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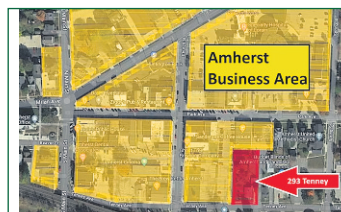
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In Smaller Homes, Pocket Doors Can Provide Space Savings

(Family Features) When finding extra space is crucial, an option like pocket doors can help maximize available floor space.

Because they slide into the wall cavity rather than swinging out, pocket door frame kits provide solutions to save up to 14 square feet of floor space in any room of the home, allowing homeowners to squeeze efficiency from the limited functional space incorporated into today's house designs.

After years of growing ever larger, American homes are shrinking in size, according to U.S. Census data. A half century ago, the average American house measured 1,660 square feet. Over subsequent decades, it mushroomed, filling 1,890 square feet in the 1990s and continuing to swell until reaching its largest-ever dimensions, 2,687 square feet, in 2015. As of 2023, however, the average home size has slimmed to 2,014 square feet.

That's where an option like Johnson Hardware's wide line of durable, high-quality, American-made pocket door

frame kits can come up big in small spaces, ensuring smooth, quiet door openings and closings. The pocket door hardware can be installed with nearly any door style from solid wood to metal with glass. Equipped with a soft-close feature that provides secure, soft opening and closing of doors, it helps prevent slammed doors and pinched fingers.

In addition to smaller houses becoming a trend, laws nationwide are being amended to allow homeowners to add Auxiliary Dwelling Units (ADUs).

Taking the form of either small home additions or entirely separate miniature structures in backyards, ADUs allow homeowners to provide private space to long-term guests or rent out living space, thereby generating additional income to offset mortgage expenses and taxes.

Whether in a small main house or ADU, pocket doors can offer much-needed floor space in bathrooms, bedrooms, kitchens and living rooms. For more ideas on how to save space with pocket, sliding wall-mount, bypass and bifold door hardware, visit johnsonhardware.com or call 574-293-5664.



3 tips for first-time home buyers

Real estate has garnered considerable attention since 2020, and for good reason. Though speculators and real estate professionals may point to a number of variables that have affected the market for homes in recent years, the pandemic certainly was among those factors. Real estate prices and mortgage interest rates increased significantly during the pandemic and have remained well above pre-pandemic levels ever since.

The spike in home prices and interest rates has had a significant impact on young home buyers, some of whom feel as though their dream of home ownership may never be realized. And data from the National Association of Realtors indicates the median age of home buyers is now significantly higher than it was two decades ago. In 2023, the median age of buyers was 49, which marked an increase of 10 years compared to the average buyer age 20 years ago.

First-time home buyers may face a more challenging real estate market than they would have encountered just a half decade ago. The following three tips can help such buyers successfully navigate the market as they look to purchase their first home.

1. Expect to move quickly. Inventory remains very low, which means buyers are in heated competition for the few homes that are on the market. In late 2023, NAR data indicated the rate of home sales were the lowest they had been in 13 years, so buyers will



likely need to move quickly and make an offer if they see a home they like, as chances are the property won't be on the market too long before it's sold. In fact, the NAR noted that homes spent an average of just 23 days on the market in October 2023.

2. Apply for mortgage preapproval. The competitive nature of the market for buyers means it's in their best

interests to arrange financing prior to beginning their home search. A mortgage preapproval can be a competitive advantage, as it indicates to sellers that buyers won't be denied a mortgage or lack financing after making an offer. The financial experts at NerdWallet note that buyers will be asked to provide details about their employment, income, debt, and financial accounts when applying for mortgage preapproval. Gather this information and clear up any issues, such as credit disputes or delinquent accounts, prior to applying for preapproval.

3. Set a realistic budget and expect to offer over asking price. A financial planner and/or real estate professional can help first-time buyers determine how much they should be spending on a home. In the current market, buyers should know that they will likely need to pay more than asking price for a home. For example, the NAR reports that 28 percent of homes sold for above list price in October 2023. With that in mind, first-time buyers may do well to look for homes that are under budget in anticipation of offering more than list price after seeing a property.

The real estate market remains competitive for buyers. First-time buyers can utilize three strategies to increase their chances of realizing their dream of home ownership.

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