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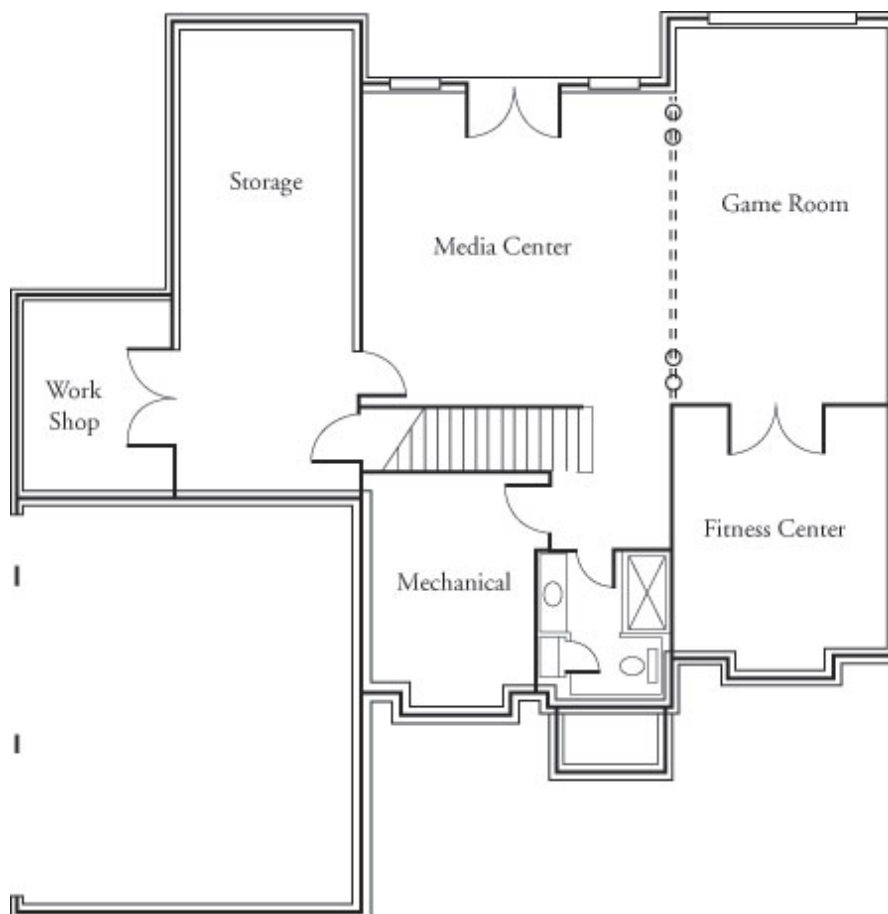
Homeowner Help

Thu 11/01/2007

What to do with Rooms with a View



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It's a common dilemma among lakefront homes. You have an unfinished lower level with some fabulous views and lots of room, but how do you finish it to take full advantage of the space and views while injecting a little personality?

That's the question one Today's Custom Home reader recently asked us. We, in turn, turned to the experts – some of the most innovative and well-regarded interior designers in Charlotte - to see what they would do. Each addressed varied aspects of the space and the challenges it presents. Here are their ideas:

The Challenge:

The homeowners have a nearly 2,000-square-foot unfinished daylight basement that overlooks Lake Norman in their traditional style home. These intrepid homeowners have a limited budget and enjoy tackling home improvement projects themselves; all they need is a little guidance. Because of that, they'd like to put a drop ceiling in the space that's now 10' high, so they can easily rewire at a later date if needed. A tile floor or similar durable, low maintenance material is a necessity.

The back of the space is fully enclosed, and there are no windows in the lower level except for the wall that faces the lake. A staircase comes down the center of the space, with a wall directly in front of it. To the left is an open area with two windows and doors that lead out to a covered porch overlooking the lake. This space is where the homeowners can picture a media room. To the right of that is a longer space with the only other window. That's where they'd love to put a pool table and possibly some pub tables. The long windowless wall is where they'd like some type of shelf to hold drinks. Behind that is an enclosed room that might make a good fitness center. To the right of the stairs is a small but functional bathroom.

