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Look between the studs to find more space

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 Special to The Washington Examiner
 The Washington Examiner

If walls could talk, they might reveal this secret: Extra usable square footage can be found between the studs.

Between the studs, which makeup the framework of every home, typically there are up to 16 inches of available space. This can often be translated into valuable extra storage.

Resources:

- Four Brothers LLC:**
www.fourbrotherscarpentry.com
- Merrill Contracting & Remodeling, Inc.:**
<http://www.merrillcontracting.com/>
- McInturff Architects:**
www.mcinturffarchitects.com
- Marissa McInturff:**
<http://www.marissamcinturff.com>

The key is to plan ahead, said LeRoy Johnson of Four Brothers LLC, a D.C.-based design and build company. "If you are tight on space and plan it at the beginning you can gain two to three extra inches. That's a big deal in some DC

homes, especially smaller condos."

Hidden beneath the drywall, space between studs can be used to create a display niche in a foyer or living room, mount a medicine cabinet in a bathroom, store pool cues and balls in a recreation room or add a magazine rack in a powder room wall.

Johnson said his company works with designers during the blueprint stage of a remodel, to incorporate uses for space between the studs. In this phase they can determine how to route wires beneath a space intended for use.

If seeking to retro-fit a niche in existing walls, he said avoid exterior walls all together and proceed with caution when it comes to interior walls.

"It's not all dead space," Johnson said. "We have to see what's behind those walls. You have electrical, insulation, air ducts and plumbing."

"If it's an outside wall forget it, said David Merrill, owner of Merrill Contracting and Remodeling in Arlington. "Generally those walls are filled with insulation."

Merrill said the 18 inches above the kitchen counter and below the upper cabinets often is overlooked as a place to carve out space between studs.



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"Wall space is such a premium in a kitchen. You have all the cabinets above and the appliances below that have to run against the wall," he said. "Eighteen inches is enough space to create two or three spice racks, depending on the size of the bottles."

A growing trend is to use stud space for installing a shower niche. "We get requests for this all the time," Johnson said. "We can put two or three in a shower." These shower niches enhance design as well as offer additional space for toiletries.

Sometimes studs can be turned sideways to gain even more space, he added, making every inch count. Other uses include installing glass shelves above a garden tub, inserting a wall safe behind a portrait, plate racks in a dining room or shallow shelves in a media room to store DVDs.

Mark McInturff, architect and custom builder with Bethesda-based McInturff Architects, created a recess between studs on a wall above a stairway in his house. He uses the recess to showcase a painting by his daughter, artist Marissa Verechia.

"I actually built the house and the recess when she was 2," McInturff said. "She made the painting when she was 26. She's now 28."

McInturff suggests caution when searching for space between studs. "You can't just go cutting holes in any wall." A lot of the time wires and everything needed to operate the house are behind those walls."

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