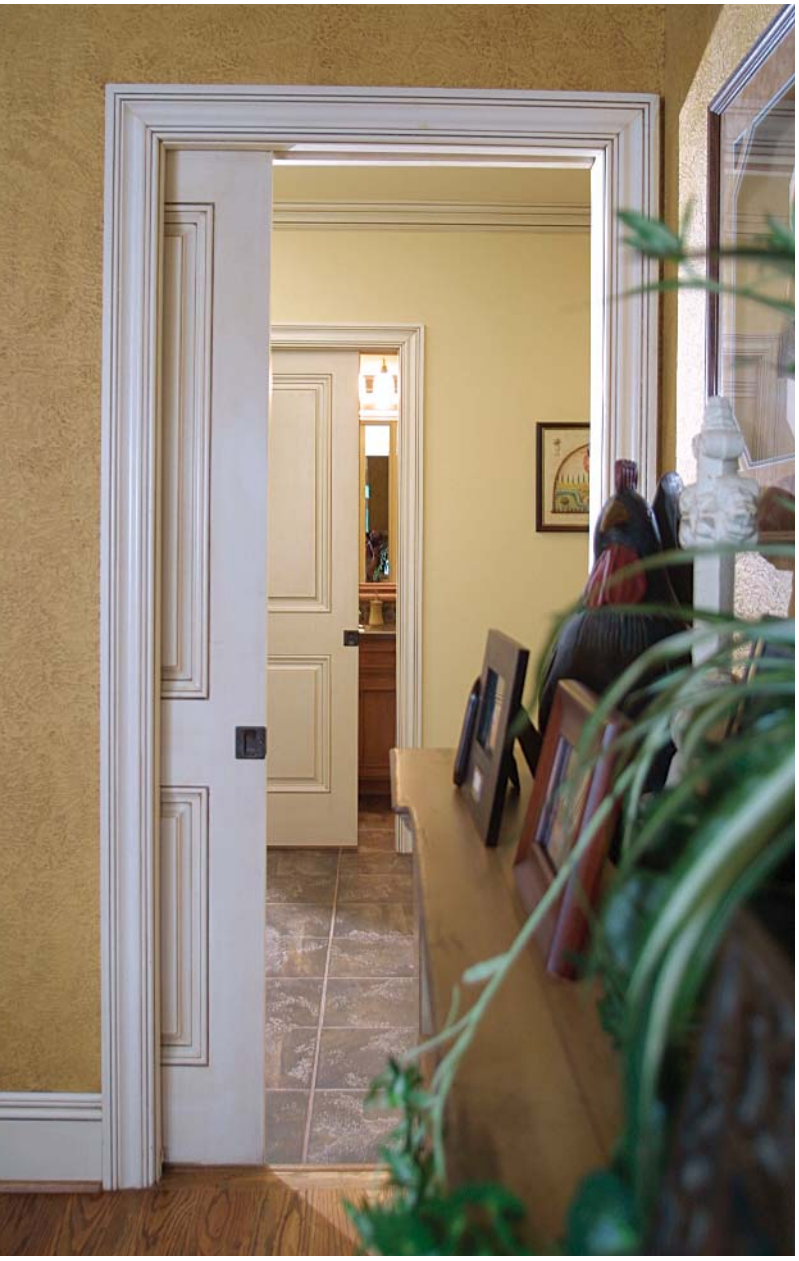
Trouble-free Pocket Doors

With a hardware kit and careful framing, you can install these space-saving doors



BY GARY STRIEGLER

1 *Cut the track to fit your door.* *This kit can be sized for different doors. First, the author cuts the wood nailers to fit the door opening. Be careful not to cut the aluminum track.*

Pocket doors slide out of sight when cabinetry or furniture won't allow a swinging door to open. In areas where a door is needed but rarely will be closed, pocket doors are there when you need them, gone when you don't.

Pocket-door kits supply all the hardware you need to hang one of these doors. I use a Johnson Hardware kit (www.johnsonhardware.com; 800-837-5664), but Stanley's is similar (800-622-4393; www.stanleyhardware.com). A typical kit consists of the track and roller hardware, steel-reinforced split studs that frame the pocket, and floor brackets to anchor the studs.

The convenience of a pocket door diminishes quickly if the door jumps the track, hangs up inside the wall, or doesn't stay closed. Unfortunately, it's not easy to fix a flawed installation, so it's important to make sure the door works properly before you install drywall and trim. If you take care to level and plumb the framing and hardware, the door will stay on track, operating smoothly for years to come.

