

A Simple Approach to a Paneled Passageway

Starting with a prehung door, you can create an elegant vestibule by adding frame-and-panel jamb extensions

BY GARY STRIEGLER

Look in just about any old building, and you'll see that the paneled passageway has been around for a long time. This trimmed-out space has a dramatic impact on the overall look of a home's interior. Even more important, a passageway can add a sense of privacy to the room it serves. Adding this transition area can make a room feel more peaceful and sequestered. When I'm building a house, my clients often ask me to add paneled passageways to enhance privacy in certain rooms, especially master bedrooms and studies.

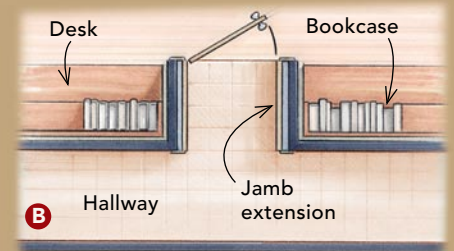
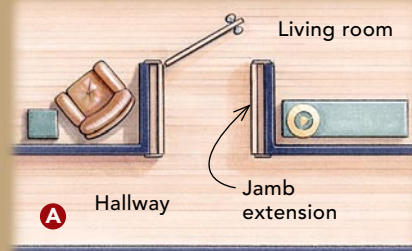
The good news is that you don't need to be a furniture maker to build paneled passageways, and they don't require expensive materials. I use simple pocket-hole joinery along with birch plywood, 1x poplar, and basic poplar moldings to build the panels. The best aspect of this approach is that everything is built off a prehung-door unit. With the door hinges already mortised, adding a paneled passageway to your next project requires only a little extra time and a few basic tools.

Gary Striegler is a homebuilder in Fayetteville, Ark. Photos by Chris Ermides.



