



### Finishing Touches

Deciding how to finish your stair can be quite a tough decision. So, we've put together a comprehensive list of things you need to consider when it comes to applying those finishing touches. From floor coverings, through to colours and lighting - you'll be able get those details just the way you want them.

### Floor Coverings

#### Carpet or timber

The finished surface of a staircase will most likely be dictated by the finishes of the floor surfaces on both the lower and upper floor levels. Generally if the lower floor level has a polished timber finish, the stair would be of a similar finish. If the upper floor is a carpet finish then you may wish to carpet the stair. Carpet has many advantages. For one, it deadens noise. It is also an excellent non-slip surface.

There is a down side to carpet however which is that it will wear faster than in the rest of the house because traffic on a staircase tends to be concentrated near the centre of the staircase, but the same applies to a polished finish as well. . If you have a narrow set of stairs, a carpet runner could be used as an alternative as it still reduces noise, but because it is narrower than the staircase, it helps increase the apparent width.

—

#### French polishing

Traditionally a very strong and distinctive way of applying a high sheen polish. It uses a product known as a shellac which is a naturally occurring product from beetles. A high degree of skill is involved in the application but the results are impressive and easy to clean (it even reduces the amount of dust a stair collects).

Often it can be best to keep floor treatments as simple as possible particularly in smaller areas, if a floor gets over complicated, the space will be spoiled. Therefore, if you have natural, good looking floors, don't bother to carpet them unless the noise is too much. If you must have carpet, go for a plain version in a strong wearing weave or in smaller houses a striped runner is good. If you leave the floors relatively plain, you can go crazy on the walls with colour and the stairwells lighting.

—

#### Non-slip treads

It is compulsory to have a non slip surface to steps or a non slip leading edge. If you intend carpeting then it is not required. But if you intend to have timber treads there are several ways you can achieve this. Inlay aluminium or stainless steel strips that protrude from the surface of the front edge of the tread. Alternatively, a specific non slip finish can be applied after staining the timber.



## Lighting

### Lighting your stair

Falls on staircases can be a major cause of accidents in the home, surprisingly it is often the smaller staircases e.g. split level stairs which can be the most dangerous. Often risks to a stairs user can be caused by lighting that falls in pools, leaving other areas dark or encourages shadows when it is necessary to see clearly. It is essential that practicality and safety is placed first over bespoke lighting design features.

Staircases should convey a sense of airiness and be welcoming. Quite often, stairwells and landings do not have windows or at least ones that cannot be opened. Even if fresh air is circulating through open doors from ventilated rooms, the air will not appear to be fresh. If a stairwell does have a window, the sunlight streaming in will give the impression of freshness, and these windows should have the minimum amount of curtaining possible.

If there are no openings for natural light, you will have to create the impression of sunlight by trickery. One common trick is the skylight, which allows the maximum daylight stream down the entire length of the stairwell with the added bonus of being toplighting.

Another is to put in plain glass doors that lead into rooms off the staircase and borrow the light from their windows. Finally, in new houses there are small openings with wide reveals which can be designed at strategic angles of the stair. These tricks can be supplemented by introducing artificial light to increase the effect.

Light "borrowed" from other rooms can be enhanced by placing table or floor lamps in areas of the room where their rays can blend with the daylight. The wide ledges created by the obtuse opening angles of the wall slits can be used for table lights or lights concealed in the opening's top.

With new houses, it is easier to allow the maximum light to flow into the halls and staircase because you are able to construct the house to suit, unlike older houses with other conditions.

Diffused light created by translucent shades or other covers placed in front of both daylight and artificial light provide an overall soft glow. This technique is excellent for halls and stair landings where close work such as reading are never done, but where you need to see steps and obstacles.

Strong lights can be built into the staircase wall at baseboard level, giving the treads a beam of brightness. Modern light fixtures can be mounted into the staircase itself, great care and attention is required when considering this technique.

## Colour

### Choosing the right tones

Choosing colours for narrow spaces such as staircases is quite challenging. The big problem is that colours do not have a chance to diffuse between walls. Any strong colours you pick will become concentrated and more powerful, which is not always a bad thing. Stairways are sometimes dark and poky. The trick is to use colour to reduce the sense of enclosure. Light and shadow are used to emphasise angles and features. If you own an older staircase such as an 18th century one, don't mess it up. Plain colours accentuate the generous width of the stairs and ornate banister.

Light shades are preferable for dark and narrow areas that need all the help they can get. A staircase painted entirely white can be too minimal and clinical, but if you vary the shading and tone, you are able to emphasise the woodwork against the plain white walls.

Halls and stairways are areas where it is possible to be rather more decoratively adventurous than elsewhere in the house. For example you can use a strong combination of colours of equal weight such as a rich red and yellow. You could also use the same colours as on your doors and doorways on the staircase.



Wallpaper doesn't always work on staircase however it can be used on the walls between the flights. Well chosen wallpaper can make a ground floor entrance hall welcoming and help to divide it from the stair. However there should be a connection between the two - a major colour in the wallpaper could be matched to the plain walls of the stair or the pattern could be copied to curtains higher up. Colours should also have continuity on the stairs. It is not a good idea to start the ascent with grey and then suddenly burst into pink.

