



STEPPING UP THE STAIRS

By STACY DOWNS
The Kansas City Star

Your home should rise up to greet you, lifestyle experts are forever preaching. Sprucing up the stairway is a simple start.

"Stairs are architectural details that should be played up," said Karol Nickell, editor in chief of Fresh Home magazine. "But they often get ignored be-

Runners, tile and other touches add personal style to this sometimes neglected home feature.

cause they're passageways. People forget that they're the transition between the public and private places in the home, which makes them important."

To say Patricia Shackelford

of Kansas City felt uplifted when a candy-colored striped runner recently spiffed up her stairway is an understatement. Here's what she wrote in her blog, Mrs. Blandings: "Is it pos-

sible that the installation of a carpet runner would offer such joy? Can you imagine your heart skipping, not a beat, but just skipping?"

So how does she feel about her stairs now, after her three sons, ages 7, 10 and 13, as well as the family's boxer, Rosie, have

SEE STEPS | D4



TAMMY LJUNGBLAD | THE KANSAS CITY STAR

TILES

Casey Simmons of Kansas City gathered found objects, including blown fuses, to create works of art on the stairs of her home. She also incorporated tiles on the treads that friends and family wrote to her to commemorate her 30th birthday. She suggests doing a sample board or stepping stone of mosaic tiling before tackling the stairs because it was a project that took dozens of hours.

Another option is installing straight rows of thin, lightweight tiles on just the risers for pops of color.

RESOURCES

- **A Daily Obsession** (carpet-tile stair runner project), www.adailyobsession.com
- **Dezign With a Z** (decals), www.dezignwithaz.com
- **Elements of Green** (Flor carpet tiles), 1919 Wyandotte, 816-842-0500, www.elements-of-green.com
- **Fresh Home magazine** (decal stair project in the winter 2009-2010 issue), 800-344-6913, www.freshhomemag.com
- **Mrs. Blandings blog** (stair runner project), mrsblandings.blogspot.com
- **Stuff** (Dash & Albert runners), 316 W. 63rd St., 816-361-8222, www.pursuegoodstuff.com

STEPS: Give your house a lift with a few stairwell details

FROM DI

trounced up and down hundreds of times in one of the snowiest winters in history?

"The same," Shackelford said with a satisfied smile. "It's wearing well."

However, she concedes no one wears their shoes in the house, which is why the cotton runner still looks new. In a shoe-wearing house, wool takes a better beating — especially in high-traffic areas.

Shackelford found the two Dash & Albert rugs she used as runners at Stuff in Brookside. It took installers about half a day to staple them in place to the stairs. The project cost about \$750.

Nickell says that there are other ways to add a little springtime to our steps. Painting the risers — not the treads — a contrasting color is a smart choice.

"It would also improve safety because it's easier to see each step as you go up," Nickell said.

The skirting of the staircase in front entrances, often painted the same color as the molding, also could be painted a new color.

"You could even stencil in a traditional support bracket and paint it a bright color like lime green," she said. "And when you got sick of it, you could just paint over it."

Another idea Nickell likes is using carpet tiles, which are easy for do-it-yourselfers to install.

"There are so many colors and textures, and they're very low profile and flexible to work with," she said. "You could almost make a colorful, modern patchwork quilt with your stairs."

Aubrey McClintock of Old Forge, Pa., and her husband, Lee, swapped out their scuffed rubbery stair treads for zebra print Flor carpet tiles.

"It was a huge change right away," said McClintock, who shows crafting and home projects on her blog, A Daily Ob-

session. "I really wanted animal prints. I have a thing for them. They're not over the top, but they're fun."

Even though the carpet tiles include adhesive on the backing, she and Lee opted to staple them in place since they're also on the treads.

She, Lee and their poodle mixes Lexi and Esko safely trek up and down the stairs several times a day. The staples are concealed within the nap of the rug.

"I like that if they get really gross, it's easy to pull them and change them out," McClintock said. It was a fairly inexpensive change, too, about \$100.

Nickell also suggests using thin, lightweight ceramic tiles on risers.

"You could go to home-improvement stores or online for vintage decorative tiles and it wouldn't cost a lot," she said. "You could do one or two lines per riser in a beautiful color, and they're an instant pick-me-up."

Casey Simmons of Kansas City took tiling her stairs several steps further. About eight years ago, she installed mosaics of tile samples, shells and river rocks from vacations as well as broken dishes to the treads of the stairs leading up from the lower level.

"I love them," said Simmons, co-owner of Stuff, who lives in the Southmoreland neighborhood. "When I'm talking on the phone I'll go and sit on the rocks. It created a nice nook. They feel great underfoot, too, like those pebbly massagers."

Simmons spent 6 to 12 hours on each step in yoga-like positions to accomplish the elaborate mosaics. She knows the eclectic, beach bungalow-like look of hers isn't for everyone.

"Someone could do it in one color palette or one style of tile, and it would be sophisticated," she said. "And at the same time, personal."

To reach Stacy Downs, call 816-234-4780 or send e-mail to sdowns@kcstar.com.