

Basement beauty

Photos courtesy of Sylvestre Construction

A renovation transforms a basement into friendlier space

By Nancy Crotti

The Ibele-McNaughton family had several reasons for remodeling the basement of their 1931 home.

The four young adults in residence needed a place to hang out without filling the upper floors with noise. That place also had to accommodate a previously acquired pool table.

John Ibele needed a new workshop and a place to play his bass guitar.

Monica McNaughton was tired of having a wet basement despite the presence of drain tiles.

The June 2014 storm that dumped nearly 4 inches of rain on Minneapolis was what finally drove the family to complete a remodel that had stopped short of finishing more than a decade before.



"It was literally a water closet," McNaughton said. "Your knees kind of hit the door."

The rest of the space is more subdued, with a balance of contemporary, clean lines and new cabinetry and woodwork that harmonize with the age of the house.

Sylvestre replaced an unused wood-burning fireplace in the corner of the rec room with a gas fireplace, and its brick façade with slender porcelain tiles.

Rather than mount the TV above the fireplace, as some do, the family had it hung to the right. They also took advantage of the opened walls to install a wireless router and wiring for gaming and sound systems.

A custom cabinet for electronics and storage stands below the TV. Above and to the right, floating shelves add interest to what would otherwise be a blank wall. McNaughton said she found the idea for the shelving on houzz.com.

"I was trying to get something to add interest, so it didn't look sterile down here," she said.

Windows were replaced, lead ceiling paint abated, and old pipes swapped out for flexible plastic PEX piping, which was small enough to allow the plaster ceiling to remain largely intact.

The family's lighting choice for the rec room also preserved the ceiling and keeps noise from drifting upward. Rather than the standard recessed lights, which they have in the adjacent game room, interior designer Laurie Platten suggested semi-flush, low-profile LED ceiling fixtures.

"You don't necessarily want all that overhead light on all the time," Platten said. "It makes for a bright space, but not a lot of coziness."

For ambient lighting, Platten suggested bronze sconces for the walls in the rec and game rooms. Different switches control the

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— Laurie Platten,
interior designer

two types of lights for more flexibility, she added. The rec room also has a small wooden table and chairs for snacking and semi-custom cabinets for storage.

The family already had a blue sectional sofa in the basement, so Plattes suggested a soft gray paint color that leans more toward taupe than blue to keep the room from looking cold. Glass doors separate this room from the game room, which the pool table dominates.

McNaughton and Plattes went through several possible configurations of the storage space in the game room before settling on a pair of closets separated by built-in cabinets. They decided to leave a few feet of space between the upper and lower cabinets to allow pool players to move their cues unimpeded. A beverage cooler beneath the Iroko (aka African teak) countertop is stocked with pop.

A three-light, brass ceiling fixture illuminates the pool table. McNaughton chose a style compatible with the house's architecture, according to Plattes.

"I'm always aware of where we are," said the designer, who has worked with McNaughton for about 20 years. "I wanted to make it feel newer. I also wanted to still reflect the feeling of what the rest of the house is."

For both rooms, the family chose a waterproof, "floating" vinyl floor with an attached cork bottom layer that is naturally resistant to odor-causing mold and mildew, Post said. Its extruded core, made of recycled wood, bamboo dust limestone and plastic, keeps feet warmer and noise to a minimum, according to the manufacturer, US Floors.

"You feel it and you see it and it really does trick you into thinking that it's wood," Plattes said. "It's quieter than wood would be. It absorbs more sound and it's a lot thinner. You're not losing three-quarters of an inch for wood in a room with a less-than-eight-foot ceiling."

The basement remodel has helped the entire house work better for the entire family, according to McNaughton.

The downpour flooded the basement, soaking the carpeting for what McNaughton decided would be the last time.

"Enough was enough," she said.

Sylvestre Construction of Minneapolis had remodeled the kitchen and expanded the house near Lake Nokomis in 2003. The company added a mudroom and a first-floor powder room, a master bedroom and space for a future master bath on the second floor. Sylvestre also expanded the basement beneath the addition, insulated it and installed drywall.

This time around, Ibele and McNaughton visited several homes on the Remodeler's Showcase Fall 2014 tour to check out other companies' basement work.

Some of the remodeled basements looked stark and others had poor lighting, according to McNaughton.

"I didn't want it to feel like a basement," she said of hers. The family chose Sylvestre again, in part because production manager Kate Post makes sure everyone involved with the project stays on schedule and stands behind their work, McNaughton added. The remodel was complete in three months.

"We hear from clients that scheduling is everything, and then, cleanliness," Post said, "keeping the jobsite clean and orderly."

Their original basement had knotty pine paneling, which had to come down in order to install a new drain tile system.

"The boys and my husband really liked it, but I thought it was dark and time for a change," McNaughton said.

The basement also had built-in cabinets that she wanted out. Rather than sending the paneling and cabinets to a landfill, the family offered them to neighbors.

Tucked away at the base of the colorfully carpeted stairs, the laundry room nearly pops with color. McNaughton chose buttery yellow paint for that room, and celery green for the new, adjacent half-bath. It replaced a toilet (sans sink) that had stood under the stairs. →

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