

# 80 million misconceptions!



selling to **People 50+**

by Laurence Weinstein



## **An incredible new home buyers market—**

There are over 80 million age 50+ boomers and many million more older adults in America! It is safe to say that most all of them are very familiar with traditional “on-site” or stick-built homebuilding. It is also safe to say that the majority of them have little or no understanding about the advantages of buying factory-built homes over traditional site-built homes.

Unfortunately, a large percentage of prospective age 50+ homebuyers think of factory-built homes as “mobile homes” of years gone by...and little has been done by the manufactured housing industry to change this incorrect consumer assumption. All one has to do is look at the statistics showing how many site-built homes versus manufactured homes have been built in recent years.

## Who are these 80 million boomers and their aging parents? What do they represent financially?

The current U.S. population over age 50 includes more than 80 million people, with another 40 plus million to be added to its ranks by 2020...and is the fastest growing market today. Someone turns 50 years of age every six seconds. They control 80% of all money in U.S. savings and loan institutions and 77% of all privately held financial assets. The mature market is credited with half of all discretionary spending in the United States. Seniors control 70% of the disposable income in the United States. It's simple math. One-third of the nation controls two-thirds of the spending capital.

The combination of financial success and a wide age span creates disparity within the senior population. While many are already retired and reaping the benefits of comfortable pensions, including health care plans and investments that have doubled in value, the younger end of the spectrum continues to plan and save for retirement. In an unprecedented paradigm shift, both parents and their children are now members of the senior population.

While each group has fared well financially, especially compared to their parents, none has done quite as well as the Baby Boomers and the Silent Generation; that is, people roughly 50 to 70. Moreover, the younger segments in this market are poised to inherit anywhere from \$180 billion to \$11 trillion (depending on the source of the estimate and the impact of the current market on bequeathed assets).

The dramatic rise in the numbers of older Americans will impact on every aspect of U.S. communities. The entire social, physical and fiscal fabric of communities will be affected by the coming "Age Wave". Making homes and communities "Elder Friendly" is a key element of Smart Growth Planning. Communities in the United States are faced with increasingly difficult choices and decisions about how to grow, plan for change, and improve the quality of life for a graying America...including over 54 million Americans of all ages with permanent disabilities, along with many people who will develop disabilities as they grow older.

**I didn't know about manufactured homes:** For over four decades I successfully designed and built many homes of all sizes, shapes, and prices...using traditional on-site construction "technology". Late in 1998, I wrote a widely circulated article for a major publication on the subject of traditional home building pitfalls and shortcomings. I covered such subject areas as lumberyards often supplying warped and wet lumber, subcontractors that often were no-shows, jobsite materials that often mysteriously disappeared, materials that often did not arrive in

a timely manner, "necessary" change orders...and on, and on!

The irony is that in 40 plus years of successful practice as an architect, industrial designer, and builder, I had no real exposure to, or knowledge of factory-built home construction. I did not know that most all of the problems and pitfalls of traditional home-building can be resolved with manufactured homes!

I retired from residential design and construction in early 1999, and in 2002, under long-term contract I became the Livable Homes Housing Consultant for AARP National Events. (AARP has over 37 million age 50+ members). In early



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2002, Champion Homes became one of my AARP National Event exhibitors and at this time they "educated" me about the basics and merits of manufactured homebuilding. They helped me to obtain a good understanding of the methodology, and advantages of manufactured and modular homebuilding over traditional on-site construction.

These past five years I have been concentrating on learning all I can about manufactured and modular homebuilding technology and new advances. Things have gotten worse in the traditional homebuilding industry as the availability of quality building materials and the decline of available experienced and quality subcontractors has continued to substantially dwindle. I have come to believe that manufactured and modular home construction is really the only way to go!

**What special features will make your manufactured homes special and appeal to the needs of the enormous age 50+ market?**

Let's think about powerful words and phrases. How about "*my home*?" These two simple words may be the most emotionally charged phrases that we ever say—with the possible exception of "I love you." Our homes are part of our identities. They are property, certainly, but they are also zones of comfort, security, and independence. They carry memories, hold our possessions, and give us a sense of place and belonging. Our homes are our keys to personal independence and engagement in community life. And they are the setting for socializing with family, friends, and neighbors.

