

Found Space

# WHAT LIES BENEATH

*(Yes, we're talking basements)*

→ The dusty walls, exposed ceilings, and hulking systems of an unfinished basement can divulge much about the age and condition of a house, as well as its mechanical beating heart. But for the renovation obsessed, those raw spaces often offer something more: a land of untapped potential. Forget dark, damp, and cobwebby. These homeowners and designers envision comfortable, even elegant spaces for recreation, relaxation, and entertaining down there, no busting through and building new exterior walls required. Witness the inviting remodels here and on the following pages.

BY KATHRYN O'SHEA-EVANS

**BELOW-GRADE BEAUTY** A cushy U-shaped sectional, an 85-inch TV, and a well-equipped kitchenette elevate this family gathering space. Low drawers double as seating with back cushions hung from leather straps. Custom art, which nods to the couple's alma maters, flanks the big screen for a gallery-wall effect.



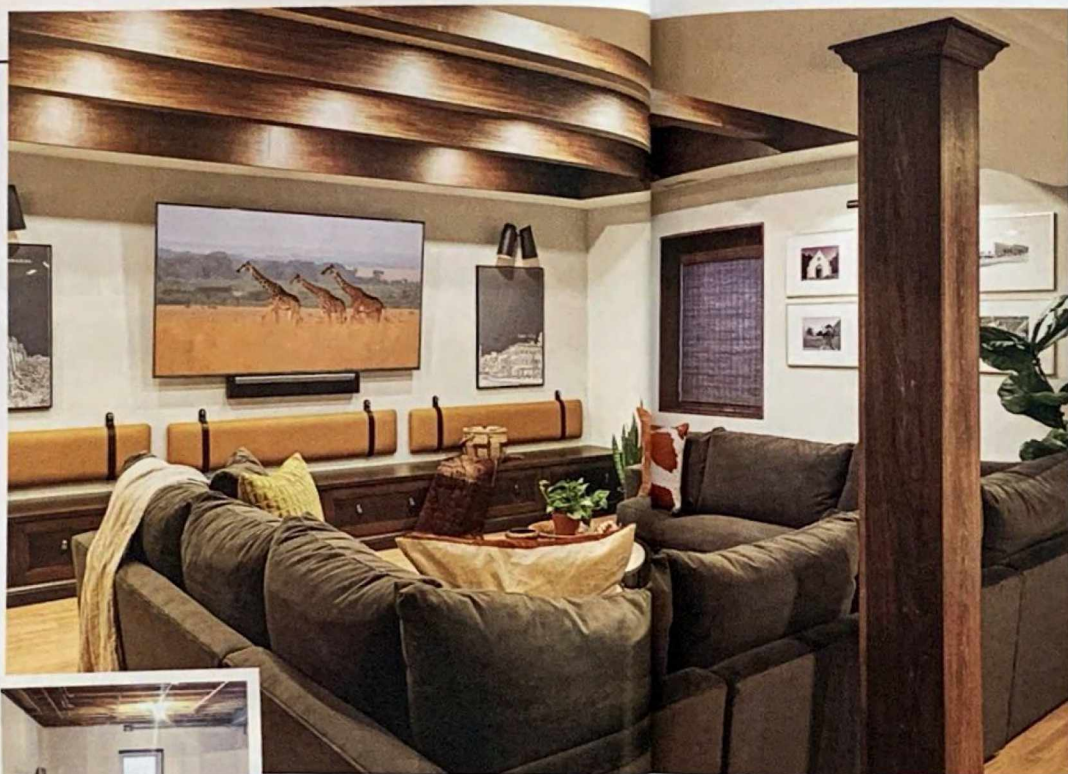
## A MULTI-GEN HANGOUT

At nearly 1,200 square feet, the basement of this 2015 Neocolonial in Glen Ellyn, IL, had plenty of available space. But with raw-concrete floors, bare bulbs in junction boxes in the ceiling, and no interior walls, it had become a dumping ground for cast-off furniture, with a lackluster kids' area. "It was truly a shell, left unfinished until the kids were older and they had a vision for it," says Rachel Alcorn of Two Hands Interiors, who, with her partner, Karen Javier, was enlisted to spiff up the space.

