

Steve Maxwell's

HOW TO FINISH A BASEMENT

A HOW-TO VIDEO eCOURSE

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HOW TO FINISH A BASEMENT

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HOW TO FINISH A BASEMENT



SECTION#1 HOW TO FINISH A BASEMENT

“Bilbo lives in a comfortable hole in the ground, not a nasty, dirty, wet hole, filled with the ends of worms and an oozy smell, nor yet a dry, bare, sandy hole with nothing in it to sit down on or to eat: it was a hobbit-hole, and that means comfort.”

J.R.R. Tolkien from *The Hobbit*

LESSON#1 : THE BENEFITS & CHALLENGES OF FINISHING A BASEMENT

Creating a comfortable and beautiful finished basement is a powerful and economical way to expand the potential of your home. The possibilities are wide and inviting. You may be thinking of a separate space for your growing brood of kids and the extra peace and quiet it could bring to your upstairs livingroom. Or how about the possibility of avoiding the rush-hour marathon twice a day by setting up an efficient, self-contained home office down there in the basement? Perhaps you like the idea of sharing your mortgage with someone who’s renting your basement as a self-contained second suite? Even having a separate part of the house for guests to stay in, cook in, and use their own bathroom would be great. These are just some of the ideas that get people thinking about finishing their basements, but there’s a hidden challenge.

Underneath all these worthy possibilities lurk dangers unique to the basement-finishing game. And these dangers are especially sneaky because most of them aren’t obvious at first. More often than not, they allow themselves to be ignored while building. But eventually, when all the work is done and lots of money spent, basement finishing design and construction errors always make themselves known. And they surface in ways that are impossible to fix properly afterwards. Short of ripping everything out and starting from scratch, there’s nothing you can do to fix major design problems with a finished basement after the fact. All you can do is avoid making mistakes in the first place. Saving you from making mistakes (or having a professional make mistakes and charge you for it) is a big part of what this course is about. Listen to my welcome message on the next page and learn more about the philosophy behind this course.

HOW TO FINISH A BASEMENT

AUDIO LESSON



WELCOME TO THE BASEMENT COURSE

AUDIO LESSON



WHY FINISHING BASEMENTS IS A UNIQUE CHALLENGE

HOW TO FINISH A BASEMENT is for two kinds of people: homeowners who want to do the work themselves; and also for people who simply want to hire and manage a professional builder to get the best possible finished basement. Besides teaching you how to create a comfortable, attractive and useful basement space, my main aim is to help you avoid the common troubles that happen because basements are often finished in ways that look good on the surface, but aren't good underneath.

So, what are these hidden dangers that so many finished basements run into? It could be musty basement air or mold growth. It could also be inadequate floor insulation that keeps feet perennially cold during winter. Perhaps, after spending tens of thousands of dollars finishing your basement, the place still feels clammy, dark and uninviting. If you live in a region that gets hot and humid, there's also the danger of condensation and the mold growth it triggers. You might even be hit by regular, catastrophic flooding if the basement wasn't prepared properly before finishing. The risks are real, but so are the potential rewards. That's why it's worth finishing your basement, but only if you're committed to doing things right. Doing things right is what this course is all about.

Click above right to hear why basements require finishing techniques that are quite different than above-ground projects, and what happens when this fact is ignored.

The surprising fact is that standard professional basement finishing practices aren't all that great. In fact, many of the "tried and true" strategies being used to finish basements right now by professionals are highly likely to cause trouble in the future. In fact, I've found that many professional builders don't properly understand how the latest insulation, flooring and lighting technologies can lead to vastly superior finished basements compared with "the way we've always done it". The construction business is notoriously slow to recognize and adopt innovation.

That's why you'll probably need to buck the status quo if you want the best possible finished basement. This is especially true if you intend to hire help to make it happen instead of doing the work yourself. Are you prepared to be different? This course tells you how and why.



The information you'll discover here may seem like overkill to friends, neighbours and some contractors, but ask yourself a simple question: How many people really know that "the old ways" have always worked fine? Sure, that previously finished basement seems okay at first glance, but how many of the ones finished 5, 10 or 20 years ago have drywall pulled down to see how things have fared beneath the surface over the long haul? Almost none. How many professional basement finishing contractors monitor indoor air quality in the homes they worked on in the 1990s? No one does this. How many builders call previous clients to ask how warm their feet are on an evening in winter? I hear regularly from a constant stream of distressed homeowners who've had basements finished professionally "like it's always been done". I only wish I could have talked to them during the planning stages of their basement finishing.

