

Buried Treasure

A DESIGNER FINDS AN ARTS AND CRAFTS
GEM HIDDEN UNDER LAYERS OF GAUDY 1970s
TRAPPINGS IN A MINNESOTA BASEMENT.



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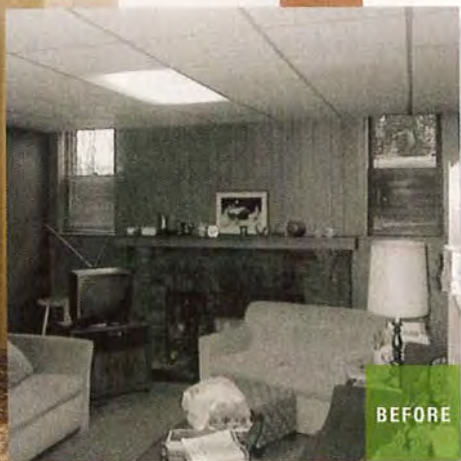
It was a typical 1970s basement—gold shag carpeting, fiberboard paneling, and an acoustic-tile dropped ceiling—but it was in an atypical house—a 90-year-old Arts and Crafts jewel situated squarely in St. Paul’s Summit Avenue historic district (and once home to writer Sinclair Lewis).

The homeowner wanted the basement to become a cozy entertainment space for his teenage daughter. But the historic district’s rules prohibited major remodeling, such as breaking into walls or adding windows.

Faced with those limitations, designer David Heide decided the first thing to do was get rid of the decades-old accumulation of amateurish remodeling efforts. A new design plan would wait until he had “demolished and ripped out everything that wasn’t fastened to the building,” he says. “It was all done up in 1972 ‘grandeur.’ We didn’t know what we were going to [find].”

Thankfully, what they found was spectacular. The demolition revealed solid masonry foundation walls, a thick concrete floor, and several architectural gems—quartersawn oak trim, terrazzo floors, and an arch-top niche that had been hidden behind paneling.

LEFT: With a fresh design inspired by existing Arts and Crafts details, this basement in a historic Minnesota home now functions as an entertainment space. Reproduction furniture and light fixtures reinforce the Craftsman theme. **ABOVE:** An arched doorway reflects the arch of the built-in wall niche found during demolition. New iridized glass in the doors reflects light from the basement’s two windows.





BASEMENT BASICS

Finishing a basement is one of the best ways to increase living space in your home and typically gives you about a 79 percent return on your investment. A few issues you need to consider when finishing a basement are headroom, moisture, and sound transmission from the level above.

Moisture can quickly turn your dream space into an expensive nightmare. Condensation occurs when the basement is cooler than the rest of the house. This happens when the temperature difference is greatest between the cool basement air and the warm outside air.

Another cause of moisture in the basement is improper grading against the exterior of the foundation. Adding a sump pump in the utility area of the basement will keep water from entering your living space. Fill cracks, holes, and expansion joints in the floor with a vinyl or cement-base floor-patching compound. You may need to apply a floor leveler if the existing concrete is particularly rough or uneven. A basement subfloor will give you a flat, level surface that is more comfortable and warmer than concrete. First, lay a plastic moisture barrier over the concrete, then create floor joists by laying 2x4-inch pressure-treated lumber flat and securing them to the concrete with a powder-actuated nailer or masonry screws. Place ¾-inch tongue-and-groove plywood on top and secure it to the joists to finish your subfloor.

These findings, combined with the limited space (just 600 square feet) drove Heide's design decisions. He began by hiding the mechanicals—radiator piping, electrical wiring, and ductwork—behind decorative trim and wainscoting. He then moved the DVD, stereo, and other hardware for entertainment features to a separate room, and set up the components to be controlled by infrared remote. A well-hidden dehumidification system with fresh-air intake ensures that the area doesn't smell like a basement.

Because the home is bound by the restrictions of the historic district, Heide couldn't add windows to bring in more light. (The two wells that flank the fireplace were already there). Instead, he replaced the upper three panels of six-panel doors with iridized glass that shimmers like mother-of-pearl. That same glass shows up again in the fireplace screen, which hides the surround-sound speaker inside the firebox.

"The owner was concerned that because it was a space that children [and teens] would be using, he didn't want the fireplace used as a fireplace," Heide says.

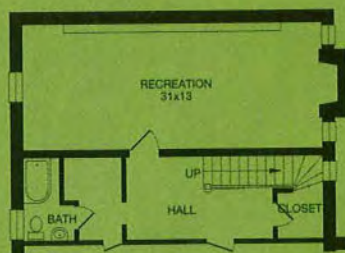
Other elements, from light fixtures to cabinetry and the oak fireplace surround, exhibit a signature Arts and Crafts style. The homeowner jokes that his daughter wanted bean bag furniture and a casual hangout, not an elegant recreational space that appeals to adults. "[At first] she was afraid to have her friends go down there because it wasn't the bounce-around room we promised her," the homeowner says. "She wouldn't allow her friends to have food down there for the longest time. They got water and pretzels."

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OPPOSITE, FAR LEFT: Giving the basement a finished appearance required some camouflage artistry, including shrouding a steam radiator and other mechanicals behind wood wainscoting and trim. The room's two existing window wells bring in the basement's only natural light.

OPPOSITE LEFT: Demolition revealed this elegant wall arch, which inspired some of the basement's design. A new stencil contributes to the period styling found throughout the space.

THIS PHOTO: A wet bar adds extra convenience and utility to the basement. Quartersawn oak cabinetry conceals appliances. Granite countertops provide an upscale look.



BEFORE



AFTER

■ CHANGE

THE CHANGE

Key architectural details discovered during demolition propel the transformation of a 1970s basement into a chic Arts and Crafts entertainment space.

WHAT IT TOOK

- * Unearthing and restoring some of the original elements, such as quartersawn oak trim, a terrazzo floor, and an arch-top built-in wall niche.
- * Relocating mechanical piping, wiring, and ductwork behind wainscoting.
- * Installing custom fixtures and iridized glass panels to reflect natural light from existing window wells.
- * Playing off existing Arts and Crafts details to direct the design scheme.
- * Assigning electronic media components to an adjacent room to eliminate clutter.