

The Additionless Addition

Ever had a client who wanted a castle but could only afford a bungalow? You don't have to lose these people to the rental market any more.

Many first-time homebuyers dream of a house with space to spread out, but the bank will only approve them for something small. If you want to help these clients turn their dream into reality, suggest they hit rock bottom first - renovate the basement of a smaller, affordable home.

Renovating a basement is an economic way to increase living space. Here are a few reasons why:

- it's space you already own
- the space is already heated
- you probably won't have to upgrade the electrical/heating system
- if you're handy, you may be able to do the renovations yourself
- if you do the work correctly, you can even improve indoor air quality

Adding another floor to the top of a house, or adding an addition to the existing house are two acceptable ways to get more space, but they also happen to be expensive options. If your client can afford to buy a house and then pay for a major addition on top of that, they probably could have bought a larger house to start with.

Most people worry about finishing a basement, fearing a leak could damage their carpet and other finishes. Raising the finish floor off the basement floor in order to leave a space underneath for water to flow is one way to address that problem.

The traditional way to raise your finish floor is to build a "sleeper floor," which is nothing more than two-by-fours laid flat, shimmed and topped off with sheets of plywood. This construction leaves a gap underneath the finish floor equal to the thickness of the two-by-four sleepers. The sleepers, shims, plywood and the finish all add up to a three-inch loss of headroom.

In an area where vertical space is already at a premium, this loss does not make the prospect of renovating a basement particularly inviting. These three inches are sometimes the difference between a worthwhile living space and a sore head.

In addition to losing headroom, the sleeper-floor system traps water between the sleepers, ultimately rotting the wood.

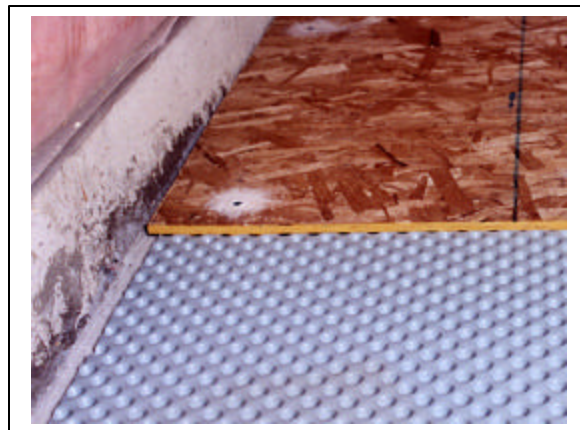
So, why would you renovate a basement?

Because new technology has come to the rescue, offering an innovative way to get your finish surface off the concrete floor without losing all your headroom. It can transform even most dark, dank basements into dry, comfortable living spaces.

What is this miracle material? It's a dimpled sheet made of an impermeable plastic membrane that insulates while handling water problems typical to most basements. This sheet sits between the concrete basement floor and the plywood or OSB (Oriented Strand Board, which is a lot like plywood.). You only lose approximately an inch of space once everything is installed – membrane, OSB, finish floor. The dimpled sheet subfloor completes all the steps described for the sleeper floor in one application, while having the added benefit of providing an unimpeded path for minor basement leaks to flow directly to the drain. Also, the air gaps under the membrane do not trap moisture. Rather, any moisture dries out because the air gaps ventilate to the edges of the sheet, which do not touch the foundation walls.

The goal of this sheet is *not* to achieve the impossible – a perfectly dry basement – rather, to ensure water has easy access to the drains, keeping the finish floor dry. The best part is, since the sheet is made of plastic, it's not going to rot like a two-by-four sleeper floor.

The following two photographs show the installation of this material. The first shot shows the dimpled plastic being fitted into place on the basement floor. The second shot shows the OSB subfloor. You can see in the second photograph that the membrane and the OSB *don't* butt up against the foundation wall. This gap allows water leaks to either run down the wall or along the floor to pass under the dimpled membrane, rather than soaking the OSB, or whatever finish is on top of the OSB such as carpeting.



Even if your client doesn't want to add living space to the basement, there are several reasons they may want to take advantage of this system:

- This is an economic way to keep all of your possessions dry and safe.
- Keeping the basement dry will help keep the rest of the house healthy by preventing mold growth.
- This membrane helps cut down on heat loss through the basement floor and walls.
- It's a nice surface to walk on; it's warmer and softer than concrete.

This floor is not a substitute for waterproofing. It's designed for incidental leaking. For instance, this technology will not handle water floods such as from a drain backup or a clothes washer that overflows. There are still some uncertainties in life.

Photographs provided by Basement Technologies, www.dampbasements.com, used with permission.