HOW TO FINISH A BASEMENT

REALITY CHECK: TV ILLUSIONS

Despite what you see on TV reno shows, money spent on home renovations rarely pays for itself with increased property values. Sure, making your home better will boost its value to an extent, but almost always less than you spend making it happen. There are good reasons for finishing the basement of a home you love, but increasing your equity in the building shouldn't be one of them. For every dollar you spend finishing a basement you'll typically add only about 70 cents to your property value. This isn't to discourage you, only to inform you that home renovations rarely pay financial dividends.

I have the greatest respect for quality-minded builders, but there's no substitute for being your own watchdog when it comes to basement finishing strategies. Why bother? It's worth it for the simple reason that even an unfinished basement is better than a musty, moldy finished one that contaminates indoor air quality throughout the house. The rewards of a properly finished basement space are great, but the risks are considerable, too.

As you'll see, the **HOW TO FINISH A BASEMENT** course is interactive. Besides words, photos and illustrations, there are also videos and audio recordings throughout the course. I'm also always personally available to answer questions and make suggestions for your unique basement situation. This is, after all, a real course. I'm the course creator and instructor, and part of my role is to help you via the comments interface here on the course.

And finally, **HOW TO FINISH A BASEMENT** makes use of my 30+ years experience to help you make things right. In addition to building & renovating, I've written about these topics for homeowner and professional audiences around the world since 1988 in newspapers, magazines and online. Researching new products and educating homeowners and builders about optimal basement finishing solutions is what I've done for years, and it gives me insights into real-world problems and effective solutions. A constant stream of homeowners distressed by problem basements is what prompted me to create this course in the first place. My aim is to help you get it right the first time, or wipe the slate clean on a previous basement finished badly and get it right the second time.

One more thing before we get going. The vast majority of basements that are eligible for finishing have some kind of masonry foundation walls and a concrete floor. Foundation walls could be made of poured concrete, concrete blocks, bricks or stone. Occasionally a house will have below-ground foundation walls made entirely with pressure treated wood, and these are candidates for finishing using the ideas and techniques you'll find here, too. All this said, if your basement is short – less than 84" high – or if it has a dirt floor, you'll need to do major structural renovations to raise and refine your space before you

can apply what you'll learn in this course.

I've organized **HOW TO FINISH A BASEMENT** in a way that gives you building blocks of knowledge, then shows how to use them. In Section #2, for instance, I'll show you the hidden parts of a basement and explain best-practice approaches for various parts of the finishing job. Section #3 covers moisture-proofing a basement, considerations for electrical and plumbing systems, plus tips on tearing out an old basement to make room for a new one. In Section #4 you'll learn how to plan and test different basement floor plan layouts, including room divisions and traffic flow. Section #5 covers special basement features including a bathroom, kitchen, second suite accommodation, plus a cold room, root cellar, sauna and steam room. Section #6 covers tools and techniques you'll need for finishing a basement yourself and how to begin using them safely. Right now it's time to start looking at the basement you've got, figuring out if it really can be finished properly. Not all basements can.

One more thing . . . As you work through the course, look for something called "Quick Definitions", "Reality Checks", and "Tech Tips". These are short, simple explanations of different technical terms and situations as they come up in the course. You'll want to know these whether you do the work yourself or hire a contractor. Just remember that this course has a real person behind it, and I'm ready to answer your questions as they come up. I can't cover every little detail in this course that might crop up with every basement in the world, but I'm sure that we can figure out anything working together on a one-on-one basis. The course interface always offers you a way to get in touch with me. I've spent years creating the videos, photos, illustrations and text for this course and I'm always upgrading and improving them. If I happen to look younger in some videos than others, you'll know why.



LESSON#2: ASSESSING YOUR BASEMENT SPACE

Basements vary a lot. Some are a new and clean – a dream to finish, with lots of headroom, bone-dry conditions year-round, and foundation walls that look like the day they were made. Other unfinished basements aren't nearly so nice. They look and feel like a medieval torture chamber. Dark, damp and

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TRUE STORY: FINISHING A WET BASEMENT

For about ten years I had regular Sunday afternoon visits from a couple of well-dressed religious men.

A guy named Bill was always one of the team.

Living in a small rural community as I do, my visitors knew that I was involved in construction and renovation. This sometimes gave the conversations an unusual turn. We

might start with questions about home improvement projects or power tools before my guests abruptly made the leap to things above.

One day the topic of basements came up . . .

“What can I do to stop the waferboard in my basement from swelling and going moldy”, Bill wondered.

“How long has this been happening?”, I asked.

“Ever since I finished the basement 6 years ago. I knew we usually get a little water in the basement in the spring, but this year’s worse than usual. Is there something I can kill the mold with?”

