

Building a Basement Apartment

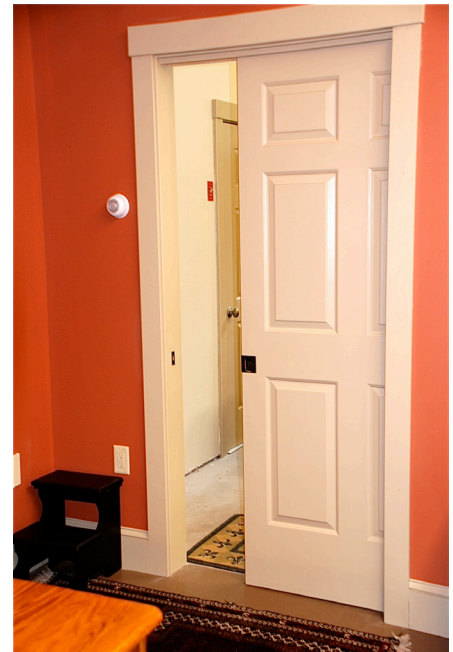
Basement apartments are growing in popularity because they provide three big benefits. Besides offering affordable housing for people looking to rent, the additional income also makes it easier for homeowners to carry a mortgage. Comfortably housing more people in fewer buildings offers environmental benefits, too. The trick to basement suite success at your house depends on dealing with two very different kinds of challenges.

The first and most important part of success is partnering with the right kind of contractor. It's not as simple as it sounds, and enthusiasm is one reason why. Your enthusiasm.

It's easy to let the prospect of new living space lull you into a sense of impatience. Too often the result involves hitching up with a contractor that you don't really know, while tackling a job that hasn't been fully outlined on paper.

Take the time to get references on at least three contractors, then follow them up. You need to visit completed jobs, as well as clients in the middle of jobs right now. You also need to do some thinking on your own.

Homeowner indecision is one of the most common and expensive renovation mistakes. You can't expect a contractor to tell you what you really want in a renovated



Pocket doors slide into adjoining walls on hidden tracks, eliminating the need to reserve floor space otherwise required for the arc of a hinged door. Since they're so efficient, pocket doors are especially useful for maximizing space in basement suites.

Photo credit: Chris Hollinrake

basement. Design, materials and floor plan are up to you. Do you have trouble making decisions like these? Consider hiring a renovation coach. Good ones optimize design, assess price quotes and knock the fluff out of inflated estimates. The money a reno coach saves typically more than pays their fee. But coach or no coach, incomplete contracts are a classic trap you need to watch for.

Every last detail of construction needs to be spelled out in writing, including the type and brand of plumbing fixtures, lights, cabinet hardware,