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FINDING YOUR HOME'S HIDDEN (STORAGE) POTENTIAL

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Finding Your Home's Hidden (Storage) Potential

By Stacy Green

“Grow where you’re planted.” Good advice, but how does a homeowner follow it when the house feels like it’s bursting at the seams with clutter, or languishing from underuse, or both? Without changing a home’s footprint or adding an additional floor, built-ins, from furniture like bookshelves to features like cutting boards, can offer enhanced storage, greater function, and more.

Take, for example, a recently remodeled 1916 bungalow in which the rooms had been poorly designed and scaled, diminishing their utility and charm. Some rooms felt vacant; others, cramped. The clients wanted to get greater function and storage from their rooms while conferring distinct identities upon them.

Key to this whole house remodel, designed and executed by Craftsman Design and Renovation, are the many built-ins that add client-specific functionality and historical detail. Working within the existing footprint, the designers saved the clients money by giving them additional storage in the form of built-ins that capitalize on underutilized space.

We’re not talking about just your usual bookcases here. In the home’s kitchen, the remodel added storage, seating, and period character with built-in furniture. A bench and wine rack allow space for entertaining guests, who can peruse the wines within arm’s reach and find a place for a glass on the oversized armrest. Storage is maximized with drawers for linens and shelves for cookbooks integrated into the bench. A built-in buffet with custom leaded glass provides additional storage in period-appropriate style. In the range work area, a customized knife holder in the butcher block cutting board ensures the right blade is always at hand.

Built-ins can work their wonders on virtually every room in your home. From basement to attic, custom-designed installations like benches and seating areas can add space where you least thought possible and carve out character from nondescript rooms. Even if you have ample space, say a large boxy basement or kitchen, built-ins can “commit” specific areas to a purpose — for study or work here or lounging and entertaining area there.

For example, in the aforementioned bungalow, a large, drafty, and charmless sunroom belied its name and dared the designers to assign it a purpose other than housing three cat boxes. Eliminating most of a wall of windows allowed space for built-ins that give the room clear purpose. With a variety of installations — an extra-deep “sofa” bench, cabinetry, and a



A custom-designed daybed makes room for sewing and crafts by day and rolls out to provide a queen-size bed by night.

All “after” photos by Pete Eckert/Eckert & Eckert Photography



Above; The sewing room felt nondescript and improvised. The closet was removed to make additional space for the family room's entertainment unit.

Right; The pull-out work surface in the sewing room's bookshelf lends an area for cutting fabrics and other tasks, without imposing on the graciousness of this occasional guestroom.

“boot bench” — the room now serves equally varied functions: mudroom, entertaining space, and reading nook, all while discreetly accommodating the felines with an under-bench built-in litter box (complete with remote fan and venting).

Likewise, the upstairs landing assumed a definite identity as a family room with customized bookcases built into previously unaccessed space flanking the stairwell and a matching entertainment center adding a pervasive craftsman statement. The adjacent sewing room gained storage and an additional function as a guest room, with a daybed that rolls out for a night's stay. When visitors are gone, the resident quilter can pull out a work surface from the built-in bookshelf and resume her projects.

You don't need large, empty space for a built-in to have impact. Even in the smallest, unlikeliest places, a built-in may be the answer to what ails a room. A tight bathroom, for instance, expands its function with the addition of a built-in seat with storage or laundry chute underneath, or even just a niche built into the shower surround for toiletries.

While built-ins do commit a space to a certain purpose, they can also be flexible in their function. For their client, Craftsman Design created a nursery to meet the evolving needs of childhood. When the couple's new baby arrived, a single bookshelf did double duty as a changing table, built to the right height and to accommodate a padded cushion on top. As the child grows older, a pullout in the bookshelf with grommet for cables can serve as a laptop desk. A clever, customized wardrobe also exhibits growth potential, as its shelves can be removed to hang increasingly longer clothes.

Keep in mind that built-ins deliver that something extra that furniture can't: They add to the character and value of your home. Whether in a vintage ranch or an early-century Foursquare, well-designed and -constructed built-ins lend authenticity to their surroundings by adding period detail.

Finally, nothing makes a house feel as personalized as customized built-ins, be it a shoe shelf niche built into the footwear fanatic's closet, or a media center that transforms a no-man's land into a family room. For a room, or an entire house, with an unclaimed identity or lacking needed storage, built-ins can be a multi-purpose solution. Visit www.craftsmandesign.com to view their portfolio or call 503-239-6200 for more information. ■

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Customized built-ins allow a nursery to grow with the child. The wardrobe has shelves that hold a myriad of baby clothes but can later be removed to make way for hanging clothes.



