Building a Free-standing Stairwell

by Tiko, 9 November 2006

Introduction

After the launch of The Sims2, an air of mystery and special secrecy somehow attached itself to constructing split-level stairs! It was implied it was somehow “too difficult” for the ordinary player.

Well, nothing could be further from the truth! ☺

So in this tutorial and its partners, *Building Split-level Corner Stairs* and *Building a Split-Level Staircase,* I’ll be explaining in simple steps how to put split-level stairs in your houses – your old houses as well as new ones.

A stairwell is simply a set of stairs that twists round on itself inside its own space or ‘room’. In this tutorial we’ll be making the simplest version, which is free-standing on a lower level and rises into an open area in the floor above.

As an example, on this page are a couple of pics from my town house ***Ashbury Summit.*** The free-standing middle level isn’t connected onto a wall – to do this, see the partner tutorial *Building a Split-Level Staircase.*

In the pic of the upper floor, notice that the open space is one gridsquare (or floor tile) wider than the stairs on three sides. The gap is needed because the mid-level is actually the upper floor level, brought down a bit, as we’ll see.

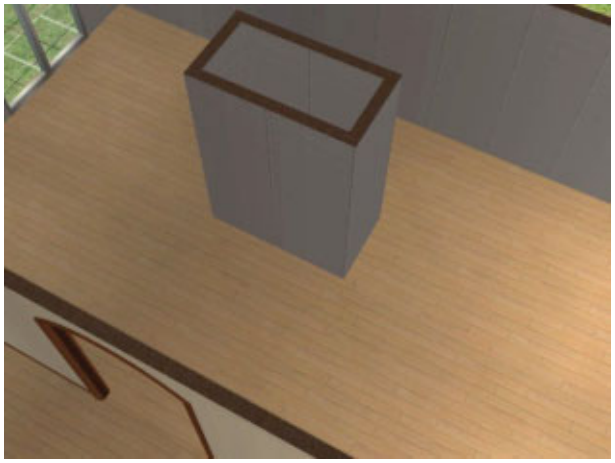
This tutorial will show how you can place a split-level stairwell in many of your other houses, provided the lower and upper rooms you build in can provide enough room for both stairs and the gap around them. You can build them equally easily in houses on foundation and houses with no foundation.

So let’s go over to an old house we’ve had lying around, that now needs modernising. (Crikey, sounds like a DIY TV programme!) ☺

Step 1.

First, have a look at your house, and decide the point from which you want Sims to step up onto the stairs.

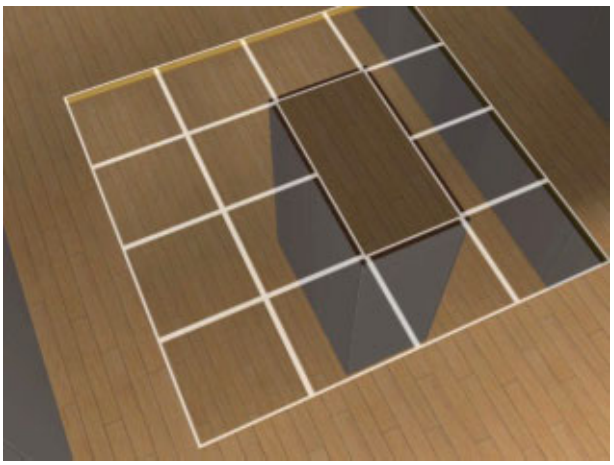
I've decided to have Sims go through an arch, so let's place a mid-level platform by adding a tiny 2x1 'room' with standard walls. By default stairs are 4 tiles or gridsquares long (16 steps), so our half-stairs will need to be 2 tiles long. Therefore place the platform 2 gridsquares away from the floor tile that Sims will step up from, as shown here.



Step 2.

Then go up one level (press your PageUp key or use the Control Panel buttons) and delete floor tiles as shown, leaving a gap of one tile all round the platform (you may have to hunt for it first!!!) and an extra gap of 2 tiles where you'll be placing the stairs.

