



INVISION DