

Manly Daily Home Living

Changes give industry a lift

KATHRYN WELLING

A private elevator was once the domain of the seriously wealthy and it conjures up visions of being whisked up floors in panelled interiors within big sprawling mansions.

However they are proving popular on the northern beaches with hundreds being installed in the past three years.

They are not vast, indeed you could call them mini, but they are very much the new luxury appliances on the peninsula and they are going into the most modest of homes.

Liftshop director Les Katz said a relaxing of industry standards for residential lifts, improved technology and cheaper products have stimulated a big interest in mini-lifts, both for those who need them for medical reasons and for those who regard it as a luxury item.

"The affluent nature of the peninsula, the topography and the fact that people here are

aging has meant that one-third of our business is on the northern beaches," he said.

Nine years ago his business consisted of himself and an electrician from Frenchs Forest. Today Les employs nine full-time staff and the number of lifts he is installing annually has grown fourfold.

They have overtaken the much cheaper "stairchair" option and lend a sense of wealth to the house.

Pittwater Council principal strategic planner, Caroline Kades, said Pittwater was aging and the whole issue of housing senior people was a big question for council.

"The State Government's policy on senior living also demands all sorts of access requirements, for example lift access from basement parking," she said.

Census figures for Pittwater show that the percentage of the population aged over 74 has jumped 26 per cent over four years with 3717 people in that age bracket.



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MAN FOR THE JOB: Liftshop director Les Katz at Sacred Heart Primary School.

Lifts to deliver designer lifestyle

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The number aged between 55 and 74 has climbed by more than 17 per cent.

A Warringah Council spokeswoman confirmed planners were seeing more lifts installed and developers were using them as a marketing tool.

"And our population is aging at a greater rate than the rest of Sydney. The proportion of people in Warringah aged over 65 is about 15 per cent compared to between 11 and 12 per cent for the rest of Sydney," she said.

As more and more people aspire to having a view, extend their homes with second storeys and develop more and more valuable land the demand for easy access grows.

There are basically two methods of getting upstairs without walking: the incline method and the vertical method.

There are numerous inclinators or stairchair products on the market that effortlessly take people upstairs without using their legs. They cost around \$7500 for a straight run staircase but can climb to up to \$20,000.

A wheelchair platform works in a similar way; a wheelchair is pushed onto a metal platform and is slowly raised up the side of an existing staircase.



Les Katz

"But these are very much reluctant sales," Les said.

"People buy them because they must and they are often very cost sensitive . . . whereas a lift, while it does the same thing, smacks of luxury and being rich."

With prices as low as \$32,000 the mini-lift (taking up to four people or 350kg) has become something of a designer feature without the label of disability.

Property developer David Livingstone, of Bilgola, is building seven houses for seniors in Bardo Rd, Newport

and has decided to put in three individual lifts as a selling point.

"They are costing \$40,000 each but we spending it because they are a big plus in a development and we believe we'll get it back. People don't move from the peninsula, they downsize, and a lift is a luxury item when you are young and a necessity as you age," he said.

Much of the red tape of installing a lift into a private home has been cut.

You don't need a building application from your local council if it is inside the house, you no longer need separate electricity circuits and Workcover inspections and they can be installed within 18 weeks with nothing more than a 240-volt single power point.

The government does require annual inspections and registration but the responsibility for maintenance now rests with the owner.

Phil Crowther, of Harbord, is installing a \$40,000 lift into his home to make access and bringing in the shopping easier.

"Also at Christmas half the family wouldn't be able to visit us with our stairs unless we had a lift," he said. "For me, it's a good investment."



HOME LIVING

WANT the latest in luxury appliances? Private homes on the northern beaches have been given a lift with the increasing popularity of elevators. Businesses such as those run by Liftshop director Les Katz (pictured) have boomed over the past three years. But they are not just the domain of the rich.