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# Design & Planning

Layouts, drawings, and planning decisions before a renovation begins

14 Expert Answers from Construction Brain

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## What flooring transitions work best between rooms?

**The best flooring transitions depend on your specific floor types and room layout, but properly executed transitions create seamless flow while protecting floor edges from damage.** In Ottawa homes, we typically see the most success with coordinated transitions that complement both flooring materials rather than trying to match one exactly.

**Transition strips and moldings** are the most common solution for different flooring heights or materials. T-moldings work well when floors are the same height (like hardwood to laminate), while reducer strips handle height differences between thick and thin materials. For Ottawa homes with original hardwood that's been refinished multiple times, we often see 1/4" to 1/2" height differences that require careful planning.

**Threshold transitions** work beautifully between rooms with distinct purposes - like tile in a bathroom meeting hardwood in a hallway. The key is choosing finishes that bridge both materials. For example, if you have honey oak hardwood meeting ceramic tile, a medium wood-tone threshold creates better flow than trying to exactly match the oak grain.

**Direct butting without transition strips** can look very clean but requires precise installation and works best with similar materials at identical heights. This approach is popular in modern Ottawa renovations, particularly when extending the same luxury vinyl plank (LVP) or engineered hardwood throughout main floor living areas. However, this method requires expansion gaps to be hidden under baseboards and isn't suitable for all material combinations.

**Ottawa-specific considerations** include our significant seasonal humidity changes, which cause natural wood floors to expand and contract considerably. Transitions must accommodate this movement - rigid transitions can crack or pop up during our dry winter months when floors shrink. We typically leave slightly wider gaps in winter installations, knowing floors will expand come summer humidity.

**Material compatibility** matters significantly for durability. Hardwood to tile transitions see heavy wear in Ottawa entryways where snow, salt, and moisture create challenging conditions. Stainless steel or aluminum transitions often outlast wood or plastic options in these high-traffic, high-moisture areas.

For **basement renovations** (a specialty of ours through [OttawaBasements.com](https://OttawaBasements.com)), transitions become critical when meeting concrete floors or dealing with slight elevation changes common in Ottawa's older homes. Vinyl transitions often work better than wood in basement environments due to moisture considerations.

**Professional installation** ensures transitions lie flat, don't create tripping hazards, and properly accommodate seasonal movement. Poor transition installation is one of the most common flooring complaints we address during

renovation consultations. When planning whole-home flooring updates, we can coordinate transitions to create the most seamless flow possible throughout your space.

For a free consultation on your specific flooring transition needs, contact Justyn Rook Contracting - we'll assess your current floors and recommend the best approach for your Ottawa home's unique layout and conditions.

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## Q2

### Should I include a bathtub or just a shower in my bathroom renovation?

**The choice between a bathtub and shower depends on your household needs, bathroom size, and resale considerations. In Ottawa's market, having at least one bathtub in your home is generally recommended for resale value, but a well-designed shower can be more practical for daily use.**

For most Ottawa homeowners, the decision comes down to lifestyle and space constraints. If this is your only bathroom, a bathtub is typically the safer choice for resale value, as families with young children often prioritize homes with at least one tub. However, if you have multiple bathrooms and this renovation is for a master ensuite or secondary bathroom, a spacious walk-in shower often provides better functionality and a more luxurious feel.

**Space utilization** plays a crucial role in Ottawa's typically smaller bathroom layouts. A standard bathtub requires about 60 inches of wall space, while a well-designed shower can be more space-efficient and allow for additional storage or a larger vanity. Walk-in showers also offer better accessibility for aging in place, which is increasingly important for Ottawa homeowners planning long-term.

From a **cost perspective** in the Ottawa market, shower installations typically range from \$3,500-\$8,000 for a quality tile shower with glass doors, while bathtub installations run \$2,500-\$6,000 depending on the tub quality and surrounding finishes. Custom tile work, popular in Ottawa renovations, adds \$15-\$25 per square foot for quality installation.

**Climate considerations** in Ottawa make showers particularly appealing during our long winters - they're faster to heat up and more water-efficient. However, many families still prefer having a bathtub available for relaxation during those cold months or for bathing young children.

