

Brick Steps, Porches, and Columns: The Entryway Repair Guide

Fixing the Brickwork Everybody Sees First

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Chapter 1: Brick Porch Column Repair — The Entryway Takes the Beating

Your entryway is the hardest-working brick on your house. Not the tallest, not the biggest — the hardest-working. The steps carry every foot that enters your home, in rain and heat and freeze. The porch columns hold up the roof over your front door while taking driving rain in the face. The porch slab sits on soil that moves, catches every gallon the roof valley dumps on it, and gets salted, scraped, and sprayed by everything the weather brings. Nothing else on the house takes that combination.

I've been doing this fifty years, and entryway work is some of my favorite — because it's visible. A homeowner lives with bad mortar on the back wall for a decade without noticing. A cracked porch column or a settled step gets noticed every single day, by everybody who walks up to the door. When the entryway is right, the whole house looks right. When it's wrong, the whole house looks tired.

This book covers the full entryway: brick steps that settle and crack, porch slabs that drop away from the house, columns

that crack and lean, caps and railings, the water problems that cause most of it, what the repairs cost in 2026, and how to hire them right. Straight talk, real ranges, no invented numbers. If it's a number I couldn't verify, I'll tell you what drives the cost instead of making one up.

One principle runs through every chapter: the entryway fails from the ground up and the water down. Soil movement, poor footings, and water — that's the cause of nearly everything you'll read about here. The brick is almost never the problem. The brick is the messenger.

Chapter 2: Anatomy of a Brick Entryway — Know the Parts Before You Fix Them

You can't diagnose what you can't name. Here's the entryway, part by part, the way a mason sees it.

The steps (the stair). The flight of brick steps from grade to the porch or door. Each step has a tread (the flat top you step on) and a riser (the vertical face). Brick steps are usually built as a solid masonry mass or as brick veneer over a concrete core. The treads take the wear; the risers take the weather.

The stoop. A small porch — just a landing at the door with steps down. Common on Texas ranch homes where the front door is only a foot or two above grade. A stoop is a porch in miniature, and it fails the same ways.

The porch slab. The floor of a larger porch — sometimes brick, sometimes concrete with brick edging, sometimes brick over concrete. It sits on its own foundation, separate from the house foundation, which is why it can settle independently. That independence is the source of half of all porch problems.

The columns (piers). The brick pillars holding up the porch

roof. They can be solid brick, brick veneer around a concrete or steel core, or brick piers on individual footings. What matters: whether they're load-bearing (carrying the roof) or decorative, and what their footing sits on.

The cheek walls. The low brick walls flanking the steps — the ones your hand wants to rest on going up. They retain the soil or fill beside the steps and take a beating from water running off the treads.

The caps and coping. The flat tops on cheek walls and columns — usually limestone, cast stone, or concrete. Their job is to shed water off the masonry below. When caps crack or go missing, water pours straight into the brickwork.

The threshold connection. Where the porch or steps meet the house — flashing, sealant, the joint between two structures that move independently. This joint fails regularly and lets water into both structures.

Walk your entryway and name the parts. The diagnosis gets much easier when you can say "the cheek wall cap is cracked and the second tread has settled" instead of "the front steps look bad."

Chapter 3: Why Steps Settle — The Ground Beneath Your Feet

Brick steps settle for the same reason everything masonry settles: the ground moves or was never right to begin with. Here's the specific lineup for steps.

No footing, or a poor one. A shocking number of brick steps — especially on older Texas homes and DIY additions — were built with no real footing: brick laid on grade, or on a thin slab, or on soil that was never compacted. Masonry is heavy, and heavy plus soft ground equals settlement. Proper steps sit on a concrete footing poured below the zone of soil movement, sized for the load. Steps without one sink. It's not a question of if.

Water washing out the base. The downspout that discharges at the steps. The roof valley that dumps onto the stair. The grading that funnels the yard's runoff under the steps. Water erodes the soil beneath and beside steps relentlessly, and steps — being at the low end of the water's path — collect the damage. I can diagnose half of all settled steps from the driveway: follow the water, find the cause.

Expansive clay. Texas black clay swells and shrinks with moisture, and steps sitting on it ride the cycle. The movement is rarely even — the side near the irrigated flower bed stays swollen while the side near the hot driveway shrinks — so steps don't just settle, they tilt and twist. A step flight that's dropped an inch on one side and stayed put on the other is classic differential clay movement.

Fill soil. Steps built over backfilled soil — the trench dug for the foundation, the utility line, the old tree stump ground out and buried — settle as the fill compacts over years. Fill settles. Undisturbed soil doesn't. Steps on fill are steps on a timer.

Freeze-thaw working the joints. In North Texas, water in the step joints freezes, expands, and loosens the mortar a fraction each cycle. It doesn't settle the steps, but it degrades them — crumbling riser joints, loose treads — and once the joints are open, water gets deeper, and the cycle accelerates.

