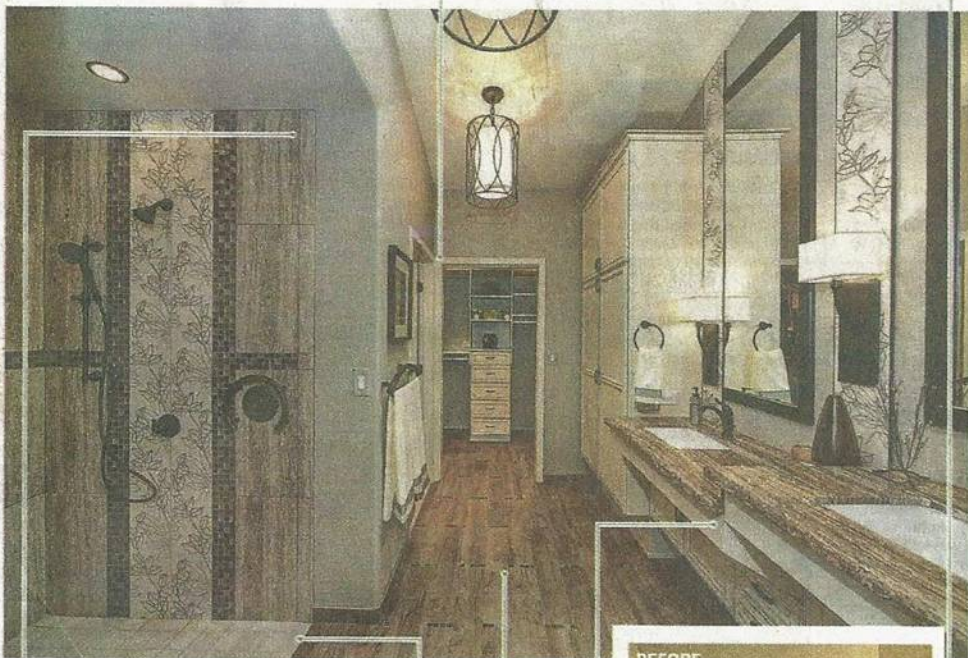


REACH US | TAMERA THORNTON, TAMERA.THORNTON@ARIZONAREPUBLIC.COM | BUSINESS.AZCENTRAL.COM

## 7 ways to modify your home\*



### \*as you age

GREMLYNN WADDELL  
SPECIAL FOR THE REPUBLIC

Nothing beats home. It's where many of us want to stay for as long as possible, even as we age.

And, yet, the varied aspects of senior life — impaired vision, arthritis and limited mobility — can make staying home a challenge. Thanks, however, to smart modifications — like adding grab bars in the bathroom or improving lighting in a hazardous hallway — the concept of "aging in place" is more possible now than ever. Once something of a buzzword, "aging in place" is now a specialty designation in the homebuilding industry. In fact, remodeling professionals with the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) have joined together with AARP, the NAHB's 50+ Housing Council and Home Innovation Research Labs to develop the CAPS, or Certified Aging-In-Place Specialist, program. The designation is not a requirement for remodelers, but those in CAPS undergo training and learn how to build tasteful, barrier-free living spaces suited to the needs of older adults.

"They know how to talk to a family

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Remove rugs to avoid tripping

A variety of colors and textures is pleasing to psyche

Lower counters and add base cabinets

Buy flooring that minimizes risk of falling

Replace doors so they are wheelchair-accessible

"Good design makes life better."

BONNIE LEWIS  
OWNER, 55+ TLC  
INTERIOR DESIGN

BEFORE



Above: A before photo of a bathroom in need of "aging in place" modifications.

Top: The after photo of a bathroom with "aging in place" modifications.

DECASTRO PHOTOGRAPHY

## 'Boomerang buyers' could give boost to Valley market

Many former homeowners start buying again this year as the metro Phoenix's housing market receives a much-needed boost.

They are called boomerang buyers because they were the mortgage market's first victims or short sales during the crash but now can qualify for a second home again.

Most lenders require a six-month sitting out period for borrowers who have defaulted on home loans. That period is over this year for a wave of people to lose homes during the crash.

A new report from national real estate research firm RealtyTrac says as many as 350,000 boomerang buyers could purchase metropolitan Phoenix homes between now and next year, about how many Valley homes were foreclosed on or sold through short sales during the crash.

National housing analyst Robert Burns calls Phoenix the third largest U.S. market for boomerang buyers. Riverside-San Bernardino ranked No. 1 and Los Angeles No. 2.

The boomerang buyer trend actually started a decade ago in the Valley, but the boom in 2014 with the rest of the market.

Some boomerangers, through short sales or home equity loans, have keys over to the former owner's mortgage giant, Freddie Mac, and wait seven years. The first of these buyers really started in 2012, as little as three years after foreclosure for some of them.

Real estate agent Phyllis Chardt was one of the first boomerang buyers. Her husband, Larry, was able to get a VA loan in mid-2012, forced to sell their home through a short sale in 2010. He lost jobs and income during the recession. They applied for a second home loan modification but weren't approved in their house.

The couple was able to buy a new home three years later, but Phyllis Chardt said getting another mortgage wasn't easy.

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# AZ Real Estate



## Modifications

Continued from Page R1

about what they're looking for in a remodel, and they also have the science behind it," said Nissa Hiatt, a NAHB spokesperson. "The work they do doesn't just keep you safe, it looks great, too."

