

The dos and don'ts of basement finishing

Finishing a basement pays dividends in additional space in a home that doesn't require the same level of investment as putting an addition on the house. Also, the groundwork for a finished room is already there, as most basements are already set up with a poured concrete floor and some walls, usually cinder blocks. Some electrical components, plumbing and the creature comforts of drywall and a more inviting floor might be all that's necessary to finish a basement. The process can be labor-intensive, and many people prefer to leave it to a professional contractor. Whatever finishing method is chosen, homeowners should follow the proper

procedures when doing the work.

DO start with a detailed plan. Measure out the basement and mark any items that cannot be moved, such as a furnace, water heater or pipes. Create a design board that showcases the materials you plan to use on the project. Think about ways you plan to arrange furniture and consider all of the possible uses for the room. Will it be a home theater? Will someone be sleeping down there? Each scenario will require certain amenities and safety requirements.

DON'T plan to finish the entire basement. Doing so will leave you without a storage or utility

area where you house holiday decorations, tools, luggage and similar items.

DO get the scoop on building codes. Knowing what the municipality allows in basement remodeling will help you to customize a plan that is functional, safe and legal. No one wants to be slapped with fines for failing to follow the rules. Plus, failure to meet building codes could mean the work that has been done must be torn out and redone. It pays to follow the chain of command and secure permits while having all work inspected.

DON'T overlook adequate lighting in your re-

finishing plan. A basement is likely one area of the house that has limited natural light pouring in. With traditionally small windows, or no windows at all, a basement needs ample lighting in its design scheme. This may include a combination of overhead and task lighting. Ample lighting will help the room feel like part of the house and not just a forgotten storage area.

DO take into consideration moisture issues in the basement. Many basements are plagued by moisture issues ranging from water seepage to condensation forming on walls. These situations may vary depending on the weather throughout the year. Certain materials may need to be used to mitigate water issues before finishing can take place. The installation of water-barrier systems, drainage, sump pumps, or encapsulation products could drive up the cost of a basement renovation. It is essential to have a pro-

fessional assess the basement water issues prior to starting any finishing work.

DON'T simply cover up potential hazards, such as mold or mildew. Have them treated instead. Otherwise, you could have a breeding ground behind drywall that could lead to unsafe conditions in the home.

DO have a radon test. Radon is a hidden killer that can cause lung cancer. Because it occurs naturally in the soil and water surrounding a home and is impossible to detect without a specialized test, many people are unaware of the presence of radon until it is too late. Radon may be more concentrated in the basement, where the foundation is touching the soil. Therefore, rule out radon before considering renovation of a basement area.

DON'T limit furniture choices to one type. You may need to be flexible in your furniture choices, even selecting modular

pieces, like sectionals, because entryways to basements may have small doorways or obstructions that make adding furniture more challenging.

DO keep the possibility of flooding in the back of your head. Homes that are near waterways or at low elevation may be at risk of flooding. Basements are especially susceptible to flood damage. Therefore, think about the practicality of finishing a basement if you are prone to flooding. If you decide to move ahead, take certain precautionary measures, such as keeping electrical wiring up higher and using a more water-resistant flooring material, like tile or vinyl. House important electronics and items on shelves so they are not at ground-level.

Finishing a basement is a job that can add a lot of usable space to a home. Go about the project in the right way to keep within budget and have a room that is safe and functional.

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