



Basements

Basement of the Week: Clever Details Update a Below-Ground Lounge

Lower-level design reaches new heights with rearranged ductwork, lighting, a new ceiling and modern styling

 **Becky Harris**
 Houzz Contributor. Hi There! I currently live in a 1920s cottage in Atlanta... [More »](#) Follow

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A classic 1960s knotty pine basement with a gargantuan wet bar caught this homeowner's eye years ago and had stuck in his head as his ideal basement ever since. When it came time to renovate his own basement, his developing tastes and collaboration with the designers at [Princeton Design Collaborative](#) resulted in a fresh, modern updated space, paneled in beautiful maple veneer with a sufficient wet bar that doesn't overwhelm. Check out the hardworking details that make it all work.

Basement at a Glance

Location: Lawrenceville, New Jersey

Size: 535 square feet



by Princeton Design Collaborative

"The greatest challenge in a basement is making it feel like it's not a basement," says architect John Conroy. His solution includes horizontal bands running throughout the design, a unique corrugated metal ceiling and clever lighting tricks. Custom furniture and careful attention to detail make all the pieces feel like a cohesive and comfortable whole, with inspiration gleaned from midcentury modern and atomic age style.

One of the greatest challenges in a basement remodel is the low ceiling, often made lower by



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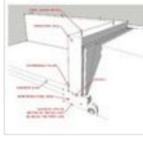
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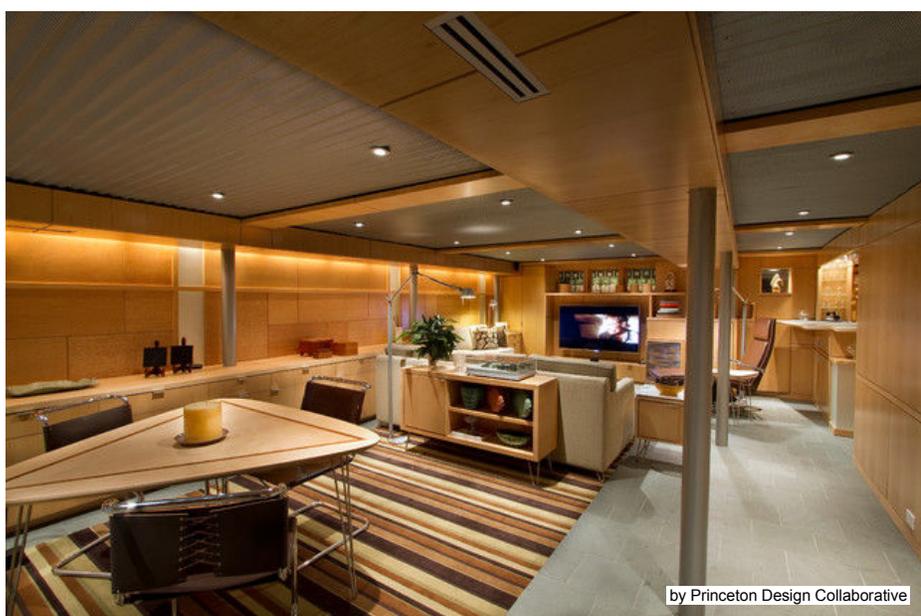
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ductwork. Conroy relocated the ductwork, which drops as low as 6 feet, 2 inches above the floor, to the sides of the room. Now rather than clunking up the space, they help define it. He used stainless steel fasteners around the ductwork to make it easy to access during ongoing renovations upstairs.

The higher parts of the ceiling are 7 feet high and covered in perforated corrugated metal panels. The new ceiling reflects light, brings in a subtle modern industrial element, adds acoustical value and enhances the horizontal banding theme that works through the room, all the way down to the striped rug. This attention to horizontal lines gives the illusion of higher ceilings.



To light the space, Conroy opened the stairwell to the rest of the house and placed skylights overhead. Recessed can lights fill in, and the aquarium also has the feel of natural daylight.



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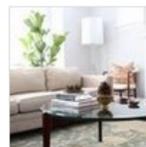
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Covering or relocating the structural elements in a basement is always a design challenge, but Conroy decided if you can't beat 'em, join 'em. The columns on the right are structural, and the ones on the left are faux. The nonstructural posts are PVC piping covered in a matching hammered-finish Rust-Oleum paint. They add architectural language and a rhythm to the space, and their metal finished look matches the metal ceiling.

Hairpin legs on the furniture play off the metallic finishes. Their paper clip–like lines are a nod to midcentury modern and atomic age style.



The panels of plain sliced maple are blueprint matched, meaning the veneer supplier took all of the wood from one tree and numbered the panels in the order they were taken off the tree so they could be placed accordingly. So the grains match from panel to panel, enhancing the banding. Conroy composed a Mondrian-esque composition and mixed in a bit of birdseye maple for subtle contrast.

The trees used for the veneer were sustainably harvested, and the plywood backing is sustainable as well.



Conroy expanded and aligned an existing window over the TV. It sits partially below grade in a window well, so he opted for stained glass by Anderson Windows to conceal the view.

Princeton Design Collaborative designed the cabinets, built-in sofa, side tables, coffee table, sofa table and dining table. "We wanted to make the coffee table a sculptural focal point," Conroy says. It's also high functioning and includes shelves for books, a magazine rack and a large drawer for throw blankets.

The door covering the media equipment is a corrugated translucent ceiling sample. A 12-inch square of glass on the coffee table is also a sample. Conroy also used glass samples for the bar shelving and topped side tables with marble samples.



In the years since the client saw his inspiration rec room with the gigantic bar, he realized a well-designed and efficient bar would suffice nicely. A sink, an 18-inch paneled refrigerator and plenty of room for glassware meet his entertaining needs.



The lighted niche behind on the left gives another window effect. The frosted glass on the column at the end of the bar lightens things up.

*Flooring, countertops:
slate*



Rather than a closed-off staircase being opened up, this light-filled entry is open to the main level of the house. Several views of the staircase here show how it is daylighted; the top left shows the skylight overhead, the bottom left shows another frosted glass detail within the paneling.

by Princeton Design Collaborative



by Princeton Design Collaborative

In addition to the 535-square-foot entertaining area, the basement includes a bathroom with a shower along with a laundry room, sofa bed and workshop.

Your turn: Have you converted your basement to a living area? We'd love to see what you did. Please tell us about it in the Comments!

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Comments

 **midmodfan** Wow! I am normally not a fan of basements, but this one is awesome. The maple panels exude such a warm, modern look - a far cry from the knotty pine. I also like the indirect lighting behind the soffits. Really beautiful overall.
20 hours ago · [Like](#) · 3

 **Incite Design** In our experience, basements can be some of the trickiest spaces to renovate in the entire house. With the ductwork and overall lower headrooms that are generally the hallmark of basements it is a challenge to have a space which doesn't feel like it has been compromised by all the bumps and spaces that these services require. Also getting light down the space is a challenge that has been overcome nicely here. The perimeter lighting draws your eye to the outside of the space and uses the warmth of the wood to make it feel contemporary yet cozy. I'm not a huge fan of the metal ceiling, but I think that the designers have integrated the look into the overall feel of the place.
18 hours ago · [Like](#)

 **A. Peltier Interiors** All of that beautiful wood paneling is what takes this space from boring basement to a really fantastic living space, which can be hard to do in a lower level.
18 hours ago · [Like](#)

 **tcufrog** I think the metal ceiling was a wise choice for making light bounce around what could have been a flat space due to lack of natural light.
9 hours ago · [Like](#)

 **olldbobbi** Wow, this is nicer than my living room :))
53 minutes ago · [Like](#)



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