

The dos and don'ts of basement finishing

Remodeling a basement is a popular home improvement project. A finished basement makes the space more functional and, when done correctly, can add a considerable amount of living space to a home.

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 dry-wall 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



An unfinished basement allows homeowners to transform the room into anything they desire. But there are some dos and don'ts to finishing a basement, including ensuring the project adheres to local building codes.

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 refinishing 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 base-

ment renovation. It is essential to have a professional 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 sec-

tionals, 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.

Cost-effective fencing options

Fencing serves many purposes. Some homeowners erect a fence for privacy, while others do so to contain pets and children. Because fencing can be expensive, some homeowners look for ways to cut costs, which can be relatively easy, especially for those homeowners willing to consider various materials when erecting their fence.

Traditional fences are available in materials ranging from wood to vinyl to metal. Homeowners have other options at their disposal if they prefer a more natural fence. Different shrubs, trees or grasses can be planted to create a barrier between properties or within the property.

When choosing a fencing material, consider that even a less expensive material may prove more expensive in the long run if it needs significant maintenance or has to be replaced in just a few years. Therefore, the most cost-effective fencing material may not necessarily be the least expensive one at the store. Here are some materials homeowners can consider.

* Found material: Repurposed wood or metal can be crafted into a rustic, one-of-a-kind fence. Materials can be found that are no cost, requiring only the cost of labor. Should you build it yourself, this can be next to nothing. Sometimes existing fences on another property can be disassembled and re-built on your own property for little to no cost as well.

* Chainlink/chainwire: Chainlink fencing is one of the most economical types of boundary fencing. The fencing comes in a variety of diamond sizes and is fixed to galvanized pipes spaced across the perimeter of the property. Although it is some of the least expensive fencing, it does not offer much

privacy on its own. But if you are looking at fencing simply as a barrier, chainlink could be the way to go.

* Picket fencing: A wooden picket fence is another inexpensive fencing material. The pickets can be purchased in various heights, and this fence may be used as garden border fencing or to mark a property line between homes. Spacing the pickets widely apart may cut down on the number that need to be purchased, further keeping the cost down.

* Bamboo: Bamboo is a rapidly growing grass that produces a hard wood-like material that is used in many building applications. Bamboo wood can be used to build a fence, but the natural plant also can be planted to form a living fence for privacy.

* Stockade fencing: A stockade fence is one of the more basic wood fencing options. Wooden slats are placed alongside one another to form an effective and affordable privacy fence. Stockade fencing can be stained or painted to preserve it. Many home improvement retailers sell panels of stockade fencing so that you can make fence installation a do-it-yourself project.

* Vinyl fencing: Although vinyl fencing is one of the more expensive fencing materials at the outset (it costs about twice the price of a wood fence), it does pay for itself rather quickly thanks to minimal maintenance. Unlike some other materials, vinyl will not rot or discolor. You also won't have to purchase stain, paint and expensive cleaners for a vinyl fence. That means once you make the investment, you will have years upon years of maintenance-free enjoyment.

There are many different fencing materials that can coordinate with a variety of budgets.



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