

First in a
SERIES

Storage Ideas: Don't Forget the Stairs

"Potential cubbies lurk in even the smallest cabin ..."

BY FRAN SIGURDSSON

A TUCKED-AWAY KITCHEN – When designing a very small cottage, where do you put the kitchen? Well, under the stairs, of course! Photo courtesy South Mountain Company, www.southmountaincompany.com.

Is your cabin awash with stuff? Let's see, there's the fun stuff: outdoor gear and sports equipment, board games and craft supplies, pet rocks and other souvenirs of the day's adventures. And then there's

the functional: clothing, bedding, kitchen and bath items. Last but not least, the jetsam that drifts over from your primary residence. "Don't toss that fondue set/8-track player/duplicate doodad. Hoi! We'll use it at the cabin!"

So where do you stow it all? Vintage retreats tend to have smaller rooms and few closets. Contemporary log homes and timber frames often feature vaulted ceilings and open plan layouts, but no attics or superfluous interior walls to block the flow.

The good news is, you don't need to add on to contain clutter. Potential cubbies lurk in even the smallest cabin. Nook and cranny, alcove or recess – all are fair game.

Examine areas overhead, underfoot, and next to appliances and fixed focal points like windows and fireplaces. Whether you're building from the ground up or remodeling, *Cabin Life's* new series on storage ideas will help you find your niches. It's up to you to fill them!

When you're trying to create more storage space, don't overlook an area that is wasted in many cabins: the area under the stairs.

Stairs typically measure 3 feet wide and 8 feet high. The triangular area underneath can be configured for storage in a number of ways. Built-in units custom made to fit this space maximize storage capacity.

Depending on your requirements, a



single solution in the form of closet, shelving, drawer or bin may be adequate. Or mix and match units. Stairways that run up the center of a cabin can have built-ins on both sides. The possibilities are limited only by your imagination – and the nature of your stuff.

For instance, the high end of the triangle is ideal for a closet, with a rod to hang jackets or a ready-made shelving system. Bulky items like sports gear (or the vacuum cleaner) can be stashed in a cupboard at the low end.

Let a 3-foot deep cubby become a Bermuda triangle of lost stuff, opt for drawers or slide-out units. Rollout bins have the advantage of being wheeled to where the contents are needed. Shoe drawers keep footwear out of sight and mud or sand out of the cabin.

Another practical option, especially for cabins lacking a mudroom: recessed open “lockers” with hooks, plus a bench for pulling on boots. And for those convivial clan gatherings, perhaps a wee wine cave or beer cellar?

In fact, you can store just about anything and the kitchen sink here. One cozy Martha's Vineyard retreat featured in *The New Cottage Book*, by author Jim Tolpin, has an L-shaped kitchen with shelving, countertop, and base cabinet tucked neatly under the stairs. “This is a very small cottage,” notes builder John Abrams, of South Mountain Company in West Tisbury, Mass. Abrams and his design team worked hard to put every inch of the 900-square foot cottage to the best use. “Pushing the kitchen under the stairway made the dining area possible,” he says.

Leave it to the Japanese – masters of designing small, serene dwellings – to come up with the ultimate under-stair storage solution: tansu chests. These chests are both stairs and storage in one. Not only are they beautiful and functional, tansu are durable enough to step on, too. Custom made to stairwell dimensions, the chests offer a variety of drawers and cubbies. Sections can be sized according to the items you want to store. ■

Fran Sigurdsson knows her stuff; the under-stairs areas of her lakehome are fully utilized.

NEXT IN THE SERIES: In upcoming issues, look for more articles on storage and built-in ideas, from clever shelving to window seats to DIY projects.



NOT JUST FOR BOOKS – Open shelving under the stairs can showcase collectibles, or in this case, family photos. “Place sentimental reminders of loved ones where you can see them every day as you come and go,” suggests Johnny Miller, owner of OakBridge Timber Framing. Photo courtesy OakBridge Timber Framing, www.oakbridgetimberframing.com.



Dorset Custom Furniture



Heidi A. Long

A CONTRAST IN STYLES – On the left are Japanese-inspired tansu-chest-style stairs, in cherry, designed by Dan Mosheim of Dorset Custom Furniture, www.dorsetcustomfurniture.com. On the right are open shelves with baskets, in a cabin renovated by High Country Builders, www.walilandi.com.



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