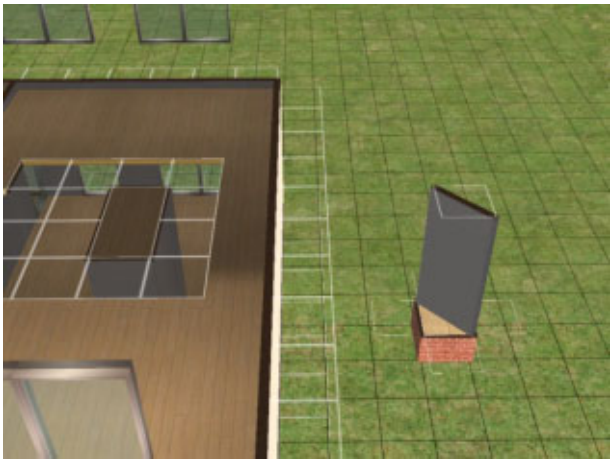
Our planned stair has one lower flight and one upper flight, but you can for example plan two lower flights side-by-side and two upper flights running up at right angles each side. You'll need to remove an extra row of tiles each side if you do.



Step 3.

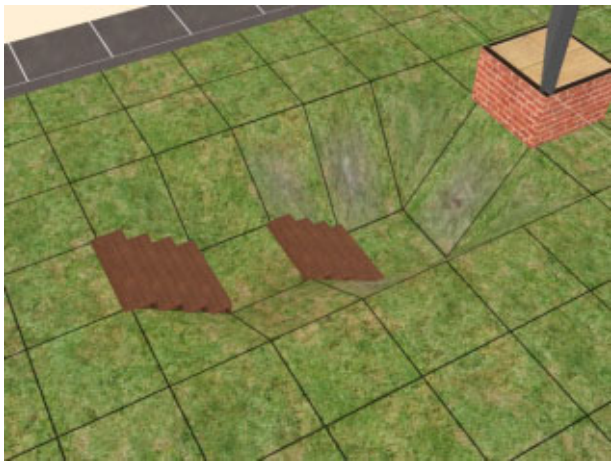
Now scroll outside your house, and place a new single square of foundation in line with one of the platform's gridsquares. Place it at least 3 gridsquares away from the house to avoid modifying any other part of the house. If your house doesn't have a foundation, you don't need to do this.

Then place a diagonal wall panel on it, as shown (or on the ground if you haven't got foundation elsewhere). It's a diagonal just because it's quicker to delete when we've finished! ;)



Step 4.

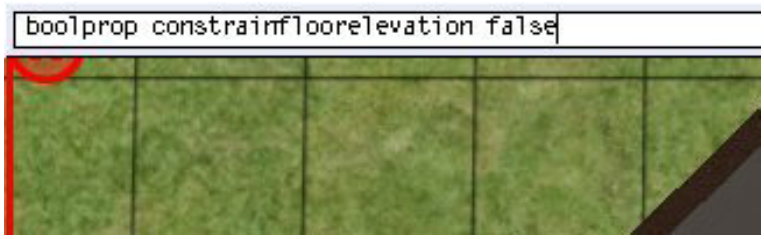
Now place two 4-step units of Connecting Stairs on the ground (they immediately bite down into the ground) as shown here, first one and then – from the new low square you've just made – the other.



This is the quickest way to take us down by exactly 8 clicks or steps. Since a standard wall is 18 clicks high, 8 clicks takes us halfway down – to the desired height of the mid-level platform for the stairs.

Step 5.

Now we need to turn on the building command which allows us to modify the heights of floors and walls. Hold down Ctrl+Shift and tap C. In the white Commands window that opens at the top of your screen, type:

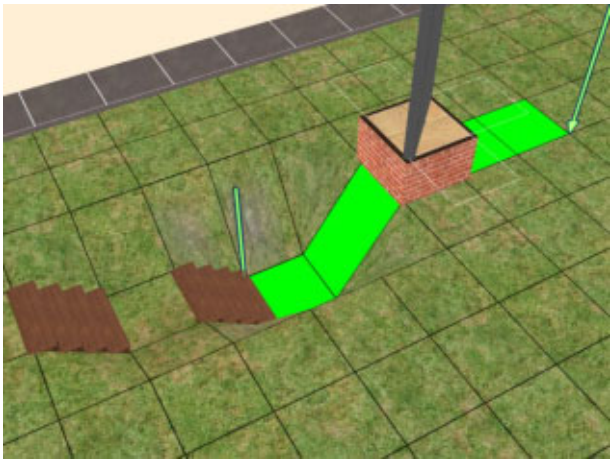


boolProp constrainFloorElevation false

and press Enter. If you've got the words right (the command is almost always called 'CFE' because of the middle phrase), the window will close. (The capital letters don't matter - it's just easier to read.)

Step 6.

Use the LevelTerrain tool to slide across from the low flat gridsquare you've created, to somewhere on the far side of the little Foundation square, as shown. If you haven't slid a tool before, you slide simply by holding the LH mouse button down.

