

Underground Paradise

Turning an unfinished basement into an entertainment center gave a big family some much needed elbow room **BY KATE ASHFORD**

Though Beth and Ken Wilson's 5,000-square-foot, four-bedroom home in Union, Ky. wasn't exactly cramped when they bought it in 2005, they yearned for a space that could accommodate the passions of their two oldest sons (their three boys are now 17, 12 and 2) yet allow adults to enjoy activities too. So shortly after they purchased the home, the couple decided to turn the house's dark, mostly unfinished 2,000-square-foot basement into a livable lower level. Besides adding a bedroom and a powder room, the Wilsons dedicated about half the space to the hobbies of teenage boys, with a home theater, a pool table, a Ping-Pong table and an area specifically for Xbox playing. That still left plenty of space for an exercise room for Beth and Ken, as well as a full bar. And for the family's common interests as well: Come Saturday night, the Wilsons watch movies on the 92-inch projection screen in the home theater, which is wired for surround sound. "We can all be down there but not bothering each other," says Ken.

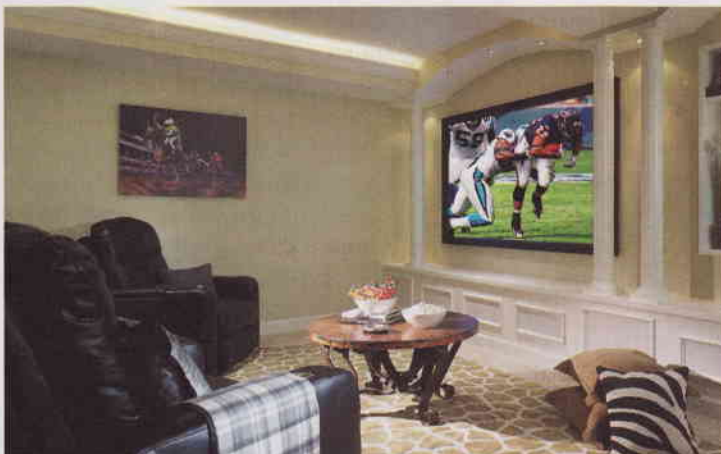
LOOK OUT BELOW

Before the renovation, the vast majority of the basement was wasted space. The new rooms have full carpeting (\$6,800) and ceilings and walls that match the rest of the house (\$12,200). The fluted columns and arches on the walls around the home theater are in a classic Greco-Roman style (\$11,500).



RAISING THE BAR

For about \$7,000, a small closet was turned into a powder room, with tile flooring that matches the bar area. Besides the Wood-Mode cabinetry (\$16,425) and a black granite top (\$6,500), the bar also has a lot of typical kitchen amenities, says project lead Neal Hendy, including a refrigerator (\$1,150) and a dishwasher (\$700). Kichler pendant fixtures overhead (\$300) cast a soft light.



THE NUMBERS

PURCHASED IN 2005

\$775,000

BASEMENT RENOVATION COSTS

\$195,000

OTHER RENOVATIONS

\$67,000

MARKET VALUE TODAY

\$1.2 million

WHAT WAS THE PAYOFF?

When the basement remodel was complete, the Wilsons had gained more than 1,000 square feet of living space. Smart move, says local realtor Jane Ashcraft-West, who recently saw the home. Purchasing electronics for the new home theater and wiring the entire house for media was also a good investment: "Buyers at that price point do a lot of entertaining," she says.

DOS & DON'TS

BY DUO DICKINSON

FINISHING A BASEMENT

DO Add Lots of Outlets

Appliances, exercise equipment and televisions will all need a source of electricity.

DON'T Chop Up the Floor If you need power in the middle of the room, it's more attractive and cost-effective to put the outlets on a column.

DO Go Bright Overhead

But add fixtures and dimmers when necessary to fine-tune the effect.

DON'T Keep All the Light Above The underside of upper cabinets, for example, can provide a great place for hidden lights over countertops.

DO Use Real Wood

Columns made of natural wood cost \$200 more than the painted-on version but will look good for a decade.

DON'T Overdecorate Crowded Rooms

Patterned wall coverings or floor finishes in tight spaces can get claustrophobic.

DO Make Use of Existing Framing

Place pipes and ducts against ceiling beams to lessen their visual impact.

DON'T Sheetrock the Ceiling You don't want to lose your access to the pipes. Plus, you'll save \$2,000 to \$3,000 if you use a drop ceiling instead.