

LANDSCAPE VIEW

Many basements can be created to link directly with the garden at the back of the house. Enhance the feeling of light and space with a clean white finish and floor to ceiling landscape window. Suspended kitchen furniture achieves a spacious feel, while the monobloc island in Corian acts as the interior focal point. The bulthaup b3 kitchen range starts from £45,000, Kitchen Architecture



Digging

DEEP

ESSENTIAL *basements*



If space is of a premium in your home, don't forget there may be hidden depths just below your feet. Some houses are particularly suited to a basement conversion, which can be an ideal space for your new kitchen project

WORDS LINDA PARKER



Adding a basement to even an average three-bedroom Victorian home is, in effect, adding a whole extra floor, and can provide a new kitchen space



There's been lots of discussion over the last few years regarding making the most of the home you're living in, rather than moving on. Loft conversions and kitchen extensions are taken as read these days, but recent years have also seen an increase in the number of basement projects being undertaken. Adding a basement to even an average three-bedroom Victorian home is, in effect, adding a whole extra floor, and can provide a new kitchen space, along with options for utility, bath/shower room, wine storage, and perhaps a study or family room. Media rooms, where daylight isn't the top priority, are a popular choice, as are nanny or au-pair suites, or a guest suite, comprising a bedroom and en suite bathroom as well as a living/relaxing room. Extensive projects may even include a swimming pool and spa areas.

Down Below

While the word association with the term 'basement' or 'cellar' brings to mind rather cramped or gloomy rooms, with today's clever creations, nothing could be further from the truth. Light wells are generally incorporated – at the front of the house they tend to match the existing frontage, but at the back of the house the project can involve garden excavations, allowing more light in and the prospect of entering a new, lower level terrace from the kitchen/dining area. Double-height 'extensions' can embrace an element of basement construction, often where the house already has a 'half basement' layout. Once the decision has been made to dig down, if it is simply a basement project it's advisable to go to a specialist company whose design team has experience as far as planning issues and the appropriate building regulations are concerned. They will, of course, have their own teams of tradespeople who know and understand basement building systems. The situation can be compared to loft and conservatory projects, where companies will have

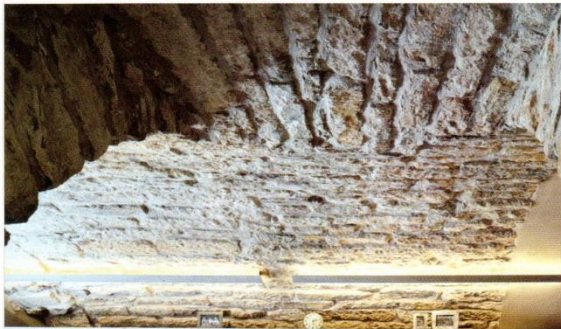
RIGHT
Natural light streams down the smooth concrete staircase in this luxury property, designed by McKinley Spaces. A curved glass balcony above creates visual impact, while a clever hidden shelf displays minimal décor

BELOW RIGHT
Tall, mirrored wall units reflect light through the glass ceiling above, adding height to the compact space. Deep wood veneers and quartz Oyster Caesarstone worktops add impact with a bright citrus finish. Kitchens from £30,000, Mowlem & Co

BELOW LEFT
Light floods through this linear kitchen from the glass panel above. Tall, mirrored units continue the seamless flow, reflecting the citrus décor and extending the space. An eclectic mix of rough and smooth furniture adds character and depth. Kitchens from £30,000, Woodstock Furniture



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LEFT
This Callerton kitchen fits seamlessly into the warm stone basement. Pure white cantilevered oak units store cookware, while strip lighting creates soft ambience. Kitchen prices are from £15,000, Kitchens International.



BELOW LEFT
Working with interior designers at Louise Bradley, Mowlem & Co created a spacious 'Chef's Kitchen'. Differing worktop materials such as stainless steel, Corian and Zodiaq were used to separate the modern kitchen and achieve a multifunctional cooking space.



RIGHT
Designed by Canadian company Design First Interiors, this open-plan kitchen is shaped by a large central island and linear lighting overhead. Three floor to ceiling units house Sub-Zero's ICBIT-30RID refrigerator, £8,640 and ICBIT-30CID combination, £8,676, maximising the eye-catching space.

FAR RIGHT
Transform your stairway with bespoke built-in storage, while using glass to divide the space and allow a free flow of natural light. This design was part of a project by Oxford & London Building Consultancy.

contacts and experience with the relevant local authority planning departments regarding what is and isn't tolerated or allowed. It may also be possible to be shown similar projects in similar homes in your local area.