The pattern to notice: steps almost always settle away from the house or tilt forward. The house foundation is deep and stable; the step footing (if it exists) is shallow. The gap that opens between the steps and the porch or house wall is the signature. A finger-width gap is maintenance. A gap you can

put your hand into is a rebuild conversation.

Chapter 4: Reading Your Steps — The Diagnosis Walk

Before you call anybody, read your own steps. Ten minutes, a level, and your eyes.

Check for level and tilt. Lay a long level or a straight board across the treads, both directions. Steps should be level side-to-side and slope very slightly forward — just enough to shed water off the tread, not enough to feel. Note any tread that tilts, any step that's dropped relative to its neighbors, and whether the whole flight leans one way. A single settled tread is a small repair. A flight that's racked is a bigger one.

Look at the riser joints. The mortar joints on the risers tell the story. Hairline cracks are age. Open, crumbling joints are water and freeze damage. Stair-step cracking through the joints at the ends of the flight suggests the steps are moving differentially — one end settling more than the other.

Check the house joint. Where the steps meet the porch or house wall, look for a gap. Measure it. Photograph it with a coin for scale. Check it again in six months. A stable gap is old settlement — repoint it and monitor. A growing gap is active

movement — find the cause before you repair.

Feel for rocking and hollowness. Press on each tread. Rocking treads have lost their mortar bond — water's in, and they'll only get looser. Tap the treads and cheek walls with a hammer handle and listen: solid masonry rings solid; debonded or hollow areas drum. Mark the hollow spots with chalk.

Measure the risers. Step up the flight slowly and feel whether each step is the same height. Uneven risers — one step noticeably taller or shorter than the rest — are a trip hazard and a sign of differential settlement. Consistent riser height isn't just comfort; it's safety. Your feet learn the rhythm of a stair in two steps, and a surprise riser is how falls happen.

Look at the caps and cheek walls. Cracked or missing caps on the cheek walls let water straight into the masonry. Spalling brick on the cheek walls — faces popping off — means water's been getting in for a while. The cheek walls often fail before the steps do, because they're thinner and more exposed.

Check the drainage. Where does water go when it rains?

Does the roof valley dump onto the steps? Does the downspout discharge at the stair? Does water pond at the base? The water story explains the damage story, almost every time.

Write it down: which treads, how much settlement, gap measurements, hollow spots, water sources. Hand it to the mason. You'll get a better bid and a better repair.

Chapter 5: Repairing Brick Steps — When It's a Fix, Not a Rebuild

Not every bad-looking step needs to come down. Here's the repair ladder, from smallest to largest — and how to know which rung you're on.

Repointing. When the brick is sound and the structure is stable but the mortar joints have failed — crumbling risers, open joints, surface deterioration — repointing is the fix. Cut out the failed mortar, pack in new matched mortar, tool the joints. Same craft as wall repointing, done on a stair. This handles age and weather damage, not settlement. If the steps have moved, repointing alone is cosmetic.

Replacing individual bricks. Spalled treads, cracked units, bricks that have lost their faces — cut them out and set new ones. Tread bricks take the most abuse and are the most commonly replaced. Matching matters: the new bricks should match in size, color, and texture, or the repair shouts. On an older home, that may mean sourcing reclaimed brick. A few replaced treads, well matched, disappear into the stair.

Resetting loose treads. Treads that rock but aren't damaged

can be lifted, the bed cleaned and re-mortared, and the tread reset level. It's a small, satisfying repair — an hour or two per tread — and it eliminates a trip hazard. But ask why the tread came loose: if water's getting under it, the bedding fix needs to address the water too.

Rebuilding the top courses. Sometimes the base of the stair is sound but the top has deteriorated — freeze damage, spalling, failed joints concentrated at the top where water sits. The mason takes the stair down to sound masonry and rebuilds from there. Less than a full rebuild, more than a repoint.

The judgment lines. Repair when: the structure is stable (no active settlement), the damage is in the joints and the surface brick, and the footing is sound. Rebuild when: there's active or significant settlement, the footing has failed or never existed, the masonry is extensively deteriorated through its full depth, or the steps are pulling away from the house with a growing gap.

What repair costs. Small step repairs — repointing a flight, replacing a handful of bricks, resetting treads — typically run in the hundreds to around \$1,500, depending on how much brick and how much matching. These are half-day to two-day

jobs. The cost driver is labor and matching, not materials — brick and mortar are cheap, hands are not.

The honest mason's rule: repair what's repairable, and say so plainly when it's not. A mason who wants to rebuild steps that need repointing is selling. A mason who wants to repoint steps that need rebuilding is stalling. You want the one who can tell the difference and explain it.