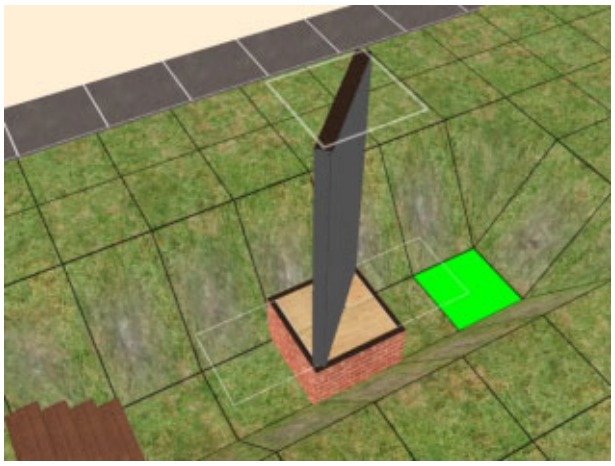


It doesn't matter if you're not quite in line before you start – just make sure you slide underneath all of the little foundation ..... but NOT the house!!! ☺.

Step 7.

This should be what you end up with.

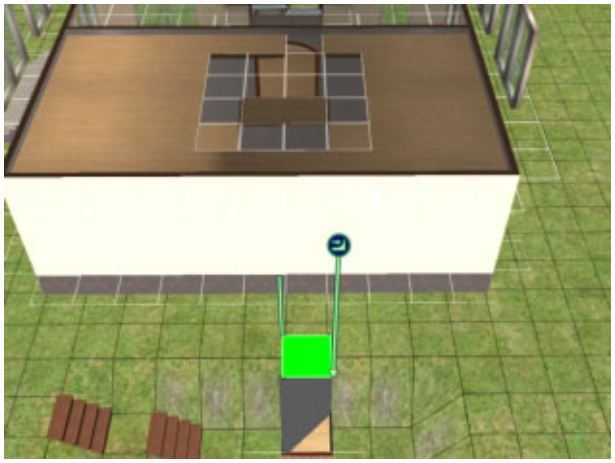
This will be our 'control column', fixing a new level from which we can modify other levels in the house (in this case our stair platform).



Step 8.

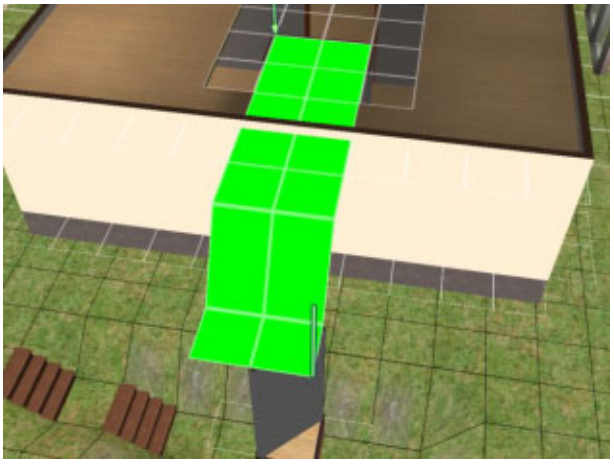
Now rotate your view of the house a little, so you can easily see the top of your control column, and the top of the "mid-level-platform-***to-be***"!

Place the LevelTerrain tool on the empty white gridsquare atop the control column …..



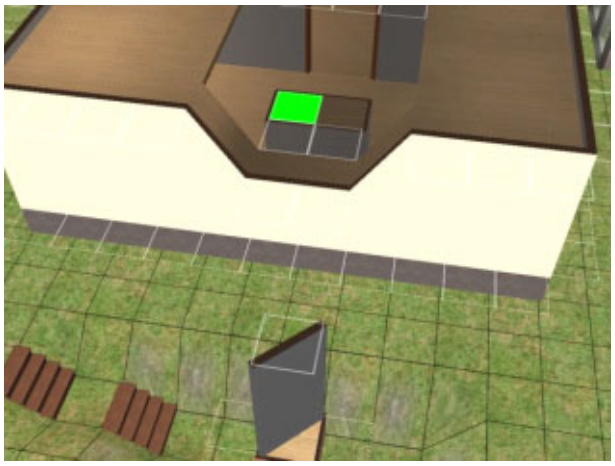
Step 9.

….. and slide it carefully across **two** rows to the opposite corner of the platform, as shown here.



Step 10.

