

# STEP BY STEP

Pros, cons and installation tips for carpeting stairs

BY MARK AYDIN



**T**here are a number of home safety hazards from carbon monoxide poisoning to electric shock from an outlet to a stovetop fire.

Less obvious is the risk stairs pose. More than one million Americans injure themselves on stairs each year, according to a study in the *American Journal of Emergency Medicine*.

While no floor covering can prevent getting hurt on stairs, carpet can help cushion the fall. It also provides the best resistance against slippage than any other flooring option. Other benefits of carpet in-

clude its ability to hide imperfections in stairs' structural elements, its sound-absorbing properties, which reduce impact noise, and little preparation is required for installation.

To ensure the safest journey going up and down stairs, a plush, longer fibre carpet like Saxony is recommended. Berber (loop) carpet provides less surface tension due to the loops and curved tips. It's also not ideal for households with pets; the tight loops can easily trap pets' nails or teeth causing injury. However, a 100 per cent bulk continuous filament (BCF) nylon is what's often recommended since most manufacturers will not warranty other carpet types for use on stairs and high-traffic areas. A low-profile, high-density polyester fibre carpet also fits most homeowners' expectations and budgets.

A rebound foam underpad that's six to 10 millimetres thick should be installed first on stairs. Where a tightly woven or lower profile carpet is being installed, a lower height and density underpad might be more beneficial for the carpet's longevity. In either case, refer to the recommended underpad type by the carpet's manufacturer for warranty terms.

The carpet underpad serves many important roles, the most important being it absorbs stress, shock and impact, not only of a fall but also during regular foot traffic. This extends the life of the carpet and helps its fibres to regain some of the retention.

As an added safety measure, an installer should follow the pillow/padding method on stairs' tread nosing. This is where the underpad is extended from the stair tread toward the nosing and wrapped around it. If a slip or fall occurs, the added cushion on this section of the stair acts like an airbag. Using this method depends on the staircase structure, as well as the carpet selected. There are also instances when it cannot be applied.

When installing carpet on hardwood stairs, nails and staples are required. Also, the carpet, whether wall-to-wall or a runner, may cause discolouration to the wood over time. This generally occurs over a three to five-year period. Should the carpet need to be removed, wood filler will be needed to cover the nail and staple holes. And, in some cases, the stairs will require refinishing or re-staining due to the discolouration. ■

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