Chapter 6: Rebuilding Brick Steps — When They Have to Come Down

Sometimes the honest answer is a rebuild. The footing failed, the steps were built on fill, the settlement is active, the masonry is shot through — patching it is money thrown at a moving target. Here's what a proper rebuild involves, so you know what you're buying.

Demolition and removal. The old steps come out — all of them, down to the ground. Published 2026 data puts step removal at **\$200 to \$800** depending on size. The debris gets hauled off. This is the unglamorous part, and it's where cheap bids cut corners — a rebuild that leaves the old failed footing in the ground isn't a rebuild.

The footing. New concrete footing, poured below the soil's active movement zone, sized for the load of the stair. In Texas clay country, this means getting below the shrink-swell zone — deep enough that seasonal moisture changes don't move it. The footing is the whole job, structurally. Everything above it is finish work. A rebuild with a proper footing lasts generations. A rebuild on the old shallow base repeats the

failure.

The build. Brick laid up from the footing, or brick veneer over a concrete core — both are legitimate, and the choice depends on the design, the height, and the budget. Treads get laid with a slight forward slope for drainage. Risers stay consistent — every riser the same height, because uneven risers are trip hazards. Cheek walls go up with proper caps. The joint at the house gets flashed and sealed properly — two structures, independent movement, detailed like it.

Matching. The new brick and mortar should match the house — or complement it deliberately. On an older home, this is where the mason earns his money: sourcing brick that's close, blending, matching mortar color and joint profile. A rebuilt stair that doesn't match the house looks like exactly what it is.

What it costs. Published 2026 national data: replacing brick front steps averages **\$2,725**, with most projects between **\$2,400 and \$3,050**. Per square foot, **\$20 to \$30** — ornate designs can reach much higher. Three standard steps: **\$1,200 to \$2,700**. Six steps to a wide porch: **\$2,400 to \$5,400**. Removal adds **\$200 to \$800**. Those are national figures; your market, the footing depth your soil demands, access, and

matching move you inside the range.

Timeline. A straightforward step rebuild is typically a multi-day job — demolition, footing pour and cure, lay-up, cleanup. Not a one-day job, no matter what anybody tells you. Mortar needs to cure, and rushing it shows.

The question to ask: "What's the footing spec?" Depth, width, and how it handles the soil. A mason who answers specifically is building you steps that last. A mason who waves it off is building you a repeat customer — himself, in five years.

Chapter 7: Porch Columns — What's Inside and Why It Matters

Brick porch columns look simple — a brick pillar holding up the porch roof. What's inside them, and what they're standing on, decides how they fail and how they get fixed.

Solid brick piers. The traditional build: solid brick all the way through, sitting on a concrete footing. Strong, heavy, durable. When these fail, it's usually the footing (settlement) or the mortar (age and water), not the brick.

Brick veneer over a core. Brick wrapped around a concrete block core, a poured concrete core, or — on older homes — a steel pipe or timber post. The brick is the face; the core does the work. These fail at the veneer-core bond (water gets between them), at the core itself (a rusting steel pipe jacks the brick apart from inside — the same rust-expansion story as lintels), or at the footing.

Brick piers on individual footings. Each column on its own footing, separate from the porch slab and the house foundation. Three structures, three settlement patterns. When one column's footing settles and the others don't, the

column cracks and the porch roof above it tells the story — a dip in the roofline over one column is the giveaway.

Load-bearing vs. decorative. This is the critical question, and it must be answered before any column work begins. A load-bearing column carries the porch roof — sometimes a significant load. A decorative column carries nothing but its own looks. The repair approach is completely different: you can take apart a decorative column freely, but a load-bearing column needs temporary shoring — the roof held up by other means — before you touch it. Any mason who starts dismantling a porch column without shoring the roof first should be stopped.

How to tell: look at what's above. If the porch roof framing bears directly on the column, it's load-bearing. If there's a beam spanning between columns and the column in question sits under it, it's load-bearing. If the roof is self-supporting or carried by the house wall and the column is just there for looks, it's decorative. When in doubt — and this is not the place for doubt — a structural assessment settles it. Guessing about load paths is how porches end up on the ground.

Know what's inside your columns and whether they carry load. Everything in the next two chapters depends on it.

Chapter 8: Why Columns Crack — Reading the Lines

Cracked brick columns alarm homeowners more than almost any other masonry problem — and understandably. The column holds up the roof. But most column cracks are diagnosable, and most are fixable. Here's how to read them.

Settlement cracks. The most common. One side of the column's footing settles, the column tilts or drops differentially, and the mortar joints crack — usually in a stair-step or diagonal pattern, wider at one end. If the column is leaning visibly, the settlement is significant. The fix has to address the footing, not just the crack: stabilizing or underpinning the footing, then repairing the masonry. Repointing a settlement crack without fixing the settlement is painting over it.