**Resale value** in Ottawa's market shows that homes with zero bathtubs can face some buyer resistance, particularly from families. However, a beautifully executed shower renovation in a secondary bathroom rarely impacts resale negatively, especially in urban Ottawa where modern design is highly valued.

Consider your household's actual usage patterns. If nobody has used your current bathtub in the past year, a shower renovation likely makes sense. For a free consultation to discuss your specific bathroom layout and needs,

contact Justyn Rook Contracting - we can help you design the perfect solution for your space and lifestyle.

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Q3

## How do I plan lighting for a kitchen renovation?

**Proper kitchen lighting requires layering three types of light: ambient (general), task (work areas), and accent (decorative) to create both functionality and atmosphere.** Start by assessing your kitchen's natural light, then plan electrical placement before any demolition begins.

**Ambient lighting** forms your foundation - typically recessed LED lights spaced 4-6 feet apart across the ceiling. In Ottawa kitchens, plan for 2-3 watts per square foot of LED lighting. A 120-square-foot kitchen needs roughly 240-360 watts total. Recessed lights should be positioned to avoid casting shadows on work surfaces, typically 18-24 inches from wall cabinets.

**Task lighting** targets specific work zones where you'll be chopping, cooking, and cleaning. Under-cabinet LED strips provide excellent counter illumination without shadows. Install them toward the front edge of upper cabinets, about 2-3 inches back from the cabinet face. For islands and peninsulas, pendant lights work well - hang them 30-36 inches above the counter surface, spaced 24-30 inches apart. Over the sink, consider a small pendant or recessed light directly above.

**Accent lighting** adds personality and depth. This might include toe-kick lighting under base cabinets, interior cabinet lighting for glass-front doors, or decorative pendants over a breakfast bar. Dimmer switches on all circuits let you adjust lighting for different activities - bright for cooking, softer for dining.

**Ottawa-specific considerations** include our long winter months when natural light is limited. Plan extra ambient lighting to compensate, and consider color temperature carefully. Warm white (2700K-3000K) creates a cozy feel, while cool white (3500K-4000K) provides better task visibility. Many Ottawa homeowners choose tunable LED fixtures that adjust throughout the day.

**Electrical planning is crucial** - all new circuits require permits and ESA inspection in Ontario. Plan switch locations early, typically near doorways and at both ends of galley kitchens. GFCI protection is required for all kitchen outlets, and lighting circuits should be separate from small appliance circuits per Ontario Electrical Code.

**Professional guidance** is essential for electrical work - only licensed electricians can install new circuits in Ontario. However, you can plan fixture placement and styles yourself. Consider hiring a lighting designer for complex layouts or high-end renovations.

For a comprehensive kitchen renovation including proper lighting design and electrical work, contact Justyn Rook Contracting for a free consultation. We coordinate all trades and ensure your lighting plan meets both Ontario codes and your family's needs.

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#### Q4

### What kitchen layout is most efficient?

**The galley kitchen layout is generally considered the most efficient for cooking workflow, followed closely by the L-shaped layout for homes with more space.** These layouts minimize the distance between your sink, stove, and refrigerator - known as the "work triangle" - making meal preparation faster and less tiring.

**Galley kitchens** work exceptionally well in Ottawa's older homes, particularly the century homes in neighborhoods like the Glebe, Westboro, and Sandy Hill. With counters and appliances along two parallel walls, everything is within arm's reach. The key is maintaining at least 42 inches of clearance between the counters - any less feels cramped, any more wastes steps. In our Ottawa kitchen renovations, we often see galley layouts in homes built between 1900-1950, and they can be incredibly functional when properly designed.

**L-shaped layouts** offer the best balance of efficiency and social interaction, which is why they're popular in Ottawa's newer subdivisions like Barrhaven, Kanata, and Orleans. This layout provides good workflow while allowing the cook to interact with family in adjacent living spaces. The corner can accommodate a large sink or provide extra prep space, and there's usually room for a small island or peninsula.

**Ottawa-specific considerations** play a big role in layout efficiency. Many Ottawa homes have galley kitchens due to the narrow lot sizes in established neighborhoods. The city's building code requires minimum aisle widths, and in older homes, we often work around existing plumbing stacks and radiator locations that can't be moved easily. Winter entertaining is big here, so many homeowners prioritize layouts that accommodate multiple cooks during holiday gatherings.

