish</b>                 | <b>STANDARD</b> | <b>UPSCALE</b> | <b>LUXURY</b> |
|--|-----------------|----------------|---------------|
| Cost per square foot of finished space | \$225 - \$275   | \$300 - \$375  | \$400 and up  |

These cost estimates include the cost of building the actual house, basic site work and minimal hardscaping. Extra costs may include additional site work, grading, decks, patios, landscaping, pools and water features, accessory structures (detached garages, sheds, pergolas, and cabanas), professional fees and building permits. Depending on the scope of work and landscape on which you intend to build, these items could add substantially to the overall project budget.

For a major renovation project, the final cost per square foot will generally be lower and vary depending on how much of the original structure and mechanicals are usable. Please see our guide geared towards full house renovations.

You now have a basic understanding of the information you need to start planning for your Empty Nester dream home. By keeping these key factors in mind, you are priming your project for success.

Since each project is unique and the requirements differ based on a multitude of factors, we are unable to offer one exhaustive guide. Please visit [WWW.GARYROSARD.COM](http://WWW.GARYROSARD.COM) for additional resources and guides on a variety of topics including *How to Hire an Architect*.

We understand the seriousness of selecting an architect and hope you'll think of us when the time comes.

*Best wishes for the success of your project!*

*Gary Rosard*