Vertical cracks through bricks (not just joints). Cracks that run straight through brick units, vertically, often mean the column is being overloaded or the core is failing — a rusting steel pipe expanding inside, a concrete core deteriorating. This is more serious than a mortar-joint crack, because the

units themselves are failing. It deserves a structural look.

Horizontal cracking. A horizontal crack around a column, especially at a consistent height, can indicate the veneer separating from the core, or lateral pressure, or a failed bond at a construction joint. It can also be the signature of a rusting embedded steel element — a plate or pipe — expanding and pushing outward at its level.

Spalling and face loss. Water getting into the column — from a failed cap above, from splashback at the base, from irrigation — saturates the brick, and freeze-thaw pops the faces. Columns are particularly vulnerable at the base, where splashback keeps the bottom courses wet, and at the top, under a failed cap.

The cap connection. The number-one column killer I see: failed caps. The limestone or concrete cap on top of the column cracks, shifts, or goes missing, and water pours straight down into the column's core. Everything below rots from the top down — mortar, then brick, then whatever's inside. A \$200 cap replacement deferred becomes a \$3,000 column rebuild. Check your column caps the way you'd check your chimney crown — same principle, same stakes.

Leaning. A column that's visibly out of plumb has a footing problem, a core problem, or impact damage. Measure the lean — a quarter inch over the height is worth watching, an inch is worth acting on. And check whether it's still moving: a plumb line, a dated photo, six months. Moving lean is urgent. Stable lean is a repair to schedule.

When to worry most: any crack in a load-bearing column that's growing, any lean that's increasing, any sign of core failure (rust staining from inside, bulging), or any column where the roof above shows distress — sagging, cracked ceiling, doors binding. Those are structural, and they jump the queue ahead of every cosmetic repair on the property.

Chapter 9: Brick Porch Column Repair — The Fix for Each Failure

Diagnosis done. Here's the repair for each failure mode, smallest to largest.

Repointing. Stable hairline cracks in mortar joints, surface deterioration, age — cut out the failed joints and repoint with matched mortar. On a column, matching matters more than on a wall, because the column is front and center. Same craft, higher visibility. This is the fix for columns that have finished moving and just need their joints renewed.

Brick replacement. Spalled or cracked units get cut out and replaced with matching brick. On a column, every brick shows, so the match has to be good — color, size, texture. A column with five mismatched replacement bricks looks worse than a column with five spalled originals. Source the match before you start.

Cap replacement. Cracked, shifted, or missing caps get replaced — and this is often the highest-leverage repair on the column. A proper cap overhangs the brick slightly, sheds water clear of the faces, and is bedded and sealed so water

can't get under it. Limestone, cast stone, or precast concrete — match the house's other caps. While the cap is off, the mason can see the top courses and the core — it's a free inspection of the column's most vulnerable point.

Partial rebuild. When the damage is concentrated — the top third under a long-failed cap, the bottom courses from years of splashback — the column comes down to sound masonry and gets rebuilt from there. The footing stays, the sound brick stays, the failed section goes. This is the sweet spot for a lot of column repairs: less than a full rebuild, permanent where it counts.

Full rebuild. Footing failure, core failure, extensive deterioration, significant lean — the column comes down to the footing (or the footing gets redone too) and gets rebuilt. On a load-bearing column, the roof gets shored first — temporary supports carrying the load while the column is down. This is structural work, priced like it, and it's the only right answer when the column's integrity is compromised.

Core problems. A rusting steel pipe or plate inside the column can't be treated — it has to come out. That usually means dismantling the column around it, removing the failed steel, and rebuilding — often with a new concrete core or a

properly coated replacement. Rust expansion doesn't stop. There's no sealant, no paint, no injection that fixes expanding steel inside masonry. It comes out or the column comes down.

What it costs. Honest ranges: minor column repairs — repointing, cap replacement, a few bricks — run in the hundreds to around \$1,500. Partial rebuilds run into the low thousands. Full column rebuilds, especially load-bearing with shoring, run several thousand — published porch-repair data puts larger rebuilds with footing work at **\$3,500 to \$12,000 and up** depending on size and scope. The variables: load-bearing or not (shoring adds real cost), footing work, matching difficulty, and height.

The non-negotiable: on a load-bearing column, the roof is shored before work begins, the shoring is engineered or at minimum done by people who do it regularly, and nobody works under an unshored load. This is the safety line. Everything else is craftsmanship; this is life and death.

Chapter 10: The Porch Slab Problem — When the Floor Drops Away

The porch slab — the floor of the porch — sits on its own foundation, independent of the house. And independent foundations settle independently. The classic porch slab problem is the slab dropping away from the house: a gap opens at the house wall, the slab tilts outward, water ponds against the foundation, and the steps — which were built to meet the slab at its original height — don't line up anymore.