**Kitchen islands** can enhance efficiency but need at least 36 inches of clearance on all sides - 42 inches is better for multiple cooks. In Ottawa's market, we typically see islands in kitchens over 150 square feet. Smaller kitchens often benefit more from a peninsula or mobile cart that can be moved when needed.

The most efficient layout for your specific home depends on your cooking habits, family size, and the existing structure. Factors like ceiling height, window placement, and mechanical systems all influence the best approach. For a detailed assessment of your space and a free consultation on optimizing your kitchen layout, contact Justyn Rook Contracting - we've designed efficient kitchens in every style of Ottawa home.

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#### Q5

### What bathroom layout works best for a small space?

**For small bathrooms, the most effective layout is typically a "three-wall" design with the toilet and vanity on one wall and the shower/tub on the opposite wall, maximizing the central floor space while maintaining proper clearances required by Ontario Building Code.**

The key to small bathroom success is understanding the **minimum clearances** required by code while maximizing functionality. In Ontario, you need at least 21 inches of clear space in front of the toilet and 15 inches from the center of the toilet to any wall or fixture. For showers, you need a minimum 32-inch opening and at least 24 inches of clear space in front.

**Corner layouts** work exceptionally well in tight spaces, particularly when you can position a corner shower unit (typically 32" x 32" or 36" x 36") in one corner, with the toilet and vanity along adjacent walls. This creates an efficient triangle that feels more spacious than linear arrangements. If you're working with a narrow space (like many Ottawa homes built in the 1950s-70s), consider a **pocket door** instead of a traditional swing door - this can reclaim 6-9 square feet of usable space.

**Vertical storage** becomes crucial in small bathrooms. Wall-mounted vanities create the illusion of more floor space while providing storage underneath. Medicine cabinets, corner shelving, and over-toilet storage maximize every inch. In Ottawa's older homes, you'll often find small bathrooms with sloped ceilings due to stairway configurations - these awkward spaces can actually work to your advantage with custom storage solutions.

**Fixture sizing** makes a dramatic difference. A 24-inch vanity instead of 30-inch, a round toilet instead of elongated, and a shower instead of tub can transform a cramped 5x7 bathroom into something functional and comfortable. Many Ottawa homeowners are surprised how much space they gain by switching from a standard tub to a walk-in shower, especially when creating secondary suites where space is at a premium.

**Lighting and mirrors** are your best tools for making small spaces feel larger. A large mirror opposite a window reflects natural light, while proper task lighting eliminates shadows that make spaces feel cramped. In basement bathrooms (common in Ottawa renovations), this becomes even more critical since natural light is limited.

When planning your layout, consider the **existing plumbing location** - moving drain lines in Ottawa's clay tile systems or concrete floors can add \$2,000-4,000 to your budget. Sometimes the "best" layout isn't worth the plumbing costs, and working with existing locations while optimizing fixture placement gives you the best value.

For a free consultation on optimizing your small bathroom layout, contact Justyn Rook Contracting - we specialize in maximizing functionality in Ottawa's unique home configurations.

## What is the work triangle in kitchen design?

The work triangle is a fundamental kitchen design principle that connects the three most-used areas - the sink, stove, and refrigerator - in an efficient triangular layout to minimize walking and maximize workflow.

The concept, developed in the 1940s, creates an imaginary triangle between these three key work zones. **Ideally, each side of the triangle should measure between 4 and 9 feet, with the total perimeter staying under 26 feet.** This ensures you're not cramped when working but also not walking excessive distances while cooking. The triangle should be unobstructed by islands, peninsulas, or other kitchen elements that would force you to walk around them constantly.

In Ottawa homes, particularly in older neighborhoods like the Glebe or Westboro, many kitchens were built before this principle was widely understood. **You'll often find galley kitchens or L-shaped layouts where the refrigerator ended up across the room from the sink and stove, creating inefficient workflows.** This is especially common in century homes where kitchens were originally much smaller spaces that have been expanded over time without considering traffic flow.