Bonnie Lewis, owner of 55+ TLC Interior Design, LLC, in Scottsdale, a CAPS member and a senior living specialist, said aging-in-place design is going to become even more prevalent as Baby Boomers age. And the best advice she can give to Boomers — or anyone 50 and older — is to start preparing now for the future.

"A lot of times, people wait until something happens, and a lot of times; that's too late, so you have to go into a skilled nursing center or some kind of community" because your home cannot accommodate your injury, be it temporary or permanent, she said, adding that waiting until an event happens causes problems, so it's better to be preventative.

"Good design makes life better."

Of course, most of us never think anything's going to happen, she said. Which is why she often suggests making aging-in-place modifications during standard remodeling jobs. Such tweaks don't cost much more, and since work is already underway, there's no better time, she said. In addition, many aging-in-place modifications don't just aid seniors; they may be helpful, for example, to anyone with a disability, regardless of age.

But that doesn't mean modifications are always an easy sell. Lewis, for instance, remodeled a couple's bathroom and suggested they install grab bars. It was a preventative measure; the bars were not necessary under current conditions. But the homeowners resisted until Lewis reminded them it was a smart investment and told them it's not as if the bars can be bolted into place in a matter of minutes.

"You can't just add grab bars," Lewis said. "The wall has to be able to support 250 to 500 pounds, so it has to be prepared behind the drywall. And that's what we did, in this case. So when they do decide to add grab bars, they can tell the installer, 'They go

here.'"

Other areas in a home that need often can use some aging-in-place modifications. Lewis and Jeff Gorszyk, division manager for Cook Remodeling in Mesa and a CAPS member, listed these seven tips for aging in place:

**1. Cabinetry:** Shelving may need to be lowered so it's more accessible, and you may want to add more base cabinets and drawers instead of doors. Relocating the microwave from above the range to a base cabinet also may help. One client requested a customized pocket door under the kitchen sink, so the standard doors wouldn't get in the way.

**2. Appliances:** A stove with controls at the front is more accessible than models that have the controls at the back; a refrigerator with a French door-opening is typically more accessible than other styles.

**3. Materials:** Contrasting colors and a variety of textures and patterns can provide visual cues for someone whose vision is impaired. "Colors help your psyche," Lewis said.

**4. Flooring:** Falls are a huge problem for older clients, so buy flooring that minimizes risk. Natural travertine, for instance, can catch the heel

of a shoe, walker or cane. Try smooth tile.

**5. Rugs:** Get rid of them. They are a tripping hazard, as well as a slip-and-fall hazard.

**6. Electrical:** Modifications as small as moving the garbage disposal switch — which is usually on the back wall of the kitchen near the sink — can make a big difference, as can lowering wall-mounted light switches.

**7. Doors:** The front door can usually accommodate a wheelchair, but many interior doors, particularly those that lead from a bathroom to a bedroom, often need to be widened for easier access. On another note, replacing traditional door knobs with lever-type handles can make worlds of difference for someone with arthritis.

And don't think it's strictly older homes that can use these changes, Gorszyk said. It's not.

"We've actually gone into homes, after the customer closes on a new build, because the (homebuilder) wouldn't take care of the modifications," he said. "I wish more builders would plan for this."

## Reagor

Continued from Page R1

Real agent Matthew Coates of Chandler-based West USA Realty Revela-

tion said there were more rebound buyers in metro Phoenix during 2012-13 than he is seeing now.

"There's a lot of talk, but minimal activity from boomerang buyers at this time," he said. "Perhaps they are unaware they can buy a home again or they have made a conscious decision to

be renters for the time being."

Lending guidelines are tougher now than a few years ago due to new federal guidelines. Some potential boomerang buyers may have built their credit scores back up to the 700 or higher needed now to qualify for the typical mortgage, but they don't have 10 to

20 percent of a house's cost for a mortgage down payment.

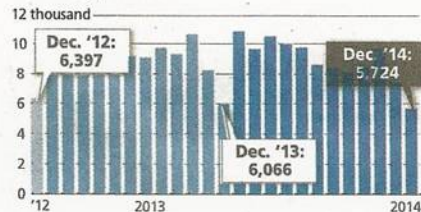
Could it be that many potential boomerang buyers are still waiting for their savings accounts to come back, too?

Reach the reporter at [catherine.reagor@arizonarepublic.com](mailto:catherine.reagor@arizonarepublic.com).

## CHARTING THE MARKET

### FRESH ON THE MARKET

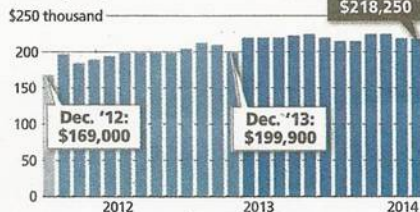
New listings per month



Source: Arizona Regional Multiple Listing Service Inc.

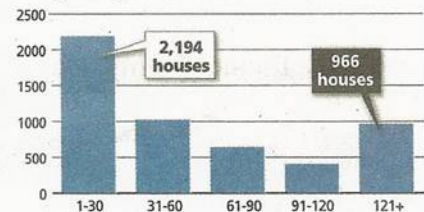
### MEDIAN LISTING PRICE

Median price per month



### DAYS ON THE MARKET

For single-family home sales in December



ALYIA MOOD/THE REPUBLIC