

STAIRS

Standards:

- Treads, Rise, Nosing: The typical step height or riser is 7". A step should not be higher than 8" and not lower than 4" (trip hazard!). The typical depth of a tread is 11". The nosing should overhang 1". All steps have to be the same height with some leeway for the lowest step when it lands on a sloped surface which is often the case in San Francisco. Single steps are a real danger because they interrupt our walking cadence. I have done 'slow' stairs on some of my projects with a 6" riser in order to..... It is hard to believe but 1" makes it less strenuous to climb a stair.
- Railings: In buildings for the public or publicly funded projects, every stair has to have a rail on both sides. In residential projects, only one rail is required. The rail height as prescribed per code is between 34" and 38" above the nosing. If your staircase is open and not between two walls, you also need a 42" guard rail.

I believe in choice:

- Most stairs have a rail on at least a rail on one side. IfWhen you add a second rail, have fun with it - consider using a different material, or maybe even a piece of driftwood.
- The building code asks for rails to have a 1.5 "inch to 2 "inch diameter grip size because this is generally good for most hands, but this is your own house so you can also experiment with the size of the grip and can even maybe vary it along the length of the rail such when you are using a piece from nature. Variations in texture and grip size will certainly keep you on your toes as you walk up and down your stairs.

Tips:

- Take your cues from stairs in public buildings, they have much more stringent requirements for safety than private homes
- It really helps when walking down a stair to call out the edge of a step with a contrasting strip or nosing. There are rubber and metal nosings available in different colors and finishes which are easy to install.

Some other thoughts:

- Make your stairs the focus of your attention. Think 'theatrical', make them as 'grand' and irresistible as possible. That means not only excellent lighting and rails on both sides but also something beautiful to look at as you use your stairs, a special painting, souvenirs and more.

AT HOME
WITH
GROWING
OLDER

Something to
Write Home About