**Modern kitchen design has evolved beyond the strict triangle rule** to accommodate larger kitchens and multiple cooks. Today's designers often talk about **work zones** instead - prep zone (sink area), cooking zone (stove and oven), and storage zone (refrigerator and pantry). In larger Ottawa kitchens, especially those with islands, you might have multiple triangles or zones that overlap efficiently.

When renovating your kitchen, consider how you actually cook and move through the space. **The triangle works best in kitchens between 150-300 square feet** - smaller than that and everything's too close, larger and you might benefit from multiple work zones. For Ottawa homeowners planning kitchen renovations, this principle helps determine optimal appliance placement during the design phase, potentially saving thousands in electrical and plumbing relocations.

**Professional kitchen designers always start with workflow before aesthetics** - getting the triangle right makes even a modest kitchen renovation feel dramatically more functional. For a free consultation on optimizing your kitchen layout, contact Justyn Rook Contracting to discuss how the work triangle principle can improve your specific space.

## How do I design a basement bedroom that feels spacious?

**Creating a spacious-feeling basement bedroom requires strategic design choices that maximize light, height, and visual flow while working within the structural limitations of below-grade spaces.**

The key to making any basement bedroom feel larger starts with **ceiling height optimization**. In Ottawa homes, most basements have 7-8 foot ceilings, which can feel cramped if not handled properly. Avoid drop ceilings where possible - instead, paint exposed joists and ductwork in light colors or white to create visual height. If you must install a ceiling, use recessed lighting rather than hanging fixtures to preserve every inch of headroom. Strategic bulkheads around necessary mechanicals can actually make the main ceiling appear higher by contrast.

**Lighting design is absolutely critical** in basement bedrooms since natural light is limited. Layer your lighting with multiple sources: recessed ceiling lights for general illumination, wall sconces for ambient lighting, and table lamps for task lighting. Install larger egress windows if possible - not only does this improve the spacious feel, but Ontario Building Code requires proper egress for basement bedrooms anyway. Consider light tubes or sun tunnels if traditional windows aren't feasible.

**Color and material choices dramatically impact perceived space.** Use light, neutral colors on walls - whites, soft grays, or warm beiges reflect available light and make walls recede visually. Paint the ceiling the same color as walls or go slightly lighter to blur the boundaries. For flooring, luxury vinyl plank (LVP) in lighter wood tones works well in Ottawa's humid climate while creating visual length. Large-format tiles can also make the space feel bigger than small tiles or busy patterns.

**Smart furniture placement and storage solutions** prevent the room from feeling cluttered. Choose furniture with legs to create visual flow underneath - floating nightstands and wall-mounted storage keep floor space open. A platform bed with built-in storage maximizes function without bulk. Mirrors strategically placed across from light sources double the apparent brightness and space.

**Ottawa-specific considerations** include moisture management (essential for comfort and preventing that "basement feel"), proper insulation to prevent condensation on walls, and ensuring adequate ventilation. The space should feel dry and fresh, not damp and musty. Consider a small dehumidifier if needed, especially during Ottawa's humid summers.

For basement bedrooms that will be part of a **secondary suite conversion**, remember that Ontario Building Code requires minimum ceiling heights of 6'5" in bedrooms and proper egress windows. These aren't just legal requirements - they're essential for the space to feel livable rather than cave-like.

**Professional guidance becomes important** when structural changes are needed (moving support posts, enlarging windows, or electrical upgrades). While you can handle paint, furniture, and décor yourself, any modifications affecting structure, electrical, or plumbing require proper permits and expertise.

For specialized basement bedroom design that maximizes both space and compliance with Ontario codes, our dedicated team at OttawaBasements.com has extensive experience creating comfortable, spacious-feeling lower-level living spaces throughout Ottawa.

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Q8

## How do I plan storage in a small kitchen?

**Planning storage in a small kitchen requires maximizing every inch of vertical and hidden space while keeping frequently used items easily accessible.** The key is thinking beyond traditional cabinets and using creative solutions that work with your kitchen's specific layout and your cooking habits.

Start by **assessing your current storage needs** and identifying what you actually use regularly versus items that could be stored elsewhere or donated. In Ottawa homes, especially older properties with galley or compact kitchens, this audit often reveals 30-40% of items that don't need prime kitchen real estate. Keep only daily and weekly essentials in the kitchen, moving specialty appliances and seasonal items to basement or pantry storage.

**Vertical space is your best friend** in small kitchens. Install cabinets that extend to the ceiling - those extra 12-18 inches above standard cabinets provide significant storage for items you don't use daily. Add under-cabinet lighting to make upper storage more functional. Consider open shelving on one wall for dishes and glasses you use regularly, which creates visual space while providing easy access.

**Inside your existing cabinets**, maximize efficiency with pull-out drawers, lazy Susans for corner cabinets, and door-mounted racks for spices and cleaning supplies. Deep drawers are more functional than traditional shelves for pots, pans, and small appliances. In Ottawa's older homes where cabinet boxes might be shallow, custom drawer inserts can double your usable storage capacity.

**Creative storage solutions** can add substantial capacity without major renovation. A kitchen island or cart provides both workspace and storage underneath. Wall-mounted magnetic strips hold knives and metal spice containers. Ceiling-mounted pot racks work well in kitchens with 9+ foot ceilings common in Ottawa heritage homes. Consider a pantry cabinet if you have even 12 inches of wall space - these tall, narrow units store an impressive amount.

**For Ottawa homeowners**, small kitchen storage improvements typically cost \$2,000-\$8,000 depending on scope. Simple additions like pull-out drawers and organizers run \$1,500-\$3,500, while adding upper cabinets or a pantry unit ranges \$3,000-\$6,000. Full kitchen reorganization with custom storage solutions can reach \$8,000-\$15,000 but transforms functionality dramatically.

**Professional installation** is recommended for upper cabinets, electrical work for under-cabinet lighting, and any structural modifications. DIY options include drawer organizers, door racks, and freestanding storage pieces. However, ensure any wall-mounted storage is properly anchored - Ottawa's older homes may have plaster walls requiring specific hardware.

Want to explore custom storage solutions that maximize your specific kitchen layout? We offer free consultations to assess your space and recommend the most effective improvements for your needs and budget.

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Q9

## Should I match my kitchen countertop to my backsplash?

**No, you don't need to match your kitchen countertop to your backsplash exactly - in fact, contrasting materials often create more visual interest and design depth than identical matches.**

The key is creating **harmony rather than uniformity**. Your countertop and backsplash should complement each other through shared undertones, similar style aesthetics, or coordinating colors without being identical. For example, a white quartz countertop with subtle gray veining pairs beautifully with a subway tile backsplash in soft gray, or natural stone counters work wonderfully with complementary tile that picks up accent colors from the stone.

**Consider the visual weight and proportion** of each element. Your countertop typically covers more surface area and serves as the foundation, while your backsplash acts as the accent piece. If you choose a busy, heavily patterned countertop like granite with lots of movement, a simpler backsplash in a solid color or subtle pattern will balance the space. Conversely, if you select a solid-colored countertop like white quartz, you have more freedom to introduce pattern, texture, or bold color in your backsplash.

**Material mixing is very popular** in Ottawa kitchens right now. Many homeowners are combining quartz countertops (which perform well in our climate and don't require sealing) with natural stone or ceramic tile backsplashes. The different textures and finishes add layers of visual interest while maintaining a cohesive look through coordinated colors.

**Practical considerations** matter too in Ottawa's climate. Both surfaces need to handle temperature changes, humidity from cooking, and frequent cleaning. Ensure whatever combination you choose can withstand daily use

and seasonal variations in your home's humidity levels.

When planning your kitchen renovation, bring samples of both materials home and view them together in your actual lighting conditions - both natural daylight and your kitchen's artificial lighting. Colors and patterns can look quite different in your space versus the showroom.

**For a free consultation** on creating the perfect countertop and backsplash combination for your Ottawa kitchen renovation, contact Justyn Rook Contracting. We'll help you select materials that work beautifully together while meeting your budget and lifestyle needs.

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## How do I design a functional laundry room in my basement?

**A well-designed basement laundry room requires careful planning for plumbing access, moisture control, and efficient workflow.** The key is creating a space that's both functional and comfortable while working within your basement's existing infrastructure.