The under-sized entry into the attic space (right) was moved and incorporated as a cabinet door (far left) into the entertainment center (shown above), which now commits the room to a new statement and purpose.



A bathroom gets and gives the spa treatment with toiletry nooks built into the tile shower and a bench for a quick pedicure or extra towels. A lower drawer front conceals a laundry chute.

Understanding the Government Stimulus Packages and Your Home Renovations

By J. Hanson-O'Connell

Home renovators who purchase an energy-efficient refrigerator, washer, dryer, or other qualifying home appliance may be eligible to receive a \$50 to \$200 rebate from the federal government later this fall. The money is available through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act — also known as the stimulus package. But the bigger reward offers homeowners a tax credit that can add up to thousands of dollars for qualifying home improvements that increase energy-efficiency.

Energy-efficient products are “not just dollars and cents — they also makes sense for the environment,” says Maria Vargas, spokesperson for the Energy Star program, a collaboration between the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Energy, which evaluates the efficiency of home products and awards Energy Star ratings to those that qualify. “The average house is responsible for twice the greenhouse gas emissions as a car,” she says.

As part of the stimulus plan's numerous programs, \$5 billion dollars is available through the Department of Energy's Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP). The WAP allows income-eligible homeowners to receive up to \$6,500 for sealing up a house from energy leaks. (Income thresholds were raised under the new legislation to \$44,100 for a family of four, or \$29,140 for a family of two.)¹ Additionally, upgrading your weatherstripping, insulation, and windows may save enough energy that the improvements pay for themselves within five years, says Vargas.

Receive a \$1,500 Tax Credit

Even if you don't qualify for a government subsidy on weatherization, you may still receive much as \$1,500 in tax credits per homeowner for various improvement projects. To qualify for the credit, upgrades

must be made to an existing home, which serves as the homeowners' principal residence.

Here's a summary of the main home renovations in the stimulus plan that are eligible for the credit if items are purchased and “placed into service” in 2009 or 2010. Keep in mind that the \$1,500 tax credit is for all home improvements combined, and labor costs are not counted toward the total.

Insulation: Along with sealing up leaks, experts generally recommend that insulation be the first upgrade a homeowner considers. This is especially true if you live in a house that is 40 years or older, because insulation deteriorates over time. Insulation requirements must meet 2009 standards set by the International Energy Conservation Code.² The insulation must have a five-year life span or two-year warranty, and insulated siding does not qualify.

Roofing: The government will give you back 30% of what you spend, provided the roofing material has a two-year warranty or is expected to last five years. Any metal or asphalt roofing product with an Energy Star rating qualifies for the tax credit.



Photo courtesy of Millgard Windows & Doors

Windows and Doors: The tax credit will pay 30% of costs for qualified window

upgrades. Keep in mind, however, that only the most efficient windows, doors, and skylights on the market qualify for the credit. The requirements are stringent: Windows and doors purchased after June 1, 2009 must have both a “U-factor” and a “Solar Heat Gain Coefficient” (SHGC) below .30. The U-factor measures the rate at which heat leaks from a window; the SHGC measures how well the window blocks heat caused by sunlight. The standard product lines of most manufacturers, even many with an Energy Star rating, don't meet these requirements.³

HVAC: The tax credit can be applied toward eligible heating, ventilation, and central air-conditioning units. This includes biomass stoves, air source heat pumps, furnaces, boilers, water heaters, and advanced main air-circulating fans. The purpose of the credit is to encourage consumers to purchase units with greater energy efficiency when they replace a product. Keep in mind, however, that not all Energy Star products qualify for the credit.⁴

Tankless Water Heaters: You may claim a tax credit for 30% of the full purchase price, including installation, for residential tankless water heaters that have an energy factor of 0.82 (or greater), or a thermal efficiency of at least 90%.

In general, most qualifying products have a Manufacturer Certification Statement. Be sure to save your receipts and this statement for your tax records. Improvements made in



1. For additional questions about the Weather Assistance Program, call the program hotline at 800-363-3732. 2. www.iccsafe.org. 3. The National Fenestration Rating Council, which labels windows and doors for efficiency, has compiled a list of qualifying windows available at www.nfrc.org/windowshop/index.aspx. 4. View the Energy Star criteria at www.energystar.gov.