

20 Things To Make Your Brownstone Last Another 100 Years

The infrastructure decisions that outlast the current technology and
protect what cannot be replaced

01 • **Install Conduit Infrastructure That Survives Three Technology Generations**

Technology changes faster than buildings do. The cable standard in use today will be legacy in twenty years. What does not change is the pathway that cable travels through a building. Conduit installed in a brownstone's walls, floors, and vertical chases during a renovation is infrastructure that will still be pulling new wire in 2060 and 2080. Invest in the pathway, not just the cable.

02 • **Build a Network Backbone on Fiber, Not Copper**

Copper Ethernet has a distance limitation that becomes relevant in a four-story brownstone. Fiber does not. Running single-mode or multimode fiber vertically through a brownstone – from basement to top floor, with a managed switch on each level – creates a network backbone that is immune to EMI, capable of multi-gigabit speeds, and serviceable without replacing the backbone when bandwidth requirements increase.

03 • **Address Garden-Level Dehumidification as Permanent Infrastructure**

A single-season dehumidification solution is not a long-horizon answer. The right approach is a properly sized, permanently installed dehumidification system with a dedicated drain line, integrated into the HVAC system where possible, with controls that maintain target RH regardless of season. Garden-level moisture is not a problem you solve once. It is a condition you manage continuously.

04 • **Install Whole-Home Surge Protection on Every Service Entry**

Old service panels arc. The wiring that supplies those panels has been in place through decades of temperature cycles, pest activity, and settlement. Surge protection at the service entrance is the first line of defense for every piece of electronics in the building. It should be supplemented by point-of-use surge protection at each AV rack and each sensitive equipment location.

05 • **Use Low-Voltage Standards That Outlive the Original Wiring**

When you install new low-voltage infrastructure, use materials and standards designed for longevity: CAT6A for data, shielded cable in mechanical spaces, properly rated outdoor cable for exterior runs, and labeled, documented pathways throughout. The difference between infrastructure installed to last and infrastructure installed to the minimum standard is visible thirty years later.

06 • Document the Building's Technology Infrastructure Like a Permanent Record

Every conduit run, every network drop, every speaker position, every camera, every control system configuration – all of it should be documented in a format that will survive software obsolescence. That means hardcopy as-built drawings alongside digital files, equipment schedules in plain text formats, and a physical binder that lives in the rack room alongside the digital archive.

07 • Preserve Original Details as Active Preservation, Not Neglect

Preserving the plaster moldings, ceiling medallions, hardwood floors, and original doors in a brownstone is not passive – it requires active decisions at every renovation stage. Every time a wall is opened for any reason, there is an opportunity to damage or protect the original details that surround the opening. Make deliberate choices at every intervention.

08 • Seal Party Walls Properly Before Closing Up

The party wall in a brownstone is a thermal boundary, an acoustic boundary, and in some cases a fire-rated assembly. Every penetration through a party wall – for conduit, for pipes, for any utility – should be properly fire-stopped and sealed. An unsealed penetration creates a pathway for sound, smoke, moisture, and pests. This is straightforward to execute during construction and essentially impossible to do correctly after the fact.

09 • Plan Stoop Technology That Does Not Fight the Facade

The long-horizon answer for stoop technology is hardware designed from the start to be appropriate to a historic facade: flush-mounted intercom panels, cameras in positions that do not require visible conduit, lighting fixtures that match the period character of the building. When stoop technology is designed with the facade in mind, it can be maintained and upgraded without repeated landmark review cycles.

10 • Design the Home Theater for the Parlor-Floor Constraints

A brownstone parlor floor is twelve to sixteen feet wide, has joists above rather than concrete, and shares at least one wall with a neighbor. A theater designed for those constraints – appropriate screen size, appropriate loudspeaker levels, a subwoofer strategy that addresses party-wall transmission – will remain a functioning and enjoyable space for decades.

11 • **Maintain the Masonry Facade on a Five-Year Cycle**

The masonry facade of a brownstone is the primary weather barrier for every room in the building. Spalling, cracking, failed pointing, and deteriorating window lintels are the pathways through which water enters the wall assembly, damages the structure, and eventually affects interior plaster and electronics. A five-year facade inspection cycle is the long-horizon investment that prevents expensive remediation.

12 • **Use Open-Protocol Control Systems Where Possible**

Control systems built on open and documented protocols – like Crestron – matter over a long horizon because the programming is not locked to a single vendor's black box, the system can be modified by any qualified programmer, and the hardware can interface with technology that does not exist yet. Proprietary, closed control ecosystems become liabilities over time.

13 • **Plan Exterior Lighting for Landmark Compliance From the Start**

Exterior lighting on a historic brownstone should be designed with landmark district standards in mind from the initial specification. That means fixture types that are period-appropriate or neutral enough to be approvable, wiring pathways that do not require surface conduit on the facade, and control systems that allow the lighting to be adjusted and maintained without hardware changes.

14 • **Size the Electrical Service for the Next 30 Years of Load**

A brownstone with full lighting control, multi-zone AV, two or more EV chargers, modern kitchen appliances, and a home office infrastructure will exceed 200A under realistic peak load. The time to upgrade the service is during a renovation, when the work is coordinated with other trades. Service upgrades after a renovation are disruptive and expensive.

15 • **Monitor the Equipment Remotely and Proactively**

A brownstone technology infrastructure that is not monitored is one that will fail without warning. The right approach is a managed network with a remote monitoring platform that reports device status, network performance, and anomalies in real time. Remote monitoring is the difference between proactive service and reactive repair calls – a difference that matters in a variable brownstone environment.

16 • Service the Dehumidification and Ventilation Systems Annually

Dehumidification equipment has a service schedule that most owners neglect until the unit fails. Annual coil cleaning, filter replacement, drain line inspection, and refrigerant level check are the maintenance items that extend equipment life and maintain performance. If the dehumidification system in the garden level fails in July and is not discovered for two weeks, the humidity can reach conditions that damage everything in the mechanical room.

17 • Keep the Original Architectural Drawings If They Exist

Some brownstones, particularly in Brooklyn and Manhattan, have original architectural drawings or permit drawings from their construction or from early-twentieth-century renovations. If those drawings exist – in the local building department archives, from prior owners, or in the city's historical record – they are worth obtaining and preserving. They tell you where bearing walls are and what the building looked like before prior renovations.

18 • Design Irrigation and Landscape Systems That Do Not Fight the Foundation

Irrigation systems that water against the foundation, drainage that does not direct water away from the building, and landscaping decisions that create consistent soil moisture against the masonry are the long-horizon enemies of the building envelope. Garden design and irrigation for a brownstone should be coordinated with the facade masonry condition and the drainage strategy.

19 • Build Redundancy Into Critical Systems

In a brownstone that is occupied continuously, critical systems should have redundancy. Network should have a backup ISP or cellular failover. Power should have UPS on the rack and on security systems. The intercom and access control system should have a battery backup. The monitoring system should alert when any of those backups goes into service.

20 • Pass the Building Forward With a Complete Documentation Package

The long horizon ends with a transfer. A complete package – original condition photographs, as-built drawings, equipment schedules, programming archives, service records, landmark approval records, structural assessments, and warranty documentation – tells the next owner what they own and how to take care of it. The building survived a hundred years before you. Give it the documentation it needs to survive the next hundred.

GET IN TOUCH

The Brownstone Specialist

We specialize in brownstone integration across NJ, CT, and NY - from the first 90-day consultation through long-horizon infrastructure design. Our team brings 20+ years of combined leadership experience to every project.

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