### Location and Layout Planning

Start by identifying the best location near existing plumbing lines to minimize costs. In Ottawa homes, this is typically near the utility room or under the main floor bathroom where drain lines are accessible. Your laundry room should be at least 6 feet by 6 feet for comfortable movement, with 42 inches of clearance in front of machines for loading and unloading.

Plan your workflow in a logical sequence: dirty clothes storage, washing, drying, folding, and clean clothes storage. An L-shaped or galley layout works well in most basement spaces. If space allows, include a utility sink for hand-washing delicates or pre-treating stains – this requires additional plumbing but adds significant functionality.

### Essential Infrastructure Requirements

**Electrical needs** include dedicated 240V outlet for electric dryers and separate 120V circuits for the washer and lighting. In Ontario, any electrical work requires permits through the Electrical Safety Authority (ESA) and should be done by a licensed electrician. Plan for GFCI protection as required by the Ontario Electrical Code for basement locations.

**Plumbing considerations** involve hot and cold water supply lines plus proper drainage. The drain line needs adequate slope (minimum 2% grade) and must connect to your home's main drain system. In Ottawa's clay soil conditions, ensure your basement has proper waterproofing before installing the laundry room to prevent moisture issues.

**Ventilation is critical** – install a proper exhaust fan rated for the room size, and ensure your dryer vents directly outside through the shortest possible route. Ottawa's climate requires insulated ductwork to prevent condensation in winter months.

### Moisture Control and Finishing

Basements naturally have higher humidity, so choose moisture-resistant materials. Use closed-cell foam insulation on exterior walls, vapor barrier, and moisture-resistant drywall or cement board. For flooring, luxury vinyl plank, ceramic tile, or polished concrete work well – avoid carpet or hardwood that can be damaged by potential leaks.

Install a dehumidifier if your basement doesn't have one already. Ottawa's humid summers can push basement humidity above 60%, creating mold risks. Proper ventilation combined with moisture-resistant finishes creates a comfortable, long-lasting space.

### Storage and Organization

Include upper cabinets for detergents and supplies, keeping them away from potential water sources. A folding counter above a front-loading washer and dryer creates valuable workspace. Consider pull-out hampers for sorting clothes and hanging rods for air-drying delicates.

### Professional Guidance

While you might handle painting and some organization elements yourself, the plumbing, electrical, and structural modifications require licensed professionals in Ontario. Permits are typically required for electrical and plumbing work, and proper installation ensures your insurance coverage remains valid.

For a comprehensive basement laundry room renovation that meets all Ontario Building Code requirements, contact Justyn Rook Contracting for a free consultation. We handle all aspects from permits to final finishing, ensuring your new laundry space is both functional and code-compliant.

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#### Q11

### What ceiling height is ideal for a basement renovation?

**For basement renovations in Ottawa, you'll want a minimum of 7 feet (2.13m) of ceiling height, but 7.5-8 feet is ideal for comfort and resale value.** Most older Ottawa homes have basement ceiling heights between 6.5-7.5 feet, which can work well with the right approach.

The **Ontario Building Code requires a minimum ceiling height of 6'5" (1.95m) for basement living spaces**, but this feels quite cramped for daily use. If you're planning a secondary suite or rental unit, aim for at least 7 feet to meet most tenants' expectations and improve marketability. Many Ottawa basements built in the 1960s-80s have concrete block foundations with lower ceilings, while newer homes (1990s+) typically offer more headroom.

**Ceiling height directly impacts your renovation options.** With 7+ feet, you can install standard drop ceilings, recessed lighting, and have comfortable clearance for tall family members and guests. If you're working with 6.5-7 feet, consider exposed ceiling treatments with painted joists and ductwork, which can actually look quite modern while maximizing every inch of height. Avoid bulky pot lights in low ceilings - LED strip lighting or track lighting works better.

**Ottawa's frost line and foundation requirements** mean most basements here have adequate structural height, but older homes may have lower ceilings due to larger floor joists and heating ducts. During renovation, we often find ways to gain 2-4 inches by rerouting utilities or using slimmer ductwork - every inch counts in a basement space.

**Professional considerations** include ensuring proper clearance around mechanical equipment (furnaces, water heaters) and maintaining access to electrical panels. If your basement ceiling is under 6'8", consult with a contractor about options for gaining height through structural modifications or creative design solutions.

