

finishing a basement series, part 1



steps to take before finishing your basement

By **Lindsey Getz**

Before you begin the process of having your basement finished, there are a few things to consider. Taking the necessary steps right from the start will ensure that your finished basement is the best it can be.

Having a clear idea of exactly what you want is important before starting any plans. Are you going to have a playroom, a bar area or a gym? What budget are you working with? How flexible is it? Focus on your family's current needs and think about how those needs might change in the future. A professional contractor can help you come up with some ideas, but most homeowners already know how they want to use the extra space. "There are a lot of options," says Robert Lascelle, owner, Hunterdon Builders. "We can do home theaters, wet bars and so much more. Many homeowners also choose to add a bathroom since they're going to be spending more time in their basements."

Finishing a basement is a great way to extend the living space in your home, continues Lascelle. "The cost to add on [to the home] can be much more expensive than it would be to finish your basement," he explains. "It often makes the most sense to create additional living space in the basement than to build an addition."

Ultimately, homeowners wind up with a whole new floor of the home, without the expense of an addition. Not to mention the fact that building an addition from scratch can be a much



Top and above: Photos by Bryhn Construction

longer process than finishing an existing basement. And when it comes time for resale, having a finished basement will add value to your home.

When seeking a contractor to do the work, look for someone who can show you a lot of finished basements from his or her portfolio. Don't hire a company that hasn't worked on a lot of basements as they can present unique challenges and it's important to have someone who knows what they're doing. "Make sure they have the experience," advises Lascelle. "And find a contractor that keeps up with the latest technology, especially green technology which is a really important issue today."

PREVENTING PROBLEMS

One key item to address before any major work is done is to ensure that any water problems are fixed. Hire a professional who can inspect your basement and either make sure it's dry, or fix any problem areas. "As a homeowner, you're probably going to invest thousands of dollars into finishing a basement, depending on what you're having done," says Robert Cherry, general manager, Quality 1st Basement Systems. "As a result, it's important to find out if you have a problem before any work is started. If you find out you have a water problem after the fact, it will involve tearing into finished work, and will ultimately be much more expensive."

There are signs to look for that would indicate your basement has an obvious water problem. "If you see any dampness or discoloration of the walls, that's a telltale sign that there's water surrounding your foundation," says Mike Klukiewski, co-owner, Select Basement Waterproofing.

Don't expect that you'll always be able to see a water problem on your own. Instead of taking the risk, let the professionals complete an inspection. "I often tell homeowners that a basement water problem can be like a cavity," says Klukiewski. "Even though a cavity might be hiding in the tooth, from the surface its appearance looks clean. You can't see the decay on the inside. And if it's too late when you discover the problem, the tooth has to be pulled."

And water alone, is not the only concern. Wet basements can also wind up with a mold problem, warns Cherry. A professional waterproofing company can take all the necessary steps to keep your basement dry. "We will design a system that works best for each homeowner," he says. "A good waterproofing company should be able to make the basement ready for the contractor to finish."

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▲ Before. A water problem is not only unattractive, but it can also do a lot of damage to your basement, as shown in this basement's before shot from Quality 1st Basement Systems.

▼ After. With the products from Quality 1st Basement Systems in place, a basement's water problem is easily solved.



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