Pocket doors need bigger openings

The trick to framing the rough opening for a pocket door is to leave plenty of room to work with. The manufacturer's instructions call for the opening to be twice the width of the door, plus 1 in. I consider this a minimum requirement and usually add an extra ¼ in. to the opening.

The rough opening has to be several inches taller than one for a regular door to allow space underneath the header for the track and the rollers (photos facing page).

If the finished floor is not installed, you need to leave clearance for the flooring material plus an additional ⅜ in. to ½ in. of clearance between the bottom of the door and the finished floor.

Although the rollers that guide the door along the track are equipped with adjustment screws to raise or lower an installed

A LEVEL TRACK AND

2 ***Clever mounting brackets ease installation.*** *A slot in the mounting hardware slides over a screw to hold the assembly in place while the author levels the track and squares it to the frame.*

3 ***Sliding doors need a level track.*** *Check the track with the level placed directly on it. When it's dead-on level, screw the mounting brackets in place.*

5 ***Split studs frame the pocket.*** *Reinforced with steel for added rigidity, the split studs provide clearance for the door and an attachment surface for the drywall. Slip each stud over the floor bracket, and screw the studs above the track.*

4 ***Frame the pocket in the same plane as the wall.*** *Snap chalklines on the floor to mark the wall's bottom-plate lines across the rough opening. Then plumb down from the track to locate the floor bracket, which anchors a pair of split studs. Center the floor bracket between chalklines.*

SQUARE FRAME PREVENT FUTURE PROBLEMS

AS LONG AS IT'S FLAT, ALMOST ANY

6 *Hang the door before hanging drywall.* *Set the roller hardware back from the door edge to avoid driving screws into the weaker end grain. Predrill screw holes to avoid splitting wood. With the pocket exposed, it's easy to level and plumb the door.*

7 *Install the door bumper.* *Screw the rubber bumper to the jack stud. With one door edge against the bumper, the opposite edge should protrude at least ¾ in. beyond the split stud. To move the door farther into the opening, put blocking between the bumper and the jack stud.*

door, the limited range is only for small maintenance adjustments.

Cut the track to the door size

The main component in the pocket-door kit is an aluminum track that is mounted on a wooden brace that fastens underneath the header. The track section that extends across the door opening has wood nailers on both sides for installing drywall and trim. This kit can be used for doors that are as wide as 36 in. or as narrow as 24 in. and is available for common door heights.

If the door is less than 3 ft. wide, cut the track to size. The manufacturer marks the track for common door widths. I use these markings to locate cuts on the nailers, making sure not to cut the track (photo 1, p. 74). Next, measure the width of the rough opening; then mark and cut the wood brace to length. Cut the aluminum track 1½ in. shorter than the brace so that you can attach the mounting bracket.

The roller track must be level

Installing the track takes only a few minutes but is the most important part of the

Door latches

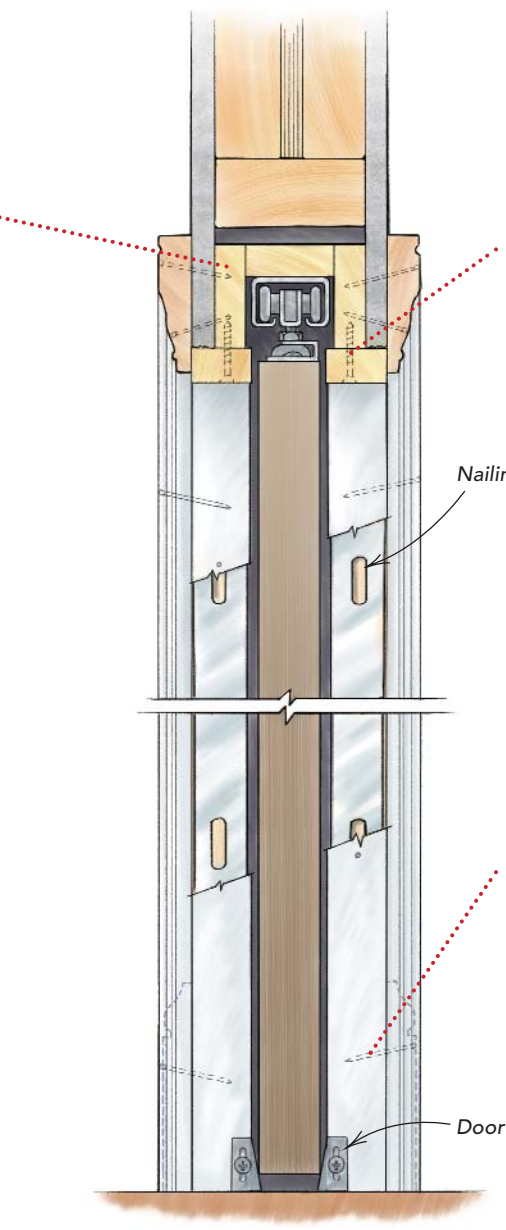
A pocket door requires a latch with a thumb pull to retrieve an open door tucked into its pocket and some type of flush side pull to grab when opening a closed door. For bathrooms, choose a privacy latch with an integral lock.