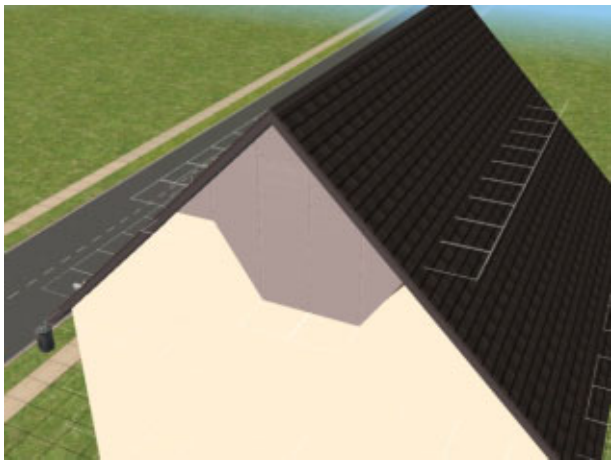
Let go the mouse button, and here's the result.



Step 11.

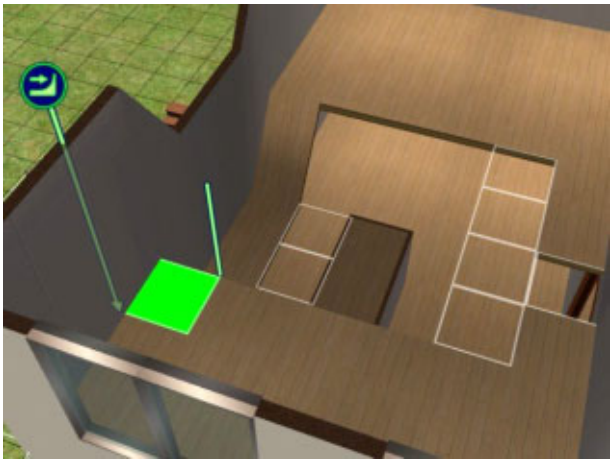
When we use the CFE command whatever we do at a low level modifies every wall and floor on the levels above. Happily this doesn't apply the other way round, so working on a higher level doesn't change things lower down – a very important thing to remember as you experiment with the world of CFE!!!

So here we can see how the walls above have been lowered by 8 clicks too (I've unpainted the gable so you can see the dip). Roofs, however, aren't affected by a CFE modification like this (whew! – aren't those Maxis people kind and thoughtful! ☺)



Step 12.

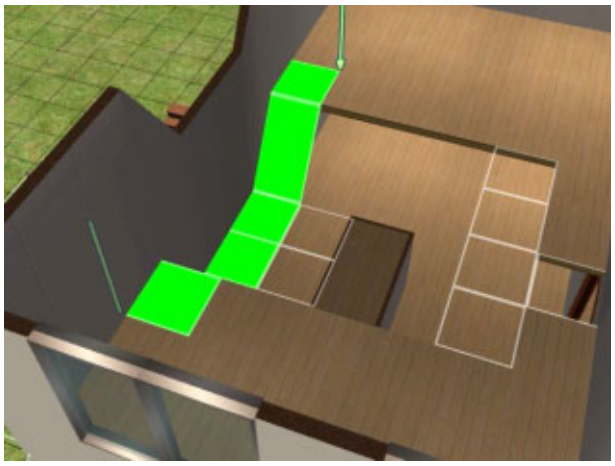
To level off the floor around the upper level of the stairwell, place the LevelTerrain tool on a flat floor tile next to the dip in the floor, as shown here.



Step 13.

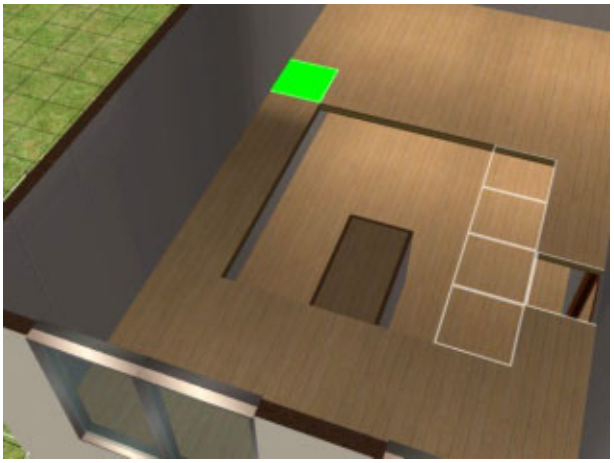
Then slide the LevelTerrain tool across the dip to the far side, carefully NOT going onto the empty white gridsquares next to the platform, or we'll start mucking the platform up.