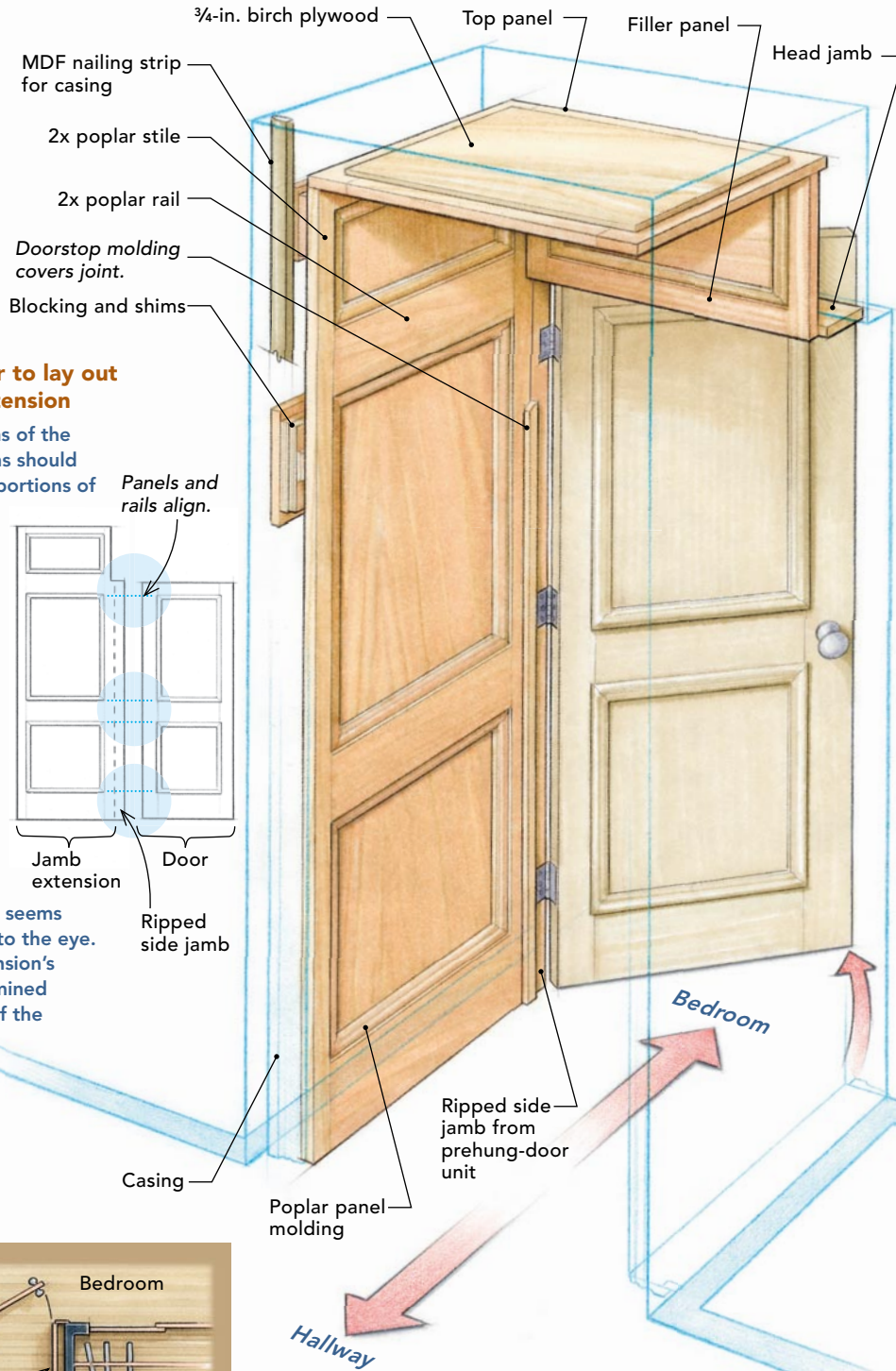
A passageway can benefit any room

Paneled passageways can do more than provide privacy. Adding a vestibule to a living-room entrance creates a niche for furniture (A). Pushing a doorway into a room creates space for built-ins like desks and bookcases (B). As shown in this article, vestibules also can incorporate existing partition walls from closets and bathrooms (C).



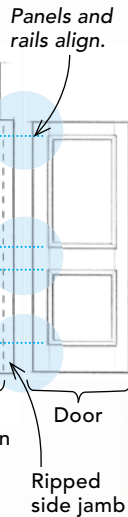
IT ALL STARTS WITH A PREHUNG DOOR

The frame-and-panel assemblies that form the sides of the vestibule are actually extensions of the side jambs from a prehung door. After removing the door and the hinges, I rip the side jambs down to 2 in. wide. Then I set aside the side jambs and head jamb and use the door's dimensions to lay out the jamb extension (details below). I build the side-jamb extensions, the top panel, and the filler panel, and then assemble them near the door opening.

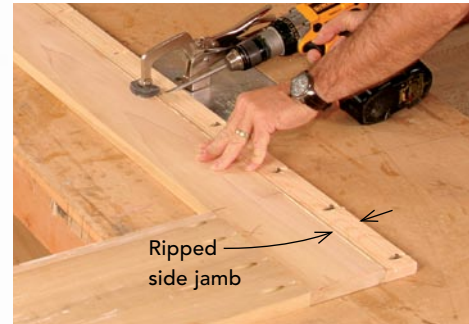


Use the door to lay out the jamb extension

The proportions of the jamb extensions should reflect the proportions of the door. I use a story pole to transfer rail heights from the door to the jamb extension. It's important to note, however, that the extension has one more rail than the door. I make the stiles 2½ in. wide because that dimension seems most pleasing to the eye. The jamb extension's width is determined by the depth of the vestibule.



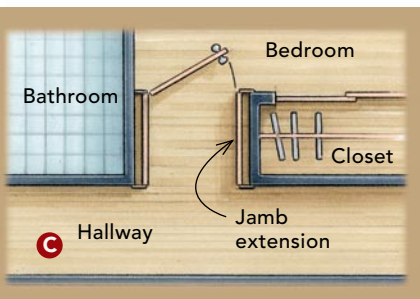
Remove the doorstop molding, then rip each side jamb. After disassembling the jamb, I pry off the doorstop carefully so that it can be reinstalled later. I rip the side jamb down to 2 in. I also rip ¾ in. off the head jamb so that the filler panel will tuck in front of the head jamb when the unit is installed later.