For basement-specific expertise and design ideas that maximize lower ceiling spaces, visit our dedicated team at OttawaBasements.com. Want to discuss your specific basement's potential? We offer free consultations to assess your space and recommend the best approach for your ceiling height situation.

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## Find a Basement Renovations Contractor

Justyn Rook Contracting connects you with experienced contractors in the directory:

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Q12

## How do I plan for future aging in place during a renovation?

**Planning for aging in place during your renovation is one of the smartest investments you can make, allowing you to enjoy your Ottawa home safely and comfortably for decades to come.** The key is incorporating universal design principles that work well for everyone now while providing crucial accessibility features as mobility changes over time.

**Bathroom modifications** should be your top priority, as this is where most aging-in-place challenges occur. Consider installing a curbless shower with grab bars rated for 300+ pounds, non-slip flooring, and a comfort-height toilet (17-19 inches vs. standard 15 inches). In Ottawa's older homes, this often means relocating plumbing and potentially moving walls, which requires building permits but creates a safer, more valuable space. Plan for 36-inch doorways instead of the standard 32 inches to accommodate mobility aids if needed later.

**Kitchen accessibility** focuses on counter heights, storage, and workflow. Installing some lower counters at 32 inches alongside standard 36-inch sections provides options for seated work. Pull-out drawers in lower cabinets eliminate the need to bend and reach, while lever-style handles work better than knobs for arthritic hands. Consider an induction cooktop for safety - no open flames and automatic shut-off features. In Ottawa's market, these modifications typically add \$3,000-8,000 to a kitchen renovation but significantly increase long-term usability.

**Flooring and lighting** changes throughout your home make a substantial difference. Replace carpeting with luxury vinyl plank or engineered hardwood - easier to navigate with walkers and wheelchairs while reducing trip hazards. Install motion-sensor LED lighting in hallways, bathrooms, and stairwells. Ottawa's long winter months make good lighting especially crucial for safety during dark mornings and evenings.

**Staircase considerations** are vital in Ottawa's multi-level homes. If renovating near stairs, ensure handrails extend beyond the top and bottom steps, consider adding a second handrail on the opposite side, and verify adequate lighting. Some homeowners install a chair lift track during renovation even if not immediately needed - it's far easier and less expensive than retrofitting later.

**Electrical and technology infrastructure** should include additional outlets at counter height to avoid bending, USB charging stations in bedrooms and living areas, and smart home pre-wiring for voice-controlled lighting and thermostats. The Electrical Safety Authority requires permits for new circuits, but these upgrades typically cost \$2,000-5,000 and provide tremendous future convenience.

**Professional guidance** is essential because aging-in-place modifications must balance current aesthetics with future functionality. An experienced contractor can help you prioritize which changes to make now versus later, ensure all work meets Ontario Building Code requirements, and coordinate with occupational therapists if needed. Many modifications - like grab bar blocking in bathroom walls or wider doorways - are much more cost-effective when done during initial renovation rather than as retrofits.

For a comprehensive aging-in-place renovation plan tailored to your Ottawa home's specific layout and your family's needs, contact Justyn Rook Contracting for a free consultation. We'll help you create a beautiful, functional space that serves you well today and for years to come.

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## Find a General Contractors Contractor

Justyn Rook Contracting connects you with experienced contractors in the directory:

- SDR Electric, Plumbing & Heating Inc. ?
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- Scott Smirle (Smirle Elite Contracting) ?

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## Should I choose an open concept or keep walls in my renovation?

**The choice between open concept and keeping walls depends on your lifestyle, home's structure, and specific needs - both approaches have distinct advantages when done thoughtfully.**

Open concept works exceptionally well for families who love entertaining and want to maximize natural light flow throughout their space. In Ottawa's typically smaller urban homes, removing walls between kitchen, dining, and living areas can make a 1,200 square foot home feel significantly more spacious. The visual continuity creates better sight lines for parents watching children, makes hosting dinner parties more social, and allows one person to cook while still being part of conversations happening in the living area.

