



Custom-built home makes life so much easier

PARAPLEGIC Phillip Blundell knows firsthand the benefits of living in the right environment.

In a wheelchair since a military helicopter accident 26 years ago, Mr Blundell, 57, custom built his Silverstream house to meet his needs.

Everything is accessible, with sliding doors that save space as well as being easy to open.

In the kitchen, the microwave opens downward and the oven sideways. Benches are low, drawers rather than shelves give access to virtually anything needed for cooking. The laundry, behind triple sliding doors, is designed so he can stow dirty clothes in pullout bins, use the combination under-bench washer/dryer or take washing to the outside line accessible off the deck near the spa pool.

Two of the three wheelchair-accessible bathrooms have wet-area showers.

It was about independence, he said.

"It just changes your life. You don't need to be so dependent on other people, you can go anywhere in the house and do things."

While his old house had been adapted for his needs, it was still an old house, he said. "It wasn't always easy to get around."

Building houses to allow for adaptation for disabilities was just common sense he said, like insulation and double glazing – things his house has in abundance.

Builders, apprentices and architects should be learning it in their training, he said.

"They should be thinking smarter about houses."

The same lessons had come into play when he needed to find a retirement home for his parents. Their hilly house with plenty of steps had left them prisoners in their own home as mobility became more difficult, he said.

Mr Blundell eventually settled on a place with the Lifemark, because it allowed his parents to regain independence.

"They're not having to fit in with the design of the house."



Wheelchair accessible: Two of Phillip Blundell's bathrooms have wet-area showers

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Environmentally friendly: Paraplegic Phillip Blundell had his one-level Silverstream house specially built to meet his needs. It comes with sliding doors and low benches, and appliances that can be easily operated by someone in a wheelchair. Photos: ANDREW GORRIE