Why slabs settle. Same greatest hits: poor compaction of the fill under the slab, water washing out the base, expansive clay cycling, buried organic material decomposing. Porch slabs are particularly vulnerable because they're often poured over backfilled foundation trenches — the disturbed soil right against the house is the loosest soil on the lot. The slab bridges it for a while, then doesn't.

Reading it. The gap at the house wall is the primary symptom — measure it, date it, watch it. A slab that's dropped an inch and stayed there for years is stable and livable. A slab that's dropping is a problem in motion. Check the slope: the

slab should drain away from the house. A slab that's tilted toward the house is funneling water to the foundation — that's now a foundation problem wearing a porch disguise. Check the steps: if the top step used to meet the slab flush and now there's a lip, the slab moved, not the steps.

The repair options:

- **Slab jacking (mudjacking / polyurethane injection).**

Holes drilled in the slab, material pumped underneath to fill voids and lift the slab back toward level. Less expensive than replacement, faster, and effective when the slab itself is sound and the settlement is moderate. It doesn't fix the soil — it fills the void the soil left — so it's best where the settlement has stabilized. Costs vary widely by region and how much lift is needed; it's typically a fraction of replacement cost.

- **Partial replacement.** When one section is sound and another is shot, the bad section comes out and gets repoured — properly this time, on compacted base, with the right slope.
- **Full replacement.** Extensively cracked slab, major settlement, failed base throughout — out it comes,

base gets built right, new slab poured with proper slope away from the house and proper jointing at the house wall. The most expensive option and the most permanent.

The joint at the house. Whatever the slab repair, the joint where the porch meets the house gets detailed properly: backer rod and sealant, flashing where appropriate, sloped so water can't sit in it. This joint is a maintenance item — sealant fails, recaulk it. A \$15 tube of sealant every few years beats water in the wall.

The Texas note: our clay makes porch slabs move more than in most of the country, and our storms dump water fast. A porch slab in Texas needs its drainage right — slope away, downspouts extended past it, no ponding — or the clay cycle will work it indefinitely. Fix the water with the slab, not after.

Chapter 11: Caps, Coping, Railings, and the Details That Shed Water

The entryway's details aren't decoration — they're the water management system. Every cap, every coping stone, every railing anchor is either shedding water away from the masonry or funneling it in.

Caps and coping. The flat tops on cheek walls, columns, and porch walls. A good cap overhangs the brick by an inch or so on all sides — that overhang is the drip edge, and it's what keeps water from running down the faces. Caps should be solid, uncracked, and bedded so water can't get underneath. Cracked caps get replaced, not caulked — caulk on a cap is a temporary patch on the entryway's umbrella. Match the material: limestone with limestone, cast stone with cast stone. And when a cap comes off for replacement, look underneath — the top courses of the wall tell you whether water's been getting in.

Railing anchors. Metal railings anchored into brick steps and porches are water highways. Every anchor point is a penetration, and penetrations leak. Loose railings — the ones

that wobble — have usually wallowed out their anchors, and water follows the anchor into the masonry. The fix: reset the railing with proper anchors, sealed, and make sure the railing is actually doing its job — a wobbling railing is a safety failure, not just a masonry problem. If the brick around the anchors is deteriorated, the anchors need new, sound masonry to bite into — which may mean rebuilding that section.

Thresholds and the door interface. Where the entryway meets the door — the threshold, the flashing above the door, the sealant joints. Water driven at the door in a storm finds every gap. The flashing above the entry should kick water clear; the threshold should be sound and sealed; the joints between the masonry and the door frame should be sealed with proper exterior sealant, maintained. This is the leak point homeowners blame on the roof, the windows, and the masonry in turn — it's usually the interface detailing.

Lighting and fixtures. Every light fixture, doorbell, and hose bib mounted on entryway brick is a penetration. They're rarely the main problem, but when you're repairing the entryway, they're worth a look — failed sealant around a fixture is a small leak with a long timeline.

The principle: water runs downhill and finds holes. The entryway's details exist to give water a path away from the masonry. Every detail that's broken, missing, or installed wrong is water going where it shouldn't. When I repair an entryway, I fix the details with the same seriousness as the structure — because the details are what protect the structure.

Chapter 12: Water at the Entryway — The Roof Valley Problem

More entryway masonry damage traces to roof water than to anything else. The entryway sits directly under the roof's drainage, and roofs concentrate water — a valley can dump the runoff of hundreds of square feet of roof onto a few square feet of porch, steps, or column. Here's the water map.

The valley dump. Look at your roof above the entryway. If a roof valley terminates above the porch, the steps, or beside a column, every rain sends a concentrated stream onto the masonry. The fix is a downspout or a diverter that carries that water past the entryway — not onto it. This is roofing and gutter work, not masonry, but it's the root cause of a huge share of entryway repairs. Fix the water or the masonry repair is temporary.

