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Headline: Digging deep to find more room

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Guest columnist and architect Jude Tugman answers your home improvement queries.

Q. I have a long narrow cellar and would like to extend it to create a separate living space for my ageing parents. Is it worth doing and what kind of expense am I looking at?

A. Converting cellars into habitable rooms can be an excellent way of maximising space in your home, especially when a degree of separation is desirable, but are you sure a cellar is the best place for ageing parents?

Most elderly people find steps difficult, so you need to think about how easy it will be for them to get up and down.

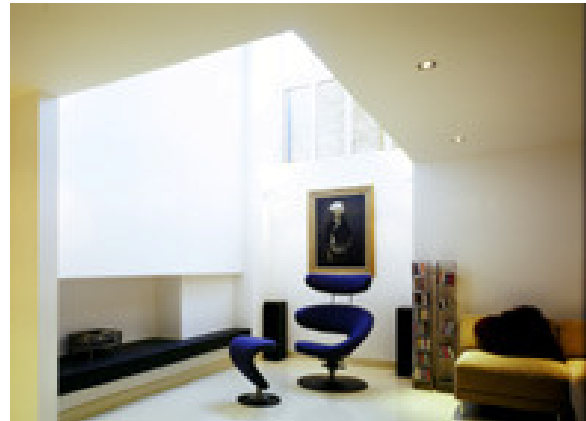
That aside, the key to a successful basement is natural light, which means installing windows to make it feel as above ground as possible. High windows don't overcome the oppressiveness of being underground, so the best solution to create a light well.

If, as in your case, the cellar is long and narrow I would recommend a light well at both ends.

This has a number of advantages. First, the important light and cross ventilation they will provide; second, a light well at the front of the house would let your parents have independent access if you installed a flight of steps outside, and third another light well at the rear would give them access to the garden if you have one.

The cost of a light well would probably be between £6,000 and £8,000 but they can range in size from a small courtyard to just the area of the window itself, stopping below the sill and no more than 50cm deep, which

obviously affects the price significantly. Depending on the size the basement you want to create, I would recommend setting aside a budget of at least £2,000-£3,500 per square metre.



Q. I have a four-bedroom house with no downstairs toilet. My local estate agent tells me that one of these would boost the value of my home and improve the chances of selling it but I don't know how much space would be needed and whether it is worth shrinking the sitting room to make the toilet fit.

A. Are you going to sell your house? If you are then it may be worth going to the expense and inconvenience of installing a downstairs toilet – but remember, it isn't an item on everyone's wish-list so it could have little or no added benefit.

However, if you are not intending to sell then a downstairs toilet is worthwhile only if you feel it would improve your home life. Extra toilets are always useful and you don't need a lot of space. A simple toilet and basin can often be fitted under the stairs. But remember, you should live in your house in the way that suits you.

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In today's climate of falling house prices, I think you would be crazy to consider shrinking your extremely valuable living space to make room for an additional toilet, especially when you take into account that climbing stairs is an excellent way of keeping those thighs trim!

\* Jude Tugman is the founder of Architect Your Home, which provides a pay-as-you-go architectural design service to customers with projects of any size, complexity or budget. It has 45 offices in England which can be contacted on freephone 0800 849 8505 or see [www.architect-yourhome.com](http://www.architect-yourhome.com). If you have a query for jude please email: [jude@architect-yourhome.com](mailto:jude@architect-yourhome.com)