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It is hardly surprising that, year after year, when AARP asks people where they want to live as they age, without hesitation they say, “in my home. My home is the preference of nearly 90 percent of people age 50+. It makes sense,” says William Novelli, AARP president and CEO.

Personal happiness and independence are deeply affected by our level of ability to perform everyday living tasks and activities—especially within our own homes. Even for perfectly healthy individuals, our ability to successfully accomplish daily chores in the home, such as cooking and bathing efficiently and safely, is often seriously impeded by the way most homes have been designed

***“As our lifestyles and needs change...so should our homes change to meet those new needs.”***

and built through the years. What, then, are universal design featured “livable homes” and why are they so important?

At least 1 in 5 Americans is affected by a functional limitation that impacts everyday living activities. Over 54 million Americans of all ages have some form of permanent disability, and many millions more incur an unexpected short term disability. In addition, the large baby-boom generation of almost 80 million are now in their 50's, and as they enter this new life-stage, face changing physical needs requiring practical changes in the home to accommodate these needs. What's more, many are facing important decisions regarding lifestyle options for their aging relatives, such as the challenge of caring for an aging parent or family member in their homes.

Standard design flaws exist in new as well as old homes: Steps leading up to the house create a hazard for youngsters and seniors, and especially anyone who is physically challenged due to any form of mobility impairment. Trying to get something from the top shelf of cabinets can be a challenge for anyone who is short or has difficulty stretching and reaching. Round door knobs can be tricky to use for the small hands of children as well as the arthritic hands of adults. Narrow hallways and doorways are difficult to get through with hands full of groceries, or carrying a young infant, or in a wheelchair. Poor lighting, loose area and throw rugs, slippery floors, etc. are all invitations for an accident waiting to happen.

Universal Design featured  
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What we all want most in life is the ability to maintain our individual independence...especially in the performance of everyday living tasks



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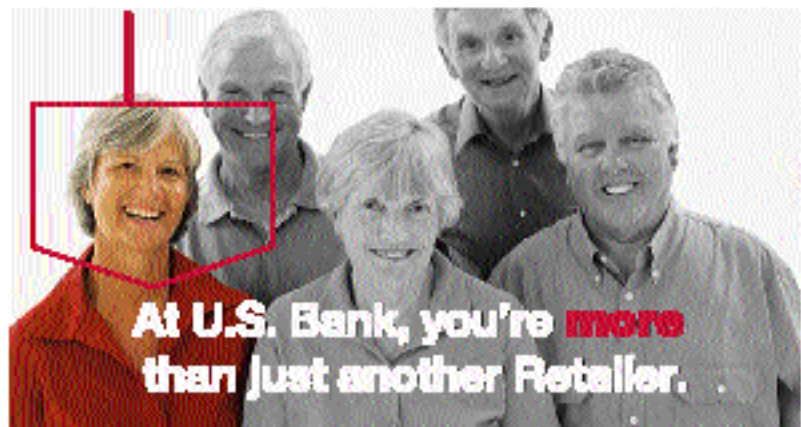
and activities in our homes! New homes can be built, and existing homes changed, in ways to help the great diversity of our nation's population better perform everyday living tasks, and maximize independence, dignity, and safety.

For older adults and people of all ages with some form of disability, the home can become an even greater barrier to safe independent living. Homes that were reasonably convenient when we were younger and in good health, can cause serious problems in later years, or when we incur an unexpected injury affecting our ability to easily walk, bend, grasp, or see. As our lifestyles and needs change...so should our homes change to meet those new needs.

Livable Homes incorporate certain functional and esthetic universal design features that help make them usable, to the greatest extent possible, by *everyone* at all stages of life. The Livable Home is right for all people—whether 8 or 80 years of age. The home incorporating universal design features will accommodate the needs of many different people with varying levels of ability, and these features incorporated into the design of the home will increase its worth and enhance its beauty and function, while maximizing independent and safe living for everyone...through ALL stages of life!

For further information about Universal Design featured Livable Homes, please contact the author at 619-445-6778 or [www.livablehomes.org](http://www.livablehomes.org).

Laurence Weinstein, product designer, architect, contractor/builder, and educator with more than four decades of successful professional experience. Developer and coordinator, AARP National Events Livable Homes Pavilion. President, Shared Solutions America, a national non-profit organization and technology resource center dedicated to the design and development of living environments, products, and technologies that help maximize daily independent living and safety for adults age 50+ and people of all ages with disabilities.



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