Gutters and overflow. Clogged gutters overflow exactly where you don't want them to — usually right over the entry. Clean gutters, sized right, with downspouts that discharge away from the steps and porch, are entryway protection. In Texas storm season, undersized gutters on a big roof will

overflow even when clean — that's a capacity problem, and bigger gutters or additional downspouts are the answer.

Splashback. Rain hitting the porch slab or the ground at the base of the steps splashes back onto the risers, cheek walls, and column bases — keeping the bottom foot of masonry perpetually wet. It's why the bottom courses fail first. Good drainage at the base — slope away, no ponding — and keeping irrigation off the masonry minimize it. Some splashback is inevitable; the masonry should be detailed to handle it — sound joints, no open holes at the base.

The porch roof itself. The porch roof sheds water onto the porch slab or the yard — and if the porch roof's drainage dumps onto the steps, the steps take it. Porch roofs often lack gutters entirely, on the theory that they're small. Small roof, concentrated drip line, same damage. A simple gutter on the porch roof, discharging away, saves the steps below.

Grading at the entry. Soil and mulch piled against the steps, the porch, the column bases — burying the bottom courses, holding moisture against the brick, hiding the weep holes if it's veneer. Keep grade several inches below the top of the foundation and sloping away. Flower beds against the entryway are beautiful and they're also the most common

preventable water problem I see. Love your flowers; keep them off the brick.

The maintenance sentence: walk the entryway in the first hard rain of spring and watch where the water goes. You'll see every problem this chapter describes, live. Fix what you see. Water is patient — it will wait years to destroy your entryway. Don't give it the time.

Chapter 13: Safety — Trip Hazards, Even Steps, and Handrails

Entryway masonry isn't just appearance — it's the walking surface everybody uses, including the elderly, the young, and the unsteady. Safety isn't a separate topic from repair. It's the reason for repair.

Trip lips. A settled tread or a heaved brick that creates a lip of half an inch or more is a trip hazard. On a front walk or steps, it's your liability. This is the repair that jumps the queue: before the repointing, before the cosmetic work, the trip hazard gets fixed. A single tread reset or a small relay eliminates it — small job, large importance.

Riser consistency. Your feet learn a stair's rhythm in the first two steps. A riser that's an inch taller or shorter than its neighbors breaks the rhythm, and that's when stumbles happen. Settlement creates uneven risers — the most common cause on brick steps. When rebuilding or relaying steps, every riser gets set to the same height. When repairing, the settled risers get brought back to match. This isn't aesthetics. It's biomechanics.

Tread depth and nosing. Treads need enough depth for a full foot — shallow treads force an awkward gait, especially descending. And the nosing — the front edge of the tread — should be sound, not crumbled. A crumbled nosing shortens the effective tread and creates an uneven edge. When replacing tread bricks, the nosing is the critical edge.

Handrails. If your steps have railings, they should be solid — no wobble, anchors sound, height comfortable. A railing that moves when you lean on it is worse than no railing, because it invites trust it can't hold. Loose railings usually mean failed anchors in deteriorated masonry — fix the masonry, reset the railing properly. If your steps don't have railings and they're more than a couple of risers, consider adding them — it's a safety upgrade that also reads as a home improvement.

Lighting. A dark entryway multiplies every trip hazard. Step lights, a good porch light, a lit walk — cheap, effective, and often overlooked. You can have perfect masonry and still have a dangerous entry if nobody can see it.

Ice. In North Texas, the occasional ice storm turns brick steps into a slide. Brick holds a film of ice beautifully. Keep de-icer on hand — and use it sparingly and correctly, because some de-icing salts damage masonry and mortar. The entryway

you can walk safely in a freeze is the entryway that was built and maintained right.

The rule: fix trip hazards first, fix them completely, and don't let cosmetic work jump ahead of safety work. Nobody ever sued over a mismatched mortar joint. Stairs are different.

Chapter 14: What Brick Step, Porch, and Column Repair Costs in 2026

All the numbers in one place. Published 2026 ranges, with the "depends on" that makes them honest.

Brick steps. Full replacement: national average \$2,725, most projects **\$2,400 to \$3,050**. Per square foot: **\$20 to \$30** (ornate designs higher). Three standard steps: **\$1,200 to \$2,700**. Six steps to a wide porch: **\$2,400 to \$5,400**. Removal of old steps: **\$200 to \$800**. Minor step repairs — repointing, brick replacement, tread resets: hundreds to around **\$1,500**. Mason labor: **\$40 to \$75 per hour**, with minimum charges of **\$200 to \$400**.

Porches. Minor porch repairs — tuckpointing, replacing a few bricks, resetting a step: **\$500 to \$1,500**. Larger rebuilds with new footings and step reconstruction: **\$3,500 to \$12,000+** depending on size and scope. (Contractor-published ranges; your scope decides where you land.)

