

Down Under

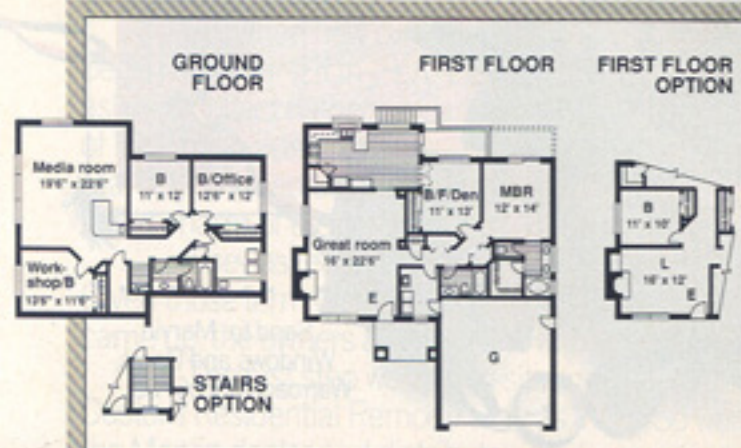
Basements can double your buyers' living space for just 15 to 20 percent more.

When you think about it, basements make a lot of sense, especially in today's small-lot markets where living space and storage are at a premium. Yet many builders avoid putting them in because of cost, seismic and soil conditions, or local tradition.

In slab-happy Sacramento, however, Cresleigh Homes is digging into a new line of basement homes. Called Cresleigh Lagunabrook, the project has 59 homes that range in size from 1,250 to 1,576 square feet (without basements). Prices start in the low \$120s. For as little as \$25,000, buyers can add an unfinished lower level that doubles the square footage (finished basements cost another \$25,000 or



THE PLAN



A basement turns the 1,250-square-foot, two-bedroom Chameleon plan at Cresleigh Lagunabrook into a five- or six-bedroom home.

Other flex features: A dining room or bedroom can be carved out of the great room. And the secondary bedroom is a swing space. Open it to the kitchen and it becomes a formal dining room. Open it to the master, and it's a nursery or home office.

The design team for Cresleigh Lagunabrook includes San Francisco-based Cresleigh Homes; Omega Architectural Group of Benicia, Calif.; and Interior Profiles in San Diego.

so). The basements are half above-grade, with 8-foot ceilings and full-size windows. "It's bone-dry, totally usable living space," says Cresleigh general manager Thomas K. Wong, the brains behind the basements.

The first 20 houses at Lagunabrook sold the weekend Cresleigh released them. All but three included basements. Wong had expected to sell primarily to budget-minded first-time buyers, anticipating that most would opt to finish the basements themselves as funds allowed. But three-quarters of the sales to date have been to move-ups, and half of the buyers are paying Cresleigh to finish their basements for them.

At press time, the waiting list for the next release had 250 names. "It's a feeding frenzy: Now everyone wants a house with a basement," gloats sales coordinator Lori Markle. Cresleigh has run only one ad, announcing a sneak preview open house for the first release. The real traffic generators have been a spot on the local NBC affiliate and an article in the real estate section of *The Sacramento Bee*. "An article is much more valid to prospective buyers than an ad," Markle says.

Boston's basements are what inspired Wong to introduce them in Sacramento. He lived there while earning his engineering degree from MIT, and came to appreciate the extra storage and living space flexibility a basement provides. At Cresleigh, he became intrigued with

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