

Exhibit focuses on homes that adapt and change with us

April 17 2018, by Katherine Roth



This November 2017 photo provided by the National Building Museum, shows the demographic data segment of the exhibition "Making Room: Housing for a Changing America" now on display at the National Building Museum in Washington, D.C. until September 2018. (Yassine el Mansouri via AP)

Most housing is designed for nuclear families, but most U.S. households don't meet that description.

That's why flexible floor plans—and innovations including moveable walls, smart technology, multifunctional furniture and space-saving features—are the future, according to a new exhibit, "Making Room: Housing for a Changing America," at the National Building Museum in Washington, D.C.

The museum's curator, Chrysanthe Broikos, says only about 20 percent of households today are [nuclear families](#), so housing and zoning rules need to adapt to keep pace with demographic changes. In addition to interiors, the exhibit highlights a number of studies on housing, and information about what's going on around the country in new development and zoning.

"We're trying to say 'Hey, what are the other 80 percent of households doing?' Broikos says.

The exhibit features an "Open House" designed by Italian architect Pierluigi Colombo, co-founder of the design firm Clei, to show how a flexible space can adapt to accommodate three different living arrangements. Initially set up to house four imaginary roommates (two singles and a couple), the space was then transformed to house an imaginary multigenerational family. At the end of May, the space will be reconfigured again to house an imaginary retired couple, and will include a rental apartment. The show, which opened Nov. 18, runs through Sept. 16.



This November 2017 photo provided by Resource Furniture and Clei shows a "daytime" interior view of The Open House, the concept home on display in the National Building Museum exhibition "Making Room: Housing for a Changing America" in Washington, D.C. (Resource Furniture via AP)

Although the Open House is only 1,000 square feet, it feels much larger—and allows for flexibility—because all the beds fold up to become walls, sofas or tables, and it features acoustically sound motorized moving wall systems made by the Wisconsin-based Hufcor company, long known for making the bigger moving walls used in gyms and ballrooms.

"A floor plan should not just be a picture in time. It should be adaptable," says Lisa Blecker, marketing director at Resource Furniture, whose multifunctional furnishings are featured in the exhibit.

"The big takeaway is that if you're planning to renovate or reconfigure your home, it's essential to think about the long term and opportunities for flexibility in years to come," she says. "The makeup of a household is fluid and, more than ever, home layouts, wall configurations and furnishings need to keep up with those changes."



This November 2017 photo provided by the National Building Museum, shows the entrance to the exhibition "Making Room: Housing for a Changing America" now on display at the National Building Museum in Washington, D.C. until September 2018. (Yassine el Mansouri/ National Building Museum via AP)

The beauty of the home set up in the exhibit is that it can accommodate multiple household configurations without moving bathrooms or the kitchen.

"And the kitchen has been carefully designed to work well for children, millennials, older people and someone in a wheelchair," Blecker says.

The kitchen in the exhibit features adjustable-height counters for wheelchair accessibility. Pull-down cabinet fittings, which allow high shelves to be pulled down to almost counter height, save people from having to stand on stools to reach upper shelves.



This November 2017 photo provided by Resource Furniture and Clei shows a "nighttime" interior view with the Hufcor motorized partition walls closed in The Open House, the 1,000 square foot concept home on display in the National Building Museum exhibition "Making Room: Housing for a Changing America" in Washington, D.C. (Resource Furniture via AP)

Bathrooms are compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act, and sinks are mounted separately from the vanity so a wheelchair can be accommodated without redoing the plumbing.

"We will always need single-family homes and apartments that are designed to accommodate a nuclear family," says Sarah Watson, deputy director of the Citizens Housing & Planning Council, which helped organize the exhibit. "But today, the majority of our households are comprised of singles living alone, multi-generational families, and adults sharing their homes with roommates. Our population is also aging rapidly and will need new housing options that can support aging-in-place with diminished physical or cognitive abilities."

Dan Soliman, director of the AARP Foundation, a major funder of the exhibit, says that one-fifth of U.S. adults will be 65 or older by 2030, "and a recent AARP study found that almost 90 percent of people want to continue living in their own home for as long as possible."

"We need more designs like this one to meet the needs of individuals and families through all stages of their life," he says.



This February 2018 image provided by Resource Furniture shows a "daytime" view of the floorplan of The Open House, the 1,000 square foot concept home on display in the National Building Museum exhibition "Making Room: Housing for a Changing America" in Washington, D.C. (Resource Furniture via AP)



This February 2018 image provided by Resource Furniture shows the floorplan of The Open House, the 1,000 square foot concept home on display in the National Building Museum exhibition "Making Room: Housing for a Changing America" in Washington, D.C. In this "nighttime" view, the wall beds are open in each living space and the acoustic partition wall systems are closed. (Resource Furniture via AP)



This November 2017 photo provided by the National Building Museum, shows part of the exhibition "Making Room: Housing for a Changing America now on display at the National Building Museum in Washington, D.C. until September 2018." (Yassine el Mansouri via AP)

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Citation: Exhibit focuses on homes that adapt and change with us (2018, April 17) retrieved 20 September 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2018-04-focuses-homes.html>

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