However, **keeping or adding walls offers benefits** that many homeowners overlook in today's open-concept trend. Separate rooms provide noise control - crucial if you work from home or have teenagers doing homework while others watch TV. Defined spaces also allow for better temperature control, as you can heat or cool only the rooms you're using. From a practical standpoint, walls give you more storage options and places to mount TVs or artwork.

**Structural considerations are critical** in Ottawa homes, especially those built before 1960. Many walls in older homes are load-bearing, and removing them requires engineered beam solutions that can add \$3,000-8,000 to your renovation budget. The Ontario Building Code requires professional structural assessment for any wall removal, and permits are mandatory. Conversely, adding walls is typically more straightforward and less expensive.

**Consider your cooking style** when deciding about kitchen walls. If you're a serious cook who generates lots of heat, steam, and cooking odors, a separate kitchen with proper ventilation might serve you better than an open concept where smells travel throughout your living space.

**Climate factors** matter in Ottawa's extreme weather. Open concepts can create heating challenges in winter, as warm air from your main floor can rise to upper levels, leaving main living areas cooler. Separate rooms allow for more targeted heating strategies.

For your specific situation, consider how you actually live in your space daily, not just how you entertain occasionally. A hybrid approach often works well - perhaps opening the kitchen to dining area while keeping the living room separate, or creating partial walls that define spaces without completely closing them off.

**For a detailed assessment of your home's structural possibilities and design options, contact Justyn Rook Contracting for a free consultation.** We can help you understand what's feasible in your specific Ottawa home and create a solution that matches your lifestyle.

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## Find a General Contractors Contractor

Justyn Rook Contracting connects you with experienced contractors in the directory:

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Q14

## What layout works best for a secondary suite in a basement?

**The most effective basement secondary suite layout maximizes the available ceiling height while creating distinct living zones that feel spacious and private.** In Ottawa's typical homes, this usually means positioning the main living area in the area with the highest ceiling and grouping wet areas (kitchen/bathroom) together for efficient plumbing runs.

**Open concept living works exceptionally well** in basement suites because it makes the space feel larger and allows natural light from any windows to flow throughout the unit. The ideal layout typically places the living room and kitchen in an open L-shape or linear arrangement, taking advantage of any existing windows. This creates a welcoming entry experience and maximizes the perceived space. The bedroom should be positioned in the quietest area, away from mechanical equipment and ideally with egress window access.

**Kitchen placement is crucial** for both functionality and code compliance. Positioning the kitchen along an exterior wall allows for proper ventilation and potential window access, while keeping it adjacent to the bathroom minimizes plumbing runs and reduces costs. A galley or single-wall kitchen design often works best in basement suites, providing full functionality without overwhelming the space. Include a breakfast bar or peninsula to create separation from the living area while maintaining the open feel.

**In Ottawa's regulatory environment,** your layout must accommodate specific requirements that affect design decisions. The Ontario Building Code requires a minimum 2.3-meter (7'6") ceiling height for habitable rooms, though 2.1 meters is acceptable in specific areas. Each unit needs a separate entrance, typically requiring a walkout or exterior stairwell. Fire separation between units requires careful planning of mechanical systems and ductwork routes. Most importantly, every bedroom must have an egress window meeting minimum size

requirements for emergency exit.

**Mechanical considerations significantly impact layout efficiency.** Position living spaces away from the furnace, water heater, and electrical panel to minimize noise transfer to the upper unit. If the existing mechanical room is centrally located, consider building an insulated enclosure around equipment rather than relocating it. Plan your bathroom location to tie into existing plumbing stacks when possible – running new drainage lines can add \$3,000-\$5,000 to your project cost.

**Storage solutions should be integrated into your layout planning** since basement suites typically have limited closet space. Built-in storage benches, under-stair storage, and murphy beds can maximize functionality. Consider a separate entrance with a small mudroom area – this creates privacy and provides essential storage for Ottawa's seasonal clothing needs.

For specialized basement expertise and layout optimization, visit our dedicated team at [OttawaBasements.com](https://OttawaBasements.com). **A well-planned layout can make a 600-square-foot basement suite feel as comfortable as a much larger space** – the key is working with Ottawa's building requirements rather than against them. For a free consultation on your specific basement layout, contact Justyn Rook Contracting to discuss how we can maximize your space's potential.

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## Find a Basement Renovations Contractor

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