

Finished basement enhances home

BY TEENA HAMMOND GOMEZ • SPECIAL TO THE COURIER-JOURNAL • FEBRUARY 21, 2009

your basement is only used to stash holiday decorations and things the **kids** have outgrown, it might be time to look into finishing at least part of the area to add square footage to your home.

Rick Atkins, owner and CEO of Handyman Matters franchises in Louisville and Lexington, said that homeowners should do their research on anyone they might hire. Make sure the person is licensed, and ask to see an insurance certificate.

"Then ask if they use their own employees or subcontractors, and if they do background checks on their employees," Atkins said. "Call the Better Business Bureau and check out the company online. Ask for references. Or check with the Homebuilders Association of Louisville and ask for recommendations."

Once you've picked out a contractor, the next step is to decide what you want to do with your basement. Will it be for entertaining? Or a **home office** or exercise room? Do you want to leave some room for storage?

Local remodeling and renovation pro Kevin Estes, president of Integrity Contracting Solutions in Louisville, said that recently he's seen more homeowners finishing their basement as an alternative to moving. "People are putting money and effort into making the best out of what they have," he said. "Basements and attics are probably the least expensive places where you can add usable square footage. You're not increasing the footprint or roofline, so it makes life easier and more economical than moving."

One of the first steps for homeowners to take when finishing their basement is to eliminate any water leaks. It can be hard to eliminate all dampness, since a certain amount of moisture wicks through the concrete in most basements, so Estes recommends using an alternative to drywall that reduces mold growth. The cost is a little more than regular drywall, but only a couple of hundred dollars extra for an average-sized basement, he said.

Avoiding moisture

Estes also recommends leaving about 2 inches of space between the wall studs and the concrete walls so that air can circulate behind the finished wall and, again, prevent mold growth.

"Some contractors will take furring strips and anchor those directly onto the concrete, and then hang the drywall on that," he said. "There are a couple of problems with that. First, you're creating holes in your concrete, which can make it easier for water to find that hole and seep in. And two, you're putting that wood in direct contact with concrete, which in the long run isn't a good thing. The backside of my studded wall is actually a couple of inches away from the concrete."

Cost varies

Overall, the price of finishing a basement varies dramatically depending on what features a homeowner desires. Adding a bathroom, for instance, is expensive if the basement doesn't already have roughed-in plumbing. Estes said he's finished basements for from \$20,000 or less up to \$70,000-plus.

Another contractor, Rich Maile, president of Maile Build Remodel & Design in Crescent Springs in Northern Kentucky, said that he has charged \$30 to \$35 a square foot to finish a basement, depending on what extras are requested.

"If you dress up your basement and put in a bath, an entertainment area, you can go easily to \$60 to \$70 to \$80 a square foot," he said. "Frankly, we've done basements that are \$120 a foot, and they have every cool thing you can think of in them."