

Housing Trend: Basements Are Now Becoming The Latest Prime Living Space

Winter Is the Perfect Time to Convert Your Basement!

The seasons are changing for Central New York homeowners; the garden has run its course, deck and patio projects have been completed, and exterior home improvements have been finished up.

As life moves inside for the winter, home remodeling initiatives do too. Now is an ideal time to increase the prime living space in your home and enhance its monetary value with a basement conversion.

Home improvement and real estate experts agree that one of the easiest ways to expand your home is through better utilization of existing space, such as the basement. National remodeling trends bear out that the basement is an area homeowners are upgrading with features that make it comparable to the other main living spaces of the house.

“The size of homes in the United States continues to grow, with homeowners wanting more usable room,” said Mary McNeill of RE/MAX MASTERS in Fayetteville, N.Y. “Basements are no longer viewed just as storage spaces or an area where the kids can go and do their own thing. Refinished basements are now seen as a great solution for adding space for entertaining, a hobby or media room, a guest suite, a home gym, an office and even an extra bathroom.”

As importantly, home building data indicates that you'll eventually recover most of the money you put into a basement conversion when sell your home. In the Northeast, more than 82 percent of the expenses of refinishing the basement are recouped. Time and again, real estate surveys show finished basements rank just behind kitchen and bathroom renovations for payback on home improvement projects.

“Often times a basement converted into practical living space can be the deciding factor in purchasing a house,” McNeill added.

Basement renovations are often viewed as the most cost-effective way of increasing living space. These conversion projects do not require increasing the home’s basic dimensions, thereby saving money on construction elements such as footings, flooring, and ceiling and roof systems. Known for being among the most affordable and the least disrupting improvement projects, basement conversions represent a sizeable piece of the \$215 billion dollar remodeling industry, according to *Nation’s Building News*.

In the Syracuse area, the trend for extensive basement remodeling is quite evident, reports Scott McClurg, president of McClurg, a remodeling and construction services company based in Marcellus, N.Y.

“Over the past five years, we have seen our basement remodeling projects go from making some additional inexpensive living space to making living space that has all of the same features as any other area of the house – and sometimes even more,” said McClurg. “This goes along with the national trend that people are starting to have a change in how they view the basement level of their homes. They are realizing this space can be equally as useful and attractive as the remainder of the house.”

Basements generally contain a large open area, which makes them perfect for creating a sizeable entertaining space with enough room for adding special features.

And what are Central New Yorkers doing with their basements?

“We are seeing a lot of basement projects in our area that center around creating a highly functional entertainment area for family and friends,” McClurg noted. “We’re designing and building everything from wet bars and wine cellars to home theaters and saunas. These features can transform ordinary basements into prime living space that often rivals other areas of the house.”

Wet bar projects can often include amenities such as wine chillers, beer and soda taps, dishwashers, refrigerators, ice makers, foot-rails, wood counters, granite counters, bottle chutes, glass holders, custom cabinetry.

In addition, many local residents are renovating their basements into media rooms or home theaters, with sound-deafening features added to preserve a quieter environment on the first floor of the house.

According to McClurg, bathrooms are often included in a basement remodeling project for convenience, which enhances the financial value of the house as well. “We add bathrooms in many of our basement conversions. This can be accomplished even if the plumbing drains are higher than the basement floor with the installation of a pump system.”

Among the design challenges of basement remodeling is the lack of natural light. Many projects include installation of egress window wells to allow more light as well as provide emergency exits. Egress window wells are large basement windows that are partially set under grade level. They use a retaining system to hold back the ground and provide a means of exit in case of emergency. The demand for egress windows has increased significantly, as New York State code includes requirements for emergency exits from a finished basement, which these windows meet.

Another popular way to make the basement more like one of the main floors of the house is to enhance the appearance of the basement stairway. This can be done by removing walls and opening up the stairway or by replacing rails or stairs with higher quality materials.

While expanding living space is the objective of most basement conversions, many home owners struggle with the potential loss of storage space.

“Many times when we remodel a basement we find that our customers want to replace some of the storage space they are losing,” reported McClurg. “One way of accommodating this need is by adding built-in cabinetry. In a basement, there are usually many opportunities to build cabinets into spaces that would otherwise be unusable. For example, the area under the basement stairs is often not tall enough to make living space, but too deep to make into a single closet. This becomes the perfect area for custom-built cabinetry.”

Building a small wine cellar in the basement also enable homeowners to maximize unusable space. Because of the naturally cool environment of the basement, a wine cellar is often a perfect addition.

“The possibilities are endless when it comes to basement conversions,” added McClurg. “We’ve helped our customers create prime living space that goes way beyond yesteryear’s children’s playrooms. The basement has emerged from being a dark storage and utility area to a vibrant focal point of family living.”