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Livingetc

LEADING BY DESIGN

DECORATE
TO BE HAPPY

COLOURS AND MATERIALS
GUARANTEED TO RAISE A SMILE
HOUSES WHERE THE JOY IS BUILT IN
MOOD-BOOSTING DESIGN - FROM CHIC
STORAGE TO COSY LIVING ROOMS

ARCHITECTURAL FEATURE OF THE MOMENT

mixed-material stairs

THE FIRST STEP IS THE SLEEKEST AS ARCHITECTS
ARE REIMAGINING THE FOOT OF THE STAIRCASE

FEATURE Keith Flanagan



Although staircases are among the most functional features in our homes, it doesn't mean they're all utilitarian. The impulse to infuse bold elements, twists and turns has precedent, which is why, in an effort to be different, a handful of architects have stumbled onto a brilliant idea: changing the very first step.

By switching up the shape, material and treatment at the base of the stairs, designers create a new layer of visual interest, an upfront feature that stands out within a structure known for continuity. Does it break all the rules? Yes, and that's precisely what makes it so exciting.

The not-so-subtle style is certainly in line with the current desire for one-of-a-kind customisation throughout modern interiors. 'Owners are wanting their spaces to be less cookie-cutter and more reflective of who they are, and that extends to almost every space they inhabit,' notes Rachel Bullock, a founding partner of Los Angeles' LAUN.

Whether installing a contrasting sculptural base out of marble or giving a lower clutch of stairs a distinct form and colour, the technique works by adding drama. If handrails and balusters are like jewellery, think of a bespoke first step like a show-stopping heel – it can elevate and ground your design at once.

Of course, it's not all about aesthetics. 'As a studio, we like to vary the finishes to the steps, not only from a visual perspective but a practical one too, as alternative step finishes can also help indicate the start and stop point for one's journey,' says Miriam Fanning, principal of Australia's Mim Design.

In this way, a distinct base can start your design off on the right foot, giving importance to a moment we often breeze past on our way up the stairs – and perhaps, counter to its main purpose, it even creates space to stop and reflect. ➤

1 SHORT CHANGE

A small four-step pedestal does the heavy lifting in this clever design by Australian architect Nic Brunsdon. Rendered in the same material as the floor, concrete steps anchor the staircase to the main level before they transition midway with timber open risers, hinting at an airy upper floor above. 'The stair became a point of play and expression of this where the solid mass of the ground floor forms up to meet the light timber upper flicking down from above,' says Nic.

GET THE LOOK Project by Nic Brunsdon

2 SOLID BASE

For a bottom stair loaded with drama, marble stone slabs are as handsome as they are hefty. 'If you are able to use a solid block of marble, carve an interesting edge to reveal the depth of the material and create a functional, sculptural element to the home,' recommends

Rachel Bullock of LAUN. Keen to make the most of your base? 'One way is to increase the size of the tread where you change materials to allow a space for contemplation that sets the tone for the space you are about to enter,' she adds.

GET THE LOOK Project by LAUN

3 STARE DOWN

Think of your first step like a first impression – switching the material, shape, or colour is guaranteed to spark interest. Mirroring concentric lines of the light fixture in their Milan showroom, the designers and founders of Giopato & Coombes chose a Rosa Portugal slab, hewn into a half circle, to contrast against grey walls and concrete floors. 'Work with materials that are very different, but which chase each other in tones, making a prominent element to be a focus, as for the pink big step,' they say.

GET THE LOOK Project by Giopato & Coombes





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4 OFF COLOUR

A coat of paint in a new shade can create a standout moment, allowing certain sections of your staircase to pop and creating a new layer of personality. 'These three colours are enveloped with a lot of white surfaces, which are important to calm down the atmosphere – including the first step, which plays the role of a sort of a continuous base,' says architect Manuelle Gautrand, the mastermind behind this sunny staircase.

GET THE LOOK Project by Manuelle Gautrand Architecture & Manuelle Gautrand Interiors



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5 BUILD OUT

Transforming an existing timber clad staircase, designers added quartzite across the bottom stairs to create an architectural transition akin to stepping down into a sunken living room. Extending the new material across the hall also created an opportunity to build out extra architectural features. 'Depending on the height of the steps, this can create a lovely streamlined bench or hall console, and with the material selection you can go as subtle or as bold as you would like,' says Kingston Lafferty Design's CEO, Becky Russell.

GET THE LOOK Project by Kingston Lafferty Design

6 BREAK STEP

Like toy blocks, breaking your staircase into entirely different pieces allows more space to explore different textures and materials. 'If you want to make a clear difference, we recommend detaching the first steps from the next ones,' says Hélène Pinaud, architect and co-founder of Paris' Heju Studio. 'We like to create a heavy pedestal like an abstract volume below and then very light and thin stairs so you see them as two separate elements.'

GET THE LOOK Project by Heju Studio

PHOTOGRAPHS (OFF COLOUR) GAELLE LE BOULICAUT; (BUILD OUT) RUTH MARIA MURPHY;



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