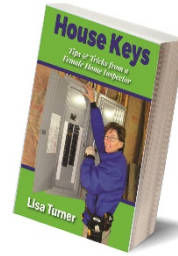


Excerpt from *House Keys: Tips and Tricks from a Female Home Inspector*. Chapter 24: Secret Hiding Places and Other Fun Stuff



SECRET HIDING PLACES IN YOUR HOME

Ready for some intrigue? What came to mind when you read the title? Either you thought about hiding yourself or you thought about hiding valuables.

If you would like a secret hiding place from family or friends, you may need to consider new construction. The “secret room” idea isn’t new, and I have built several into new construction. Secret rooms have to be well designed, though, because under scrutiny someone can discover them by analyzing the outside and then searching the inside spaces. But if you are really intent on having an entire room that’s very tricky to find, it is very possible to do. If you’re building a home tell your designer what you want and then call the Hidden Door Company. If you’d just like to place your jewelry in a safe place while you go on vacation, then I have some ideas for you.

There are poor places to hide your cash. Don’t put valuables under your mattress - believe it or not - this is the first place burglars look. Similarly, don’t place things under an obvious rock in the yard, in your sock drawer, DVD cases, behind the toilet, or on the refrigerator shelf. These are old hat.

You can try the following ideas and hope that the burglars don’t read this column. You may need to be creative and get some do-it-yourself help to fabricate some of these tricks. They work because they are generally too much trouble for burglars to check out.

- **Bathtub panel.** Depending upon what kind of tub you have, you may be able to either cut a small access hole and cover with something that looks like it belongs – attach with Velcro – or use the space next to the motor if you have a jetted tub.

- **Air vent.** Buy a small fireproof box, open one of your wall vents, and place the box inside. Make sure the box does not take up more than 10% of the space or you might slow down your HVAC.
- **Inside a picture.** This trick works because burglars don't feel like tearing every single picture off your wall looking for things. The trick is to have multiple pictures made up as canvas prints. These prints are inexpensive and have one or more inches of space behind them. Simply cover the back with cardboard leaving a flap that can be closed with Velcro.
- **Inside a hollowed out book.** Another old trick that thieves will not spend time on. Unless you have zero books on your shelves, it's just too much trouble to check them all out when thieves just want to find something and leave.
- **Pantry shelf containers.** Take a soup can, for example, and turn it into a storage container for jewelry or cash. Make sure that it's behind the other cans or someone might get a nice surprise when they are hungry.

The best place to put your valuables is in your bank's safe deposit box. If you need fast access to some of your things, the next best place is a fire resistant safe bolted to the floor in a closet. Only the most determined thief will take the time to rip your safe out, and they will likely have trouble carrying it away unless they have an accomplice.

Now think up your own even more clever ideas. You'll be amazed at your ingenuity.



MORE SECRET SPACES: SECRET ROOM?

A reader reminded me that you do not need to design and build a new home in order to make a secret room. Indeed, this is very true. I was thinking that most readers might not want to convert an existing room in to a “secret” space. But as I thought more about it, I decided that this might be both fun and easy to do with closet or pantry space. Local cabinet makers can look at your existing space and the entry to it and design a door that functions as a china or glass cabinet, or as a bookcase. The thickness, usually 8 or 10 inches, is visible from the secret room but sits flush with the wall on the outside. The door uses a strong piano hinge and handles substantial weight. You can also build a door that sits flush with bookcases you already have, and moves inward to reveal a doorway. If the design is clever and the matching is good, no one can tell that there is a space or room behind the cabinet. It is unlikely that a burglar would take the time to consider where a hidden door might be – they go for the obvious entries and exits.

Another reader asked if I could provide more secret space ideas. Sure!

The false bottom drawer trick. This is a fairly easy project and makes valuables highly accessible but very hard to find if you don’t know about it. This is perfect for cash and jewelry. Decide what drawer you will use and measure the interior. Cut a piece of ¼ inch plywood 1/16 inch smaller than the interior. Decide how much secret space you need in the bottom and place some wood strips on the sides of the drawer at the bottom to rest the new bottom on. Glue these in. Paint the bottom to match the rest of the drawer. Place a plastic organizer into the drawer on top of the false bottom and glue it to the bottom. Now, when you need to access the space, just lift out your organizer and there are your pearls.

Hiding your front door key. Don’t use the obvious places such as under the mat, above the door on a ledge, or under a rock near the door. Instead, get creative. Stand back from the door and look around. Hollow fake rocks will work if they are not near the door; put one under another rock so it’s not

obvious. Get a magnetic key box and look around for a good spot where it cannot be seen but it can be felt. A good trick for a near door space is an electrical junction box near ground level at the wall. Get the plastic one with a short section of plastic pipe. Cut off the end of the screw head and glue it into the bottom hole of the box. Secure the box and conduit in the ground by the door. All you need to do is push the cover to one side and there is the key.

Remember that although these tricks work and are fun, they will never replace a safe deposit box or a fire proof or fire resistant safe in your home. A fire could wipe out all of these secret places along with what you have in them.



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