Bill was genuinely surprised when I explained that there are no easy solutions. Some problems are easy to fix, but a chronically leaky finished basement filled with moldy wood isn’t one of them. He never should have finished his basement until he got the leaks fixed and at least one year of dry performance had happened. Bill bought and installed tens of thousands of dollars of materials to build what amounts to an active compost pile under his house. I wish he had asked me before he built. He wishes he had, too.

distressing, the physical and financial challenges of finishing a space like this can be considerable. In fact, it’s sometimes impossible to finish some basements so they don’t contaminate the rest of your house with mold spores and the smell of mildew. Most basements can be finished successfully, but not all of them. How do you know if your basement is finish-worthy? Think about the basement assessment questions coming up next, then answer them honestly. Just remember, cheating has consequences. Answer truthfully and accurately and you’ll be the big winner. Don’t let hope and enthusiasm cloud your judgement. Ideally, the assessment exercises you’ll find coming up are best done on an unfinished basement with junk removed. Walls and floors should be open and visible. If you’re basement is currently finished and you’re planning to gut and refinish it, the work of observation is still possible but more challenging.

Basement Assessment Question#1: Is It Really Dry Enough?

A reliably dry basement is a completely non-negotiable starting

point for any plan to finish the space. You may have terrific ideas for a great space down there, but the entire basement needs to be 100% completely dry, 100% of the time before finishing should ever happen. If your basement “leaks a little”, or “leaked the last time we had a really hard rain”, or “sometimes gets a bit damp when the snow melts quickly”, forget about finishing until you get the place reliably dry. And I mean bet-your-life dry. It’s that simple. It always surprises me how many people let an excess of hope and enthusiasm get the better of them in this regard. They go ahead and finish a basement that they know gets “a little wet” or fail to observe a seemingly dry basement long enough to know that it really isn’t all that dry. Heartache always ensues, along with harmful indoor air quality.

How to Check for Basement Moisture

So, how do you know your basement is REALLY dry? It takes time to do a proper job because water leaks or damp conditions don’t usually show up all the time. It also takes attention to detail and a little detective work to properly assess the waterproof status of a basement. If your basement is already finished, your nose may tell you if moisture of some kind is a problem. If the basement smells musty at any time of the year, you’ve got a moisture issue hidden somewhere, guaranteed. This might be liquid water leaks (visible or hidden), but it could also be internal condensation developing in exterior walls and floors. If your basement is currently unfinished, before you get your basement-finishing hopes up, complete the following two-step procedure. You don’t want to end up like Bill . . .

Basement Moisture Check#1: Begin by watching your basement carefully for at least a year.

Longer is better. This sounds crazy to some people, but even a year isn’t always long enough to spot serious moisture problems. Why bother? Mostly because water can only leak into a basement if enough of it exists outside your house. You might get lucky and your basement really turns out to be dry even without you proving it to be so. That’s great, but you can’t count on it. Enthusiasm is no reason to gamble tens of thousands of dollars of materials and labor – plus your family’s health – finishing a basement that shouldn’t be finished in its current state at all. You need to see if your basement really has what it takes to stay dry when the going gets wet outdoors. Regularly inspect your basement with a flashlight looking for damp patches or outright liquid water. A good LED headlamp is even better than a flashlight. You’ve got to be a Sherlock Holmes about the issue of basement wetness to avoid coming to grief.

Click below for a video tour of my favourite LED headlamps. Simple as it sounds, I consider LED lights like these to be a small but highly useful basement finishing tool. A headlamp lets you do a much better job identifying moisture and mold issues, and it’s also handy during construction when you need to see things in less-than-ideal light.

HOW TO FINISH A BASEMENT

VIDEO LESSON



LED HEADLAMP TOUR

TECH TIP: A MOISTURE METER CAN HELP



If you have an old basement that's currently finished, analyzing the wood is worth doing before tearing it out. This is where a moisture meter can help. These small, economical, hand-held electronic devices are used by woodworkers to measure the % moisture content in wood. Stick the prongs of the moisture meter into the wood, hit the button and the meter will tell you how wet the wood is. If there's old wood framing in your basement, it's definitely worth checking with a moisture meter. Anything more than 12% to 14% moisture content is too high (especially in wood near the floor) and shows that you have a moisture issue that needs addressing.

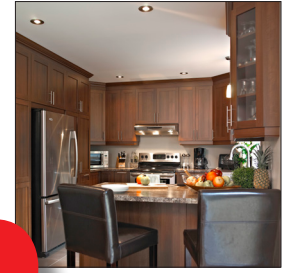
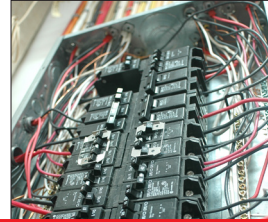
Basement Moisture Check#2: Monitor water vapour infiltration.