Columns. Minor column repairs — repointing, cap replacement, individual bricks: hundreds to around **\$1,500**. Partial rebuilds: low thousands. Full rebuilds, especially load-

bearing with shoring: several thousand and up — larger structural porch work runs **\$3,500 to \$12,000+**.

What moves every number:

- **Footing work.** Any repair that involves the footing — new footing, underpinning, stabilization — adds real cost. It's also the part that makes the repair permanent. Don't skip it to save money; you'll spend the savings on the second repair.
- **Load-bearing vs. decorative.** Shoring a porch roof to rebuild a load-bearing column is skilled structural work with real cost. Decorative work is simpler. Know which you have before you compare bids.
- **Matching.** Standard brick and mortar: straightforward. Unusual brick, custom mortar color, historic matching: craft pricing.
- **Access and size.** Front entryway work usually has good access — that's in your favor. But small jobs carry minimum charges, and intricate work carries labor hours.
- **Water fixes.** The drainage work the repair reveals — downspout extensions, regrading, gutter fixes — is often a separate line item. Budget for it. The masonry

repair without the water fix is half a job.

Bid reading. The bid should specify: exactly what's being demolished and rebuilt (or repaired), footing specs (depth, size), brick and mortar matching, shoring plan if load-bearing, drainage and water management, cleanup, schedule, and warranty. Three bids. Interview the middle. The rule never changes.

Chapter 15: Hiring It Done Right

Entryway work crosses trades — masonry, concrete, sometimes structural — and that makes hiring trickier than a straight repointing job. Here's how to get it right.

Hire a mason for the masonry, and make sure he knows structure. Steps, columns, porches — this is mason's work, but it's mason's work with structural consequences. Your mason should talk comfortably about footings, load paths, and shoring. If he only talks about brick patterns, he's half the contractor you need.

The shoring question. If a column is load-bearing and it's coming down, ask: "What's your shoring plan?" The answer should be specific — temporary supports, how the load gets carried, who supervises it. A vague answer here is disqualifying. This is the safety line from Chapter 9, and it's also the competence line.

The footing question. If steps or a porch are being rebuilt, ask: "What's the footing spec?" Depth, width, how it handles the soil. Same principle — specific is competent, vague is a warning.

Ask for entryway references specifically. Not just masonry references — entryway references. Steps, porches, columns. Drive by them. Look at the mortar joints, the alignment, the caps. Look at whether the steps meet the porch cleanly and whether the columns stand plumb. Entryway work is visible work — it either looks right or it doesn't, and you can tell from the curb.

Get the water plan in writing. If the bid doesn't address the water that caused the problem — the valley dump, the downspout, the grading — ask why. The best entryway masons bring up water before you do. The ones who don't are planning to see you again.

Red flags. The bid with no footing spec. The column rebuild with no shoring plan. The price that's half the others — he's skipping the footing, the shoring, or the matching, and you'll learn which when it fails. The cash deal, no paperwork. The contractor who says the settlement "will probably stop on its own" — maybe, but "probably" isn't a structural assessment.

If you want it done by people who do [brick porch and step repair] (<https://championbrickrepair.com>) as core work — steps, porches, columns, footings, water, the whole entryway — that's what we do. And if you're still learning, my [free brick repair books](

foundation-repair.web.app/free-books/) cover the rest of what your
masonry is trying to tell you.

Chapter 16: Keeping the Entryway Sound — The Maintenance Routine

The entryway you maintain is the entryway you don't rebuild. Here's the routine — small tasks, large returns.

Spring: the entryway walk. Every spring, walk the entryway the way Chapters 4 and 8 taught you. Steps: level, joints, house gap, trip lips. Columns: cracks, lean, caps. Porch: slab gap, slope, drainage. Fifteen minutes. Catching a failed cap in spring is a \$200 repair. Catching the column damage it caused three years later is a rebuild.

Spring: the rain watch. In the first hard rain, watch the entryway. Where does the roof water go? Any valley dumping on the masonry? Gutters overflowing? Water ponding at the base of the steps? Downspouts discharging at the stair? What you see in one storm explains years of wear.

Yearly: sealant check. The sealant joints — where the porch meets the house, around the threshold, around railings and fixtures — get inspected yearly and touched up as needed. Sealant is a wear item. A \$15 tube and twenty minutes beats water in the wall.

Yearly: cap and flashing check. Column caps, cheek wall caps, the flashing above the door — look for cracks, shifting, missing pieces. The caps are the umbrellas. A broken umbrella doesn't protect anything.

As needed: repointing touch-up. Mortar joints on steps and columns live harder than wall joints — traffic, water, exposure. Small failed areas get repointed as they appear, not saved up for a crisis. A tuckpointing touch-up every few years keeps the entryway sound indefinitely.

