



RIISING TO THE OCCASION

Home elevators provide multi-storey access for a reasonable price

Pause for a moment to picture a typical Canadian detached home. The bedrooms and main bathroom(s) are upstairs, there's likely a secondary bathroom and home entertainment centre in the basement, and the kitchen and main living areas are on the main floor. The owners will need access to all three. Which makes elevators connecting multiple floors a great option for people with mobility issues looking to age in place. And they're cheaper than you might think.

"Ninety percent of all installations are less than \$30,000. The starting point for a two-stop elevator is about \$20,000," says Jamie Hamilton, president of Cambridge, Ont.-based Cambridge Elevating.

The most challenging part of adding a retrofit elevator is finding a suitable location to put one. An elevator cab with a 5' x 5' interior will eat up a roughly 5½'-square footprint on each floor it needs to access. The ideal spot on the main floor might require rerouting plumbing, wiring, and/or HVAC equipment in the ceilings above or below. In some cases, installing the shaft "might cost as much or more as the elevator system."

The hoist equipment for a home elevator mounts to a reinforced wall: typically doubled-up 2x12s, 32 inches on centre, covered in ¾-plywood that's glued and screwed in place.

The electrical requirements are fairly straightforward, with 220-volt, 30-amp hookup for the hoist, and a separate 110-volt, 15-amp connection for the lighting system. Hamilton also recommends running a telephone line to the cab for emergencies.

Depending on the configuration of the home, the cab may only need one door, but other scenarios might call for a "pass through" system where you enter in the front and exit from the rear, or even a three-door cab for accessing multiple floors.

When building a new home or gutting an old one for a young family, home elevators aren't likely to be top of mind for must-haves. But by strategically stacking large storage closets on each floor, it's relatively easy to retrofit one in down the road.

The number one mistake installers make? Not accounting for the underside of the elevator. Without an 8"-12" pit below the lowest floor level, the cab won't be able to stop flush with the lower level floor.



"OTs work collaboratively with contractors to achieve cost-savings for homeowners," says Courage, in particular by trying to avoid having to undo work down the road in order to meet changing needs. OTs also help homeowners vet out shady contractors, by insisting on seeing the renovator has all the proper licensing and insurance and, ideally, has completed C-CAPS training (see "Put on Your C-CAPS Cap.") Both Acquisito and Klassen completed the U.S. CAPS program and have more than a decade's experience working on home modifications.