The homeowners have three children, but, she says jokingly, "The rec room is for us, not the kids." What she wants is a very open, bright and inviting space with rooms that flow into each other. She likes tropical, nautical and beachy themes and would like to continue those on the lower level. Although her home's exterior is traditional, she has eclectic tastes. "I like funky conversation pieces, but it's hard to pull everything together," she explains. "This whole space has such potential. It could be so nice."

The answers:

Build in Interest

Terri Carpinelli

Carpinelli Interior Design, Inc.

The homeowner wants a basement area for adults with a unique beach/tropical theme. Instead of the typical tropical decorations, I'd recommend using unexpected building products to convey that feeling with a level of sophistication.

You can do that on the floor with large, possibly 20" x 20", tiles to open up the space. Another option would be adding a unique flooring material like cork flooring for the main areas. Cork works well in basements, adds warmth and comes in a wide variety of colors. For the media and fitness areas, I'd recommend a sisal-like carpet. It helps with sound, flows well with the cork, and adds to the overall beachy feeling.

To allow as much light in as possible, I'd recommend roman shades made in a natural woven material of bamboo or linen. I'd back them in room darkening lining for privacy and to allow better viewing in the media room. To divide some areas and still keep the open feeling, I'd use a new material that looks like a boat sail; when it's stretched it looks like a piece of art. It's definitely a conversation starter and unique.

To add function and flair, the pool table area and the wall area would be great places for built-ins. I'd add bookshelves on either side with bead board behind them to keep the beach cottage atmosphere. The top shelves can be removed and the homeowners' posters put in their place to highlight them. Cabinets would provide storage space below. In the middle section between the bookshelves, I'd put a built-in cabinet on the bottom topped with a counter top to create a dry bar area. On the back wall, I'd place a built-in mirror and glass shelves to display seashells or any other type of collection the homeowner has. A side benefit of the mirror will be adding more light to the space.

Bring the Outside In

Donna Drake and Gina Gertzman
Drake Interior Design

Kirsch® Window Fashions



Natural materials like these woven PanelTrac® Shades from Kirsch® add interest to a space.

This space presents a fabulous opportunity to take advantage of the lake view and to bring the outside in.

We like the homeowner's suggested room placement. It takes full advantage of the view. In the media room, we would place a sectional positioned to face the lake and left wall. A bookcase/media cabinet would be placed on the left wall and painted the trim color SW6119 Antique White. Motorized blackout bamboo shades would go on the windows and could be lowered when watching a movie. Walls would be painted SW6226 Languid Blue. To soften the flooring, a rug in sisal or jute with a border would work, or a new rug made of corn by Karastan would give it a natural feel.

In the billiard room, we would center the pool table between the two columns and place the game table in front of the window to take advantage of the view. A drink rail would surround the room with bead board below painted in the trim color. Notches in the drink rail would hold cue sticks. A pool cue holder could be integrated between the studs and recessed. Walls would be painted SW6226 Languid Blue, the same as the media room, since they are open to each other.

In the bathroom, we suggest a vessel sink in bottle glass, to convey the feeling of water. We'd also add decorative glass tiles in bottle glass to the shower to visually link the two. Place a multicolored glass pendant over the sink to highlight the bowl. We'd do decorative painting to resemble bamboo or tropical plants. The paint color would be by Sherwin Williams in SW 6191 Contented, accented with SW 6226 Languid Blue.

The exercise room would have mirrored walls, since there is no natural light. Add a mural on one wall so it feels like you're looking out to a lake or beach. Include rattan ceiling fans and paint the walls SW6119 Contented.

Planning it Out

Wanda Suitt-Horton

Interior Concepts by Wanda Suitt-Horton

Photo ©2007 by Michael LoBiondo



Windows and doors overlooking a view allow you to bring the outside in

As a designer, one of the most important items I address with any space, particularly a new or unfinished space, is the area layout. If there are no accurate blueprints, I measure and draw the area(s) to scale to properly add any architectural elements and to create a space plan for furnishings or other objects. Knowing the details of how the room will function then allows for me to offer appropriate solutions. Without this knowledge, costs can easily go beyond the planned budget.