Focus on Glass

The general aim of a successful basement project is to achieve as much useable space as possible, but it needs to be space that can be used with ease on a day-to-day basis. Glass is widely used in such schemes, not only for windows and walls but often for stairs, balustrades, and even floor/ceiling panels to allow light to enter the basement. It's not all plain sailing though, as there are lots of technical and structural considerations that must be addressed. Alan West, owner/director of specialist glazing company Trombe says 'It's vital that your specialist glazing company, designer or supplier must be involved in the early stages of the design process. Damp proofing and tanking systems must be linked into the structural glass from the outset, otherwise it's just storing up damp problems for the future. Our strength as a company is that we have a design team including architects and architectural technicians who can work with basement companies and designers to ensure that structural glass, whether it's exterior walls or for floors or internal walls, will be perfectly specified and installed.'

Practical Matters

Homes with a raised ground floor (classically, with half a dozen steps up to the front door) can be successfully transformed with a kitchen-dining basement, where the feeling is very much of an extended, open-plan ground floor, rather than a 'basement'. One of the most important considerations is flow and movement from one area to another, there should be no sudden feeling of entering a separate, enclosed or darker area. Interior designers working on such projects are conscious of maintaining a sense of space – flooring is often very pale and glossy (such as polished limestone or similar porcelain tiles) and walls are also likely to be plain and pale. Lighting is of paramount importance, and generally includes recessed ceiling spots, along with wall washers and up lighters. Light wells are vital and not only allow light in, but also add a sense of the outdoors, avoiding the sensation of a limited and enclosed space. If a full kitchen is being installed the architect and kitchen designer will address matters of appliance installation, drainage, plumbing and so on. If a wine cellar is to be included, take specialist advice on temperature control, air conditioning and heat and humidity levels. If it's a shower room then take care over plumbing, ventilation and drainage. There are so many strands to consider that it really does make sense to consult an expert.

Scaling Down

If a full-scale habitable basement or cellar isn't possible, consider a spiral cellar, a self-contained structure, specifically designed for the storage of wine. It's a very simple and clever concept where a watertight concrete cylinder is sunk through the ground floor of the house – not necessarily through the kitchen, it could be through the utility room, garage or extension. The structure is entered via a spiral staircase and lift-up hatch set into the floor, and it's designed to store wine at the perfect humidity, light levels and temperature and you can store fresh groceries too! **ekbb**



'Don't forget to include garden landscaping into the budget. A basement project is likely to disrupt the existing garden area'



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LINEAR LEVEL

This glass staircase in a McKinley Spaces home successfully expands the ground floor walkway, while climbing up to create a classic optical illusion. Again, clever use of glass transforms the dark interior into a light and spacious open-plan home.

ABOVE RIGHT In this project by The Oxford & London Building Consultancy, strong glass panels above use the sun to create a warm, contemporary style, while bathing the space in natural light. From inside the basement this creates the illusion that it looks directly outdoors.



GOING UNDERGROUND

This Original Spiral Cellar, from around £14,721, is built into the ground, offering the optimum temperature for storing your wine. Designed by Spiral Cellars, it has a maximum capacity of 1,600 bottles, with many additional options available.



ROSIE CALEY
DIRECTOR,
OXFORD & LONDON
BUILDING
CONSULTANCY

What is the most popular type of property that you come across for basement projects? The most common type of property we work with is the classic Victorian terrace - it's the most prevalent type of family home in South West London and basements can, in most cases, be added in a straightforward manner.

What are the most common reasons for not being able to create a basement space?

Some local planning departments may not allow a basement to be dug beneath the house, but will allow a development beneath the garden - often in the case of listed buildings. Other reasons include situations where there are too many neighbours around - perhaps where the houses are split into flats and consequently too many Party Wall agreements would be

needed. Homes close to significant areas of water, i.e. rivers or water courses can be unsuitable for basement developments too.

What is your favourite 'design trick' for ensuring the new basement feels light and spacious?

Never to use a narrow corridor for the hallway - we think that arrival space is very important to the overall look and feel of the project. Floor-to-ceiling glass panels, large format sliding doors onto a wide light well and generous internal ceiling heights can all contribute to a successful scheme.

What are the most common planning and building regulation problems?

As far as building regulations are concerned, it's vital to design a 'protected means of escape' for the hallway

passage to the front door. Open-plan living spaces connected by staircases are not good as far as fire safety is concerned, so these areas are always very carefully considered. Anything visible from the front elevation of the house, such as railings and front staircases are also highly scrutinised by planning departments.

What would be an 'average spend' for a three-bedroom Victorian terraced home, achieving a three-room basement area?

It's difficult to give costs as each project varies hugely, according to what the rooms are going to be used for and how much the clients need or want to spend on subsequent interior fittings. We say expect to spend around £165,000 plus VAT for the structural work and waterproofing, including design.

Q&A