While you're monitoring your basement for signs of liquid water leaks, you need to keep your eye on something else. Damaging levels of water can enter your basement in the form of invisible water vapour as well as liquid water. Cut three or four 24" x 24" pieces of clear plastic (the kind used as vapor barrier works great), then fasten these pieces to walls and floor with duct tape. Brush the masonry surface clean to remove dust or loose particles before the tape goes down, then check to make sure it hasn't come loose. Look at the plastic every few days for a couple of weeks. You're looking for signs of condensation or water droplets on the INSIDE surface of the plastic. If moisture is coming in through the masonry (and it's entirely possible), it'll show up inside this plastic.

I often hear from homeowners by email who build typical wood stud frame walls on the inside of exterior basement foundation walls as part of their finishing campaign "the way it's always been done". They fill the cavities with insulation batts, then cover the frame with vapour barrier plastic before eventually applying some kind of interior wall finish. Drywall or wood panelling is popular.

If the homeowner doesn't happen to install drywall right away, it's not unusual for condensation to be visible on the inside face of the clear vapour barrier plastic. This is especially common in summer. In a sense, they've created a moisture vapour infiltration test the hard way. "What can I do to fix this problem?", they ask me, concerned. "Turn back the hands of time and prepare your basement walls correctly" is all I can say at that stage. I know it sounds harsh, but it's true. Better to put some small pieces of plastic on your walls to monitor them right at the beginning of the process rather than discover the need for moisture control after your walls are up.

Purchase the Full Course



[CLICK HERE TO PURCHASE THE FULL COURSE](#)

The full course includes 49,000+ words, dozens of photos, plans, 65 teaching videos & one-on-one advice from me, course creator and instructor, Steve Maxwell.

BY THE TIME YOU'RE FINISHED THIS COURSE YOU WILL:

- see why finishing a basement is a unique challenge that's often done poorly
 - understand why many finished basements have problems
- realize the four different sources of moisture that can ruin your finished basement & how to stop this moisture
 - understand why fiberglass batts are a very poor (yet common) choice for insulating basement walls
 - discover best practice methods for finishing basement walls, floors, & partitions
 - learn how to build a basement root cellar for storing fruits & vegetables
- understand optimal basement waterproofing, power, lighting, drainage and layout.
 - get real-world tips for building a basement kitchen, bathroom & rental suite

I'm Steve Maxwell, award-winning how-to instructor with regular articles appearing in publications such as Harrowsmith, Canadian Contractor, Mother Earth News, Cottage Life, Homes & Cottages magazine and many others. I've lived on a rural island in Canada and for 30 years and I've lived everything I teach in my video courses. There's no big publishing company behind my work, just a little guy (me) and my son (Robert) creating some of the most detailed and well-loved information products about hands-on living in the world.

Download the full version of the **HOW TO FINISH A BASEMENT** course and learn everything about doing the job right. Examine the material for 90 days and if you're not completely delighted, just ask for a refund. **You'll get it. I promise.**

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

Q: My family needs more space, but I can't afford to finish the basement all at once. What should I do?

A: Basements can be finished in stages. Insulating exterior walls and adding a subfloor makes the space more comfortable. After that you can work on each room individually as time and money permit. Another option is the "semi-finished" finished basement. If all you want is a decent place for the kids to play, painting walls and ceiling joists a bright colour and applying a flake-style epoxy floor coating does wonders to make things more inviting.

Q: A neighbour had a small basement water leak from the furnace and by the time insurance workers were done it was 10 months before things were repaired. Is there any way to make finished basements less prone to water damage?

A: Yes, but only if a basement is finished differently than usual. So many basements are finished using above-ground construction methods. This

unfortunate state of affairs is perpetuated by the majority of basement contractors who do things "the way they've always been done".

Q: The finished basement in our house is cold in winter and smells musty, especially in summer. What can I do?

A: What you're experiencing is the result of traditional basement finishing methods. Basements should never smell musty. If they do it's a sign of poor indoor air quality caused by mold spores in the air. Different basement management techniques can help, but the real solutions needed to happen when your basement was originally finished.

Q: Why is this course so expensive?

A: **HOW TO FINISH A BASEMENT** is a premium course at a premium price, but you do get what you pay for. Every person who signs up receives one-on-one help from me by email. If needed I review photos and videos of individual basements and make specific suggestions.

Got any more questions? I'm the guy who designed and created this video course, so I'm sure I can help you. I'm also only an email away at steve@stevemaxwell.ca