This client has a good laundry list of multiple functions for these areas. As they are open to one another, the key is to allow for varied uses while using similar elements to tie the areas together. One of the best ways is in how the areas are trimmed. For example, right now there are two rounded columns being used for support. For such a casual area, they appear to be a little too traditional and formal. It would be better to box those in and add some molding details. The client has shared she prefers lighter tones to darker ones. Since this is a basement area, something needs to be added to allow for visual depth while also adding a light-reflecting surface. A wainscoting treatment of a series of v-groove boards and a deeply capped rail would address this need as well as the one mentioned for a place to sit drinks. This "shelf" could also be used to place other objects, such as some framed prints or art pieces. The wainscoting can be painted in a lighter color than the upper wall, which would create light while allowing for some depth.

This client has a propensity for eclectic design. There are great eclectic uses of space as well as poorly executed ones. The key is to remember to keep the overall area simple, to allow for the wit and whimsy of art and objects to carry through.

Finishing Touches
Cyndy Kelly, Interior Designer
 Distinctive Fabrics and Furniture

Photo ©2007 by Pat Shanklin



A space plan ensures that furnishings will fit and traffic will flow from one room to the next.

For form and function of the space and the application required, you have to look at the needs of the individuals. What the homeowners asked for is a comfortable, useable space they can enjoy as an adult space as well as a place where the family can have fun together.

Given the lack of windows and the flow of the area, the space needs to be bright and open. We suggest using interesting patterns and textures to give the rooms a flow that will make the space seem larger and more open. The homeowner likes nautical themes, so we propose fabrics and furnishings that convey a beach feel with a cottage look.

For the windows, valances that look like awnings in bright colors topped with woven wood blinds allow form and function for all the different activities that will take place in the space. When watching movies in the media room, you can simply pull down the blinds, and when not in use, you preserve that fabulous view and allow the area to be flooded with as much natural light as possible.

Since this is a casual space designed to serve as a family retreat, the furniture should be comfortable and inviting, yet still light and airy to create that open relaxed feel the homeowners are seeking. We'd recommend mixing a textured, faux-suede custom loveseat with a brightly patterned pair of wood and fabric upholstered chairs. Adding in a couple of cube ottomans will give the room a casual feel. Fabrics would be a multicolored stripe with varied shades of blue, green, cream and a little red, mixed with an open, whimsical floral print against a cream background that repeated those varied hues. Keeping the pieces smaller would allow for more flexibility to accommodate varied types of family activities, ranging from teenagers entertaining their friends to a quiet night of movie watching for the parents.

Final Comments

The designers all agreed that a drop ceiling was perhaps not the best option. "Instead of saving money, they will probably lose more, because their resale value would be much higher with a smooth drywall ceiling," explains Carpinelli. If the homeowners do opt for a drop, Drake and Gertzman suggest a disguise. "We would paint the tiles to create some warmth in a soft beige/yellow SW6127 Ivoire. You could also paint the grids the same color to keep it from looking like a checkerboard. Tiles are also available in different types of textures."

In the end, turning this open space into an area the family will enjoy requires keeping function in mind and adding a dash of fun. "The judicious addition of texture and color to the space will help create the warm and welcoming atmosphere the family wants to achieve," Kelly says.

As Horton summed up for everyone: "The best advice I can offer these homeowners – and everyone considering a project - is to create a plan with a definitive list of needs. Then bring in subcontractors to offer quotes and to address any technical questions. Without sounding like an advertisement for interior designers, investing in some design consultation before the project is in progress is a wise choice. A professional designer can bring all of the puzzle pieces together for the best fit."

Photo courtesy of Distinctive Fabrics & Furniture



Fabrics that blend the feel of the beach with cottage style add a nautical twist

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