

## Down the Stairway

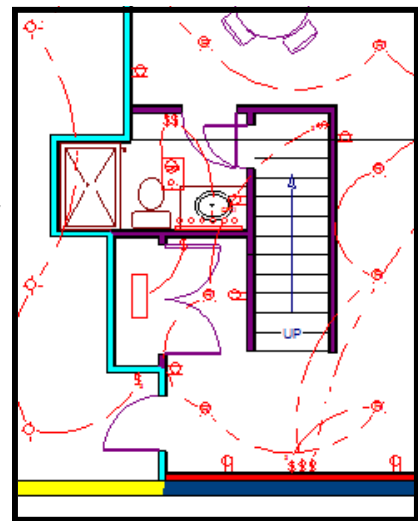
Moving big items down the stairs and into the basement can be potentially troublesome. In fact some items may not make it all.

The ease or difficulty of bringing in drywall is a good test of what you may be in for.

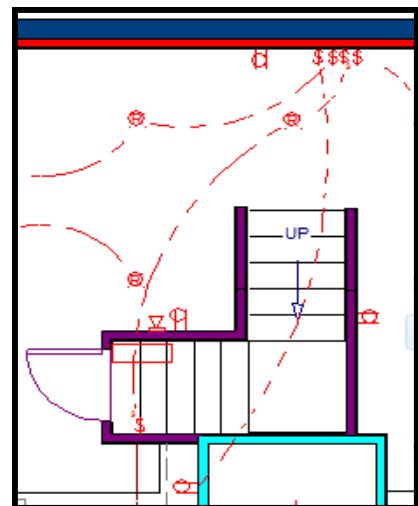
The purpose of this article is to offer some advice as to how to best deal with the situation, and to help prevent a costly and unnecessary problem. With a little bit of thought many of these situations can be eliminated, or at the very least, lessened.

Unless your basement has a walkout entrance the biggest “hole” to the basement one has is the doorway at the top of the stairs. Further, some types of stairwells can increase the difficulty. Lets first look at four different stairwells and see how they can affect your plans.

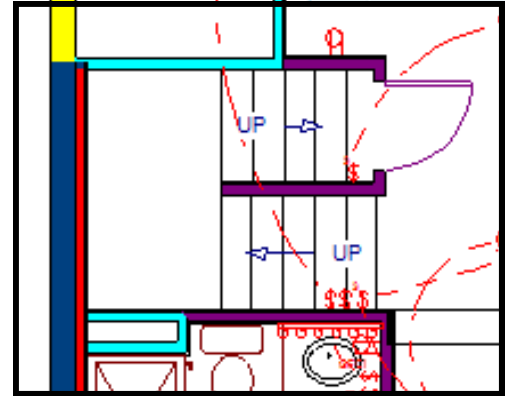
**(1) Straight shot.** This is the best type to have. No turns to negotiate, except at the bottom. The more distance you have from the wall in front - the better it will be. If you have a shorter distance – in the 3 to 4 foot range, make sure, if at all possible you have the stairwell open on at least one side. This way you can lift things up and over the railing to get into the basement. In fact I recommend this for all the stair types.



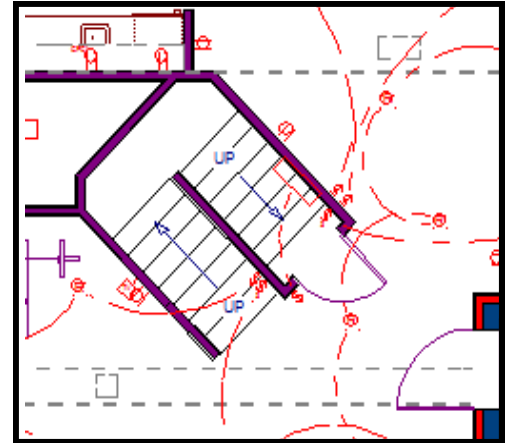
**(2) Stairs with a right angle somewhere.** These aren't as easy as the straight shot but generally aren't difficult to work with. Here you'll need to make one turn as you go down.



**(3) Stairs that return back on themselves.** These are more difficult but still manageable. The larger the landing, and the taller the ceiling height at the landing level, the easier it will be. At least two turns will be required here.



**(4) Stairs that return back on themselves with “clipped” corners.** This is the worst stairway type that I’ve personally dealt with. Minimally, there are two turns and any maneuvering room has been lessened by the angled corners.



Using the above as a guide, **BEFORE** you purchase any gym equipment, furniture, cabinets, appliances or electronics, think about the difficulty of bringing those items to the basement.

As discussed in “Basement Ideas”, having gym equipment that comes in smaller pieces will make the task of bringing any equipment downstairs easier.

Instead of a huge sofa that may not fit, consider an alternate choice of sectional furniture.

Giant full size refrigerators may not make it down some stairwells either. Will a smaller unit work, or maybe two under counter fridges?

Cabinets can pose a problem. I’ve had clients purchase corner cabinets for bar areas that had to be partially disassembled to make it into the basement. Counter tops are unforgiving too. Their size and shape should be taken into account before their construction if any potential for trouble exists.

Most electronics are fine, however if you have a monster sized flat panel TV in mind, take the stairs into account before you buy. An issue? Then consider a projector and screen as a solution.

The best thing to do is to measure your stairwell in terms of the volume. Know how high the lowest point is, especially if a turn is to be made. You'll need to know the width too.

Also examine if there's an issue getting into the stairwell.

Realize that most times the item will not be carried down upright, but at an angle which can give you extra play. This can work against you as well. The important thing to know is the space you have to work with. Once these distances are known you will then make educated purchases.

### **Other solutions:**

Depending on the state of your basement finishing project simple things can easily be done that will enable moving those big items. If you're in the framing stage, hold off on building the wall of the stairwell (if there's one that will be open). Or knock down any existing stairwell wall. In short, open the stairs as much as possible so you have the maximum space available for any kind of maneuvering.

Should you perhaps have this wall constructed and not yet drywalled - that extra inch of space can make a difference. No worries about damaged walls either.

More radically, if there's a room on your first floor with carpet, that carpet can be pulled back, the pad removed and a hole cut through the plywood subfloor. Bear in mind this only works with items less than 15" thick.

If you need more space than one joist cavity, then build some temporary support walls in the basement, open up the floor and cut out the floor joists. Drop your item down and then put the floor back together. Any joists that have been cut will need to be sistered (nailed to) NEW full length joists of the same width, length and depth of what was removed - minimally. These new joists must rest on whatever structural element the previous ones were set upon. I would even go so far as to put one on both sides of the cut joist. This however, is a very RARE occurrence. I have never been asked anything like this in all my years of basement finishing. I obviously don't advocate it, but it is a solution when none other will work.

If this is you, please consult any necessary professionals such as a structural engineer prior to doing anything.

### **Safety:**

Finally, I'd like to bring up some safety issues. If you are bringing something heavy down the stairs, (1) make sure your stairs can support your weight, the item, and anyone else that is helping to bring it down. It only takes a few minutes to add some additional support with some 2 x 4's to provide extra safety.

(2) Use proper lifting techniques and a dolly wherever possible. Take breaks as needed when moving the item. Be safe.