**THE WISH LIST** Homeowner Jenny Rieger and her husband, Paul, asked for a cozy, fun hangout their ninth, eighth, and fifth graders would like but that adults could love, optimized for the latter with sophisticated finishes and plush places to escape to. "They wanted a space where the kids could knock about, play pool, and have friends over, but didn't want it to feel super juvenile, so it would be comfortable for grown-ups, too," Alcorn says.

**THE PLAN** The designers dreamed up a scheme that would deliver the welcoming, clubby feel of a wood-paneled library—but with a cool vibe. The main event: a 728-square-foot family room, itself divided into dedicated spots for a game of pool, quality time in front of the TV, and refreshments at the ready in a kitchenette, with a locked wine fridge alongside. The rest of the space would be divided into a gym, a kids' hobby space, and a full bath. Ten-foot ceilings allowed the Two Hands team to hide ductwork in soffits around the perimeter of the finished space. In the TV area, adding a framed inset of stained wood beams in the center made the soffits disappear. When the homeowners asked for white walls, the designers guided them toward a compromise, adding a back wall of stained paneling. "It's counterintuitive, but if everything is light or white, it doesn't expand the space," Alcorn says. "Adding contrast with lights and darks draws the eye around the room and makes it feel bigger."

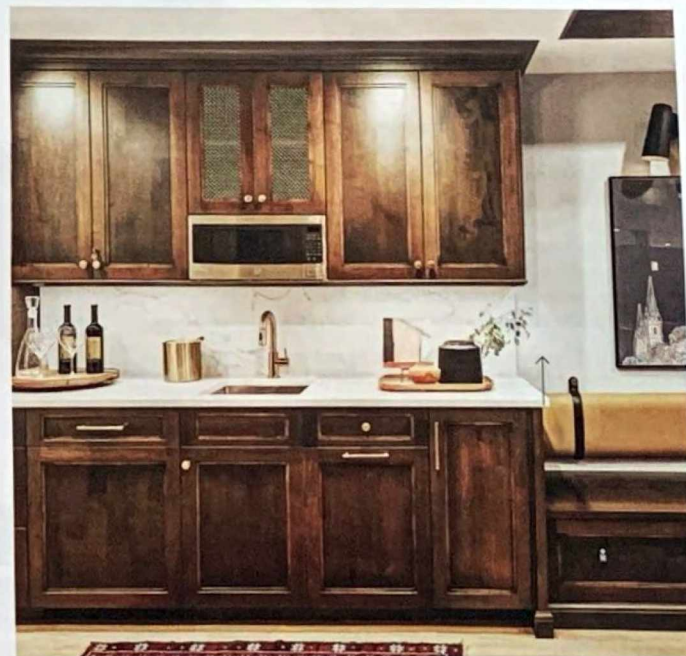
**THE RESULT** A sophisticated lower level the whole family can enjoy. Jenny's favorite feature? The pool table, which turns into a Ping-Pong table by adding a conversion top, and has seen plenty of use. "We've loved having another space for the kids to do their homework and hang out. And it's a perfect place to entertain guests," she says, thanks to its multiple seating areas and that happy-hour-ready kitchenette. Talk about a warm welcome.



**BEFORE** Unpainted drywall lined an ad hoc TV area for the kids. Pipes and conduit loomed overhead in the open ceiling.

**BRING ON MOVIE NIGHT** The whole family can pile onto the sectional, which takes pride of place in the revamped TV room. It also handles sleepover spillover.

**GATHERING PLACE** Homeowners Paul and Jenny Rieger got just what they asked for: a basement space that works well for kids Paul Jr., 15, Anna, 13, and Evie, 10, and their friends, as well as for grown-up get-togethers.



**COOL KITCHENETTE** Tucked into dark-wood cabinetry are two refrigerator drawers and a dishwasher, stacks of paper plates, and a garbage pullout. A microwave is handy for popcorn and snacks. "Everything you need for pizza-and-a-movie night," Alcorn says.

**COZY CONTRAST** The same cabinetmaker built the paneled wall behind the pool table. "It gives the other half of the room a finished look," Alcorn says. Stools at the snack bar offer extra perches that are easy to move around as needed.