(This is the point of having a 1-tile gap all round the stairs.)



Step 14.

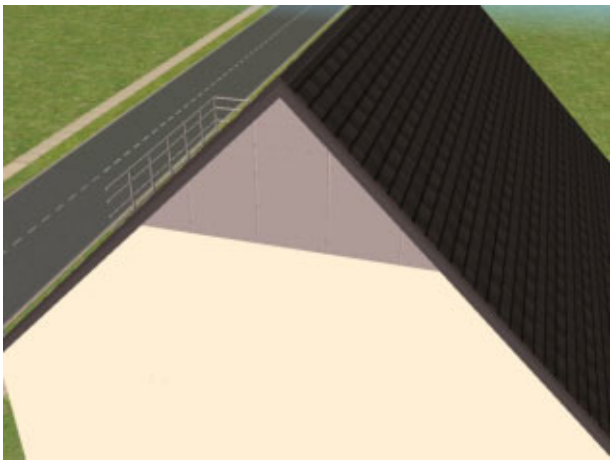
Let go the mouse button, and we have a neat open space in the floor, through which the stairs can climb.



Step 15.

Scroll outside the house and check the gable end. The wall tops are level again.

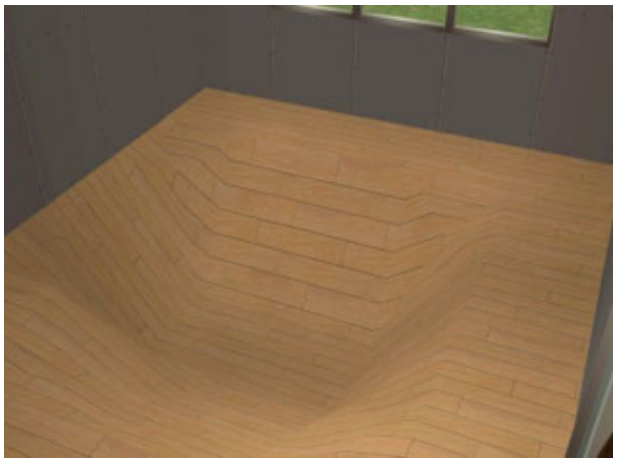
We won't need to modify any other levels, so you can delete the little control column we made at Step #7, and the 2 units of Connecting Stair. Or maybe you want to feature them as a modern sculpture in the garden? ;)



Step 16.

If you have an attic floor in your house, the area directly above the stairwell will have been clunked down when you lowered the platform at Step #10.

Don't worry! ☺ Because what we do at an upper level doesn't affect lower levels, we can simply take the LevelTerrain tool and .....



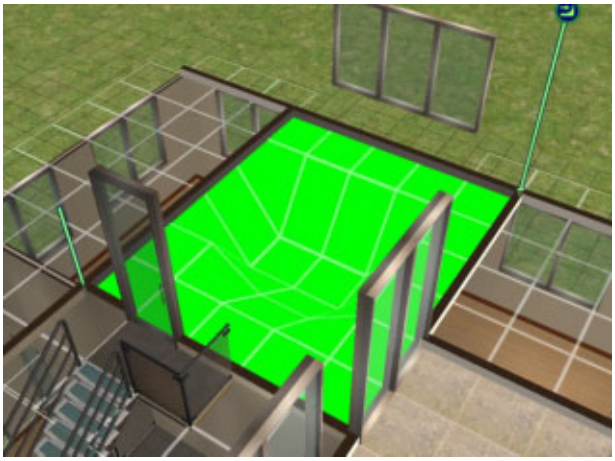
Step 17.

….. level the area in one go.

We just need to switch off the CFE command. Open the white Commands window again and type in

boolProp constrainFloorElevation true

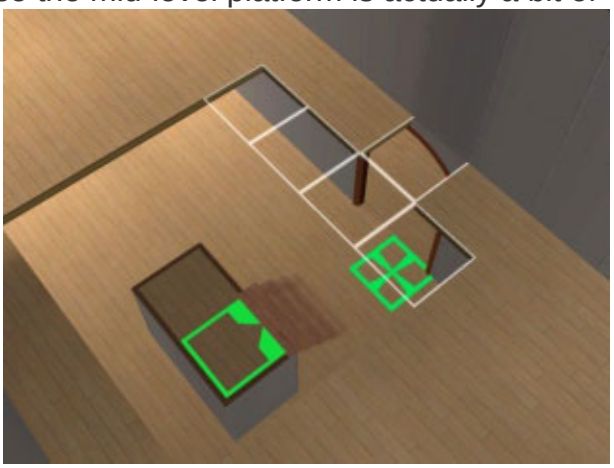
and press Enter. Now the built levels are locked or 'constrained'.



