

INTERIORS

What lies BENEATH

Look no further than under your feet to extend your living space. *The Green* investigates improving your home with a basement conversion



Convert your basement to a multi-functional room

With the credit crunch effecting the housing market, many of us are rethinking moving, in favour of increasing living spaces in our current homes. This can provide the perfect option of extended space, without the upheaval of moving, or the costs of stamp duty, surveyors and other expenditure that buying a new house generates. While many people look upwards or outwards to extend – you could in fact be standing on the

perfect solution ... a basement conversion. This isn't always a cheap option, but the benefits and end results far out way any outlay, and in most cases the cost of the conversion is covered by the increase in the property's value.

Many of us still visualise basements as dark and dingy – a neglected area or underground storage which houses unused commodities or at best, utilities which don't fit in the kitchen. Times have changed

though, and today basement conversions are being designed to let optimum light in.

When planning, think about your current needs and desires, would a downstairs kitchen suit your lifestyle or a children's play area, or what about a games room?

For maximum return on your property a self-contained area which could house a nanny or a guest is a worthwhile investment.

Consider the spatial needs and challenges of the existing layout. A basement leading

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onto a garden offers a picturesque dining area, perfect for entertaining, or a relaxing informal living room with easy access outside.

Do your homework before enlisting the help of professionals. Seek planning permission, (take into account that it may be more of a complicated procedure if you live in a conservation area or a listed building), and get advice on damp and waterproofing solutions.

Once you have done this and made the all important decision of what the room will become, it's imperative that you utilise all the space involved. At this stage it is advisable to work with a reputable basement company alongside an interior designer where you can create original designs, and discuss the layout, costings and time scales.

A problem that many growing families face is storage. Utilise every corner and inch of your development, consider built in cupboards and shelving, corner units and floor to ceiling spaces which will ensure your basement (and home) are clutter-free.

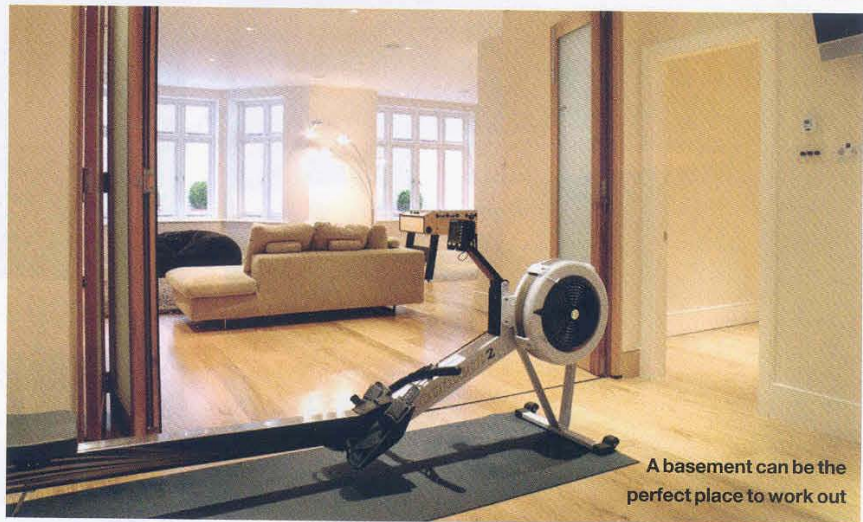
Logistically speaking, a conversion can take anything from two to four months, and sometimes longer. The noise and dust is unavoidable, but it is possible to live in your property while the work is taking place. Once the hard work is completed and all the architectural elements are in place, it's time for you to enhance its appearance.

If you haven't been able to optimise natural light, you may have decided to use your space for family entertainment such as a home cinema or something equally imaginative, but if it's general living space you are after, the interior design and colour palette you use can make or break your new level.

Common sense tell us that the lighter



If light is limited create a home cinema



A basement can be the perfect place to work out

colours we use the more we maximise the size and feel of the area, whereas darker colours can seem oppressive and make a room appear smaller. This doesn't mean that the only colour available is white, but it is advisable to stick to lighter tones. Shades with a subtle tint give the feeling of a larger space, as does a palette of soft greens and blues, – introduce bolder colours with decorative accents.

When it comes to furnishings mirrors are a worthwhile investment. As well as decorative appeal they will help to reflect light and create the illusion of space.

Perhaps the most important aspect of your basements new look is lighting, which will bring it to life. Ceiling spotlights provides the strongest illumination, but for something more subtle

add floor or table lights, or experiment with cupboard or picture lighting.

Extending your home can be an economical solution particularly in the current market. What are you waiting for – take the plunge...

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Do you have any tips for improving living areas in your home?

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