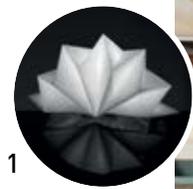


Interior Designer
Dolores Pian
shares her ideas.



PHOTO: MIRO ZAGNELI



1



2



CloudWhite
(CC-40)



WhiteDown
(CC-50)



3

4

5

Custom
cabinetry
keeps wires
hidden but
accessible.



6

7

Doors with a
clean profile
complete the look.

LOWER LEVELS

NOT THE DUNGEONS THEY USED TO BE

Gone are the days of low-ceilinged unfinished basements that smell of mould and mildew; meager places to do laundry and store sports gear and Christmas decorations.

Now that fixer-uppers in some cities are going for a million dollars or more, spending \$100,000 to \$150,000 doesn't sound unreasonable to reclaim existing space. Basement renos are a lot cheaper than an addition and much easier than attics.

In posh neighbourhoods with historical designation and height restrictions, contractors are now digging deep to create spaces three or four levels below ground, so that they can house bowling alleys, Olympic-size pools – you name it, just dig it. Called “iceberg” architecture, what you see above ground is just the tip of what lies below.

For regular folks, the new-found square footage becomes a fantasy space. When all the necessary rooms for daily living are accounted for above ground, the basement becomes a space where your imagination can run wild.

That's when I dub basements “The Lower Level Retreat.” With a shift in name comes a shift in thinking about the space and its possibilities and functions.

These spaces can house entertainment centres with large 50- to 60-inch televisions, sizes that would normally dominate a regular living area.

For the practically minded, extra storage

room is always welcome and if you're going to have a laundry room, then why not add a little panache. The ultimate home office can double as a guest room when grandma and grandpa come to visit.

Other leisure lair spaces include wine cellars, spa retreats that double as doggie grooming centres with heated floors, therapeutic pools for athletic injuries or music studios. The possibilities are endless.

How do you design a livable, lovable space that feels warm and cosy? Let's start with the basics:

Planning:

Open plan seems to work best. If you need to enclose spaces for privacy, then make the walls moveable, to enclose or open a space as required.

Building:

Ideally, a finished eight-foot ceiling suits everyone best. Remember that recessed pot lights, flooring and under-floor infrastructure all reduce available height.

Make sure to address structural issues and all possible moisture issues. Hire a contractor who knows all about basements.

I prefer to add radiant floor heat. If not the whole floor, then in the washroom or spa area. When your tootsies are warm, then the rest of you will feel warm, cosy and pampered.

Lighting:

The trick is to find light fixtures and bulbs that spread light in all directions, filling surfaces with light and minimizing harsh shadows to help decrease the cave-like effect.

Choose a warm colour temperature of

2700 kelvin (K) or 3000K. Bluish light of 4000K is cool and will feel fridge-like and not somewhere you'd like to hang out, especially in the winter.

Use different sources of lighting throughout the space such as lamps and LED strips in built-in shelving.

Décor & Design:

Raise sofas and other large pieces of furniture off of the floor. Your eye travels underneath furniture on raised legs, keeping the look light and airy.

Use lighter colours and textures as a focal point for emphasis and drama.

Don't place a television over a fireplace. Together they are visually overwhelming.

Flooring:

Make sure to use a modular flooring system. Should water damage occur, pieces can be popped out of place and new product installed easily. Large rolled goods such as carpet or linoleum should be avoided. When wet, mould and mildew occur.

I've had a lot of success with carpet tile over plywood. Carpet tile acts as an insulator it's removable, easily cleaned and easily re-installed.

Your options for flooring are: porcelain or marble tile, or vinyl or laminate planks. Engineered hardwood is debatable, but plank flooring is your best bet.

Fixing up the basement will add much happiness to you and your home. What is your Lower Level Fantasy? **OH**

1. ARTEMIDE: EN-EL Hoshigame Table Lamp **2. BENJAMIN MOORE:** Paint **3. CASA LIFE:** Henley Chair in Vanderbilt Teal Ultrasuede **4. CASA LIFE:** Tam-Tam Tables **5. FLOR:** Lacebark Carpet Tile in Jade **6. MILLET:** Shaker Doors **7. EQ3:** Pouf in Grey