Ongoing: keep water off. Gutters clean. Downspouts extended. Grade sloping away. Irrigation off the masonry. Mulch below the brick, not against it. The water rules from Chapter 12 aren't one-time fixes — they're ongoing habits.

Winter: the freeze check. In North Texas, after a hard freeze, walk the entryway and look for new spalling, new cracks, new loose joints. Freeze damage announces itself in spring. Catch it early and it's small.

Never: de-icing salt dumped on brick steps. Some salts attack mortar and brick. If you must de-ice, use a product labeled safe for masonry and concrete, use it sparingly, and rinse when the freeze passes. Or use sand for traction — zero

chemical risk.

The entryway is the face of your house. Maintain the face.

Chapter 17: Questions Homeowners Ask Me

My steps are pulling away from the house. Is that serious?

Measure the gap. A small, stable gap is old settlement — monitor it and keep it sealed. A growing gap is active movement — find the cause (usually water or soil) before repairing. A gap you can fit your hand into, or steps that are visibly tilting, is a rebuild conversation. Don't caulk a growing gap and hope. Hope isn't structural.

Can you fix just one column, or do they all need it? Just the failed one — columns are independent structures on independent footings. But while the mason is there, have him look at the others. Same age, same soil, same water — if one failed, the others deserve an inspection. Fix what's broken, watch the rest.

Is a cracked porch column dangerous? It can be. A cracked load-bearing column deserves prompt professional assessment — especially if the crack is growing, the column is leaning, or the roof above shows distress. A hairline, stable crack in a mortar joint is maintenance. Anything structural jumps the queue. When in doubt, get eyes on it quickly. This

isn't the repair to schedule "sometime."

Should I replace my brick steps with concrete? You can, and it's often cheaper — but you'll lose the look that matches your brick home, and a concrete stair against a brick house reads as a downgrade. If the brick steps can be repaired or rebuilt to match, that's usually the better choice for appearance and value. If the budget says concrete, make it good concrete — properly footed, properly finished — not a shortcut.

How long does a step rebuild take? A straightforward rebuild is typically several days to a couple of weeks — demolition, footing pour and cure time, lay-up, cleanup. Anyone promising a full step rebuild in a day is skipping something, usually the footing cure. Mortar and concrete need their time. Rushing shows.

My porch slab slopes toward the house. How urgent is that? Urgent enough to schedule, not urgent enough to panic — unless water is actively entering. A slab draining toward the foundation is a foundation problem in slow motion, especially in clay soil. Slab jacking or replacement to correct the slope, plus making sure downspouts and grading cooperate, fixes it. Don't let it ride for years.

Can I paint my brick porch columns? You can, but understand what you're doing: paint on brick is a moisture decision, not just a color decision. Standard paint traps moisture in the masonry. If the columns are sound and dry and you use a breathable masonry coating, it's manageable. If the columns already have moisture problems, paint makes them worse. And once painted, they're painted — stripping brick is expensive and risky.

The railing wobbles. Is that a masonry problem? Usually, yes — the anchors have wallowed out in deteriorated mortar or brick. The fix is masonry first (repair or rebuild the anchor area with sound material), then reset the railing with proper anchors. A solid railing in solid masonry. Don't just tighten the bolts — the bolts aren't the problem.

We're selling. Should we fix the entryway first? Yes — of everything in this book, entryway repair has the highest return before a sale. It's the first thing buyers see and the first thing inspectors flag. A trip hazard on the steps is an inspection issue that costs you in negotiation. Clean, sound, level entryway masonry photographs beautifully and reads as a maintained home. Fix the safety items no matter what; the cosmetic ones if the budget allows.

How do I find a mason who actually knows entryway work? Ask for entryway-specific references and drive by them. Ask the footing question and the shoring question and listen for specific answers. Ask how he handles the water that caused the problem. The mason who answers all three specifically is the mason you hire. The one who waves any of them off isn't.

A Final Word Before You Call

The entryway is the handshake of your house. It's the first thing visitors touch, the first thing buyers judge, and the first thing to fail — because it works the hardest and takes the most weather. But it's also the most rewarding masonry to fix, because the transformation is immediate and everybody sees it.

Walk your entryway this weekend. Name the parts. Measure the gaps. Watch the water. Fix the trip hazards first, the structure second, the cosmetics third — and fix the water with all of it. Hire the mason who talks about footings and shoring before he talks about brick patterns.

Your entryway has been talking. Now you speak the language.

About the Author

Travis Nech has spent 50 years in Texas brick, masonry, and foundation work. He owns [Champion Brick Repair](<https://championbrickrepair.com>) — (817) 900-6324 — [Metro Foundation Repair](<https://metrofoundationrepair.com>) — (817) 670-4474 — and the [LintelLOCK](<https://lintlerepair.com>) lintel system — (469) 730-0650. All his books are free at [Travis Nech's Free Book Library](<https://metro-foundation-repair.web.app/free-books/>).