Join the jamb to the assembled frame. I assemble each extension's frame with pocket screws. Once all the frames are built, I join the ripped side jamb to the frame of the extension with glue and pocket screws spaced every 6 in. When the unit is assembled and the door is hung, I reattach the doorstop over this joint.



Add plywood and panel molding. After gluing and nailing ¾-in. birch plywood to the back of the panel frame, I use a headless pinner to apply the poplar panel molding. All the vestibule panels are built the same way.

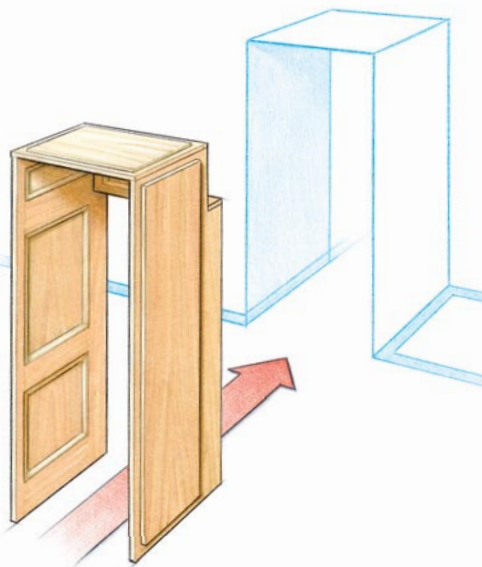


ASSEMBLE THE PIECES, AND HANG THE DOOR

The vestibule's side panels extend above the door's head jamb, which I install before tilting up the unit. Nailing up blocking ahead of time makes it possible to shim the panels plumb and level.



Attach the top panel and head jamb. Using the length of the original head jamb as a guide, I screw the top panel and nail the original head jamb to the side panels. I ripped $\frac{3}{4}$ in. off the original head jamb so that the filler panel will tuck in front of it once it's installed.



Tilt and slide. After the original head jamb and top panel are attached to the side jambs, I tip up the unit, center it in the rough opening, and slide it in place. An extra set of hands ensures that the unit won't rack as it's positioned.



SHIM THE STILES PLUMB, THEN ADD THE CASING

Once the door is hung, I finish hanging the rest of the unit. Although I could install the filler panel earlier, I choose to install it once the vestibule is nailed in place so that I can fine-tune the side jambs as needed. When everything is shimmed and nailed plumb, I reinstall the doorstop and nail up the casing.



Shim the jamb plumb, then tack it in place. I plumb the hinge side of the unit first, then nail it in place with 2½-in. trim nails. I keep these nails in the area of the jamb that will be covered by the doorstop so that there are fewer holes to fill later.



Shim and nail the outer stiles plumb. Before hanging the unit, I installed blocking within shimming range (½ in. to 1 in.) to sit behind the extension's stiles. With the door jamb nailed off, I insert and adjust shims to get the jamb extension plumb before nailing it off. A piece of medium-density fiberboard (MDF) provides backing for the casing.



Attach the filler panel to the head jamb. I nail the filler panel to the head jamb and to the studs, keeping the nails out of the panel's field. A small cove molding will cover the gap around three sides of the filler panel.



Install the hinges, then hang the door. Once the hinge side of the jamb is nailed plumb, I install the hinges. Whether I'm hanging a hollow- or solid-core door, I run a long wood screw through the middle hole of each hinge to catch the framing by at least 1 in. I then shim and nail the other side jamb in place, maintaining an even reveal around the door once it's closed.



Install the doorstop molding and casing. With the door jamb and the door hung, I reinstall the doorstop. I like to run the side pieces first and the header piece last. Finally, I add the casing to each side of the opening.