Prebored door hardware

Door latches for prebored doors install in minutes, and eliminate the possibility of ruining a door with an errant cut. This one is made by Kwikset (www.kwikset.com; 800-327-5625).

Mortised door hardware

Traditional mortised door hardware has a clean, elegant look but can be difficult to install. To simplify the process, manufacturers also make one-piece latches and locks that slide into a simple notch cut into the door's edge. The latch shown is made by Better Home Products (800-991-0300; www.betterhomeproducts.com).



8 Designed for future adjustment. *Install head jambs with screws so that jambs can be removed to access the roller-adjustment mechanism.*

9 One misplaced nail could ruin the job. *Use 1½-in. finish nails to attach trim pieces because longer nails can extend into the door. Carpenter's glue backs up the baseboard's fasteners.*

process. If the track is out of level, it may be impossible to get the door plumb or to keep the door in the opened or closed position.

For the 84-in. door shown here, I measure 85¼ in. up from the height of the subfloor on each jack stud. Driving a pan-head screw partially into each stud at the marks lets me slip the track's mounting hardware over the screws (photo 2, p. 75). With the track set, I tighten the screws enough to keep the track from moving, but not so much that I can't make adjustments. Use a level to check the track lengthwise (photo 3, p. 75) and a square to make sure it's square with the stud face from front to back before screwing the bracket in place.

The kit includes two pairs of split studs that frame the door pocket and steel brackets that anchor each pair to the floor. I snap chalklines on the floor to make sure the brackets line up with the walls on both sides of the rough opening. Because I'm working on a concrete floor, I secure the bracket to the floor with Tapcon masonry screws (photo 4, p. 75). Then I slide the split stud onto the bracket and screw the stud to the wood brace above the track.

Install a door that will last a lifetime

As long as it's flat, almost any door can be used as a pocket door. However, I prefer a 1⅜-in. solid-core door. Although hollow-core doors are light, they don't deaden sound or create the same feeling of privacy that you get from a solid door.

If the door isn't preprimed, prime its top, bottom, and back edges before installing it to prevent the door from warping.

Attach the rollers, and hang the door as soon as the track and split studs are installed. I use a level to make sure the door is plumb (photo facing page). You can make minor adjustments with the roller-adjustment screws, but anything else requires resetting the track. Check that the door stays in its opened and closed positions.

Install the rubber door bumper before hanging drywall. The door bumper screws into the jack stud on the pocket side of the opening. When the door is against the bumper, it should stick out into the opening at least ¾ in. This way, it will be flush with the finished jamb. If the opening is too wide, add a piece of blocking behind the door bumper. Once you are sure the door is plumb and level, go ahead and hang drywall over the pocket area.

Jambs give the door a clean look

The split studs' metal cladding has elongated holes for the trim's finish nails. Before installing the split jambs, I mark the locations of the nailing holes on the adjacent drywall so that I know where to drive the nails through the jamb.

I make jambs from ¾-in. stock. For the split jamb on the pocket side, rip the stock to fit flush with the drywall on the outside, and overhang the split studs just enough to hide the inside of the pocket. I try to leave at least 3/16-in. clearance between each split jamb and the door. If split jambs don't line up flush with the edge of the door, plane the backside of the jamb pieces to make them flush.

Before nailing the outside jamb, close the door to make sure the door and the jamb line up. If they are off, shim the jamb to meet the door edge.

With the trim work done, the final steps are to screw the door guides to the jambs at the bottom edge of the door to keep it centered in the pocket and to install the door latch. □

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