Step 18.

Go back to the stairwell, at the upper floor level. Because the mid-level platform is actually a bit of the upper floor which we've lowered, when we add stairs we have to add both flights of stair ***looking down*** from this upper level, running them downwards.

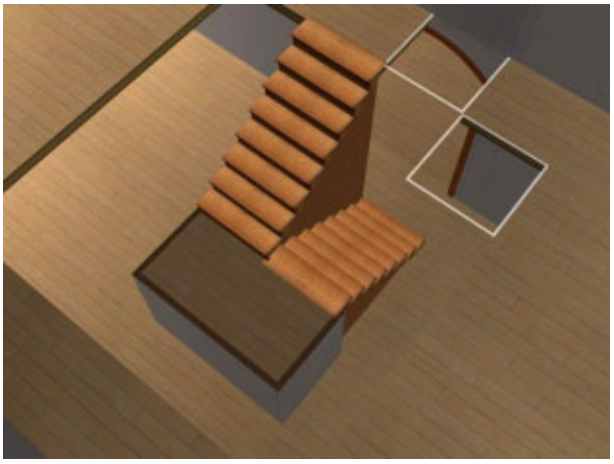
So choose a Connecting Stair that you like, and place it from the platform running down to where you wanted Sims to start climbing from.



Step 19.

And then add the upper flight. (These are the *Steadfast* Connecting Stairs.)

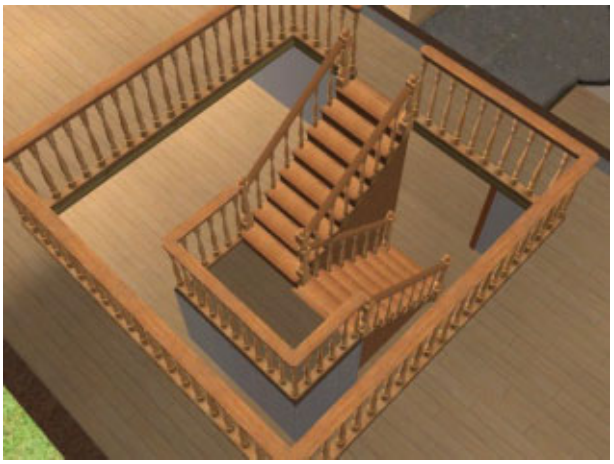
In some games it's just possible the lower stair flight shows red and you get a message saying you "Can't reserve space above stairs". If this happens, don't worry – you just need to remove the floor tile directly above the lower gridsquare, as I've shown here and in pic #18, then replace it after the stair. But normally you shouldn't need to do this.



Step 20.

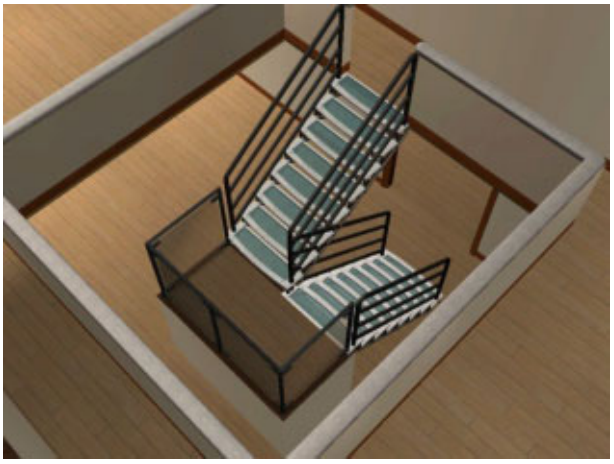
Then with the addition of some stair railings and *Longhorn Balustrade in Light Wood* we get this attractive, olde worlde stairwell.

Still, the house itself is quite modern, and I wanted to modernise it a bit more, so .....



Step 21.

..... here's a re-decorated stairwell with *Holy Smoke* Connecting Stairs and railings, and *InvisiBarrier Fencing in Steam*. The balustrade around the upper level of the stairwell is now made with Nightlife's *Perfectly Plank Half Wall in Stainless Steel*.



Step 22.

On the lower floor, the stairs can be a feature of an open-plan living area .....

Step 23.

..... or walled off a litle into a foyer as here.

Bye!

Wishing you lots of enjoyment and pleasure as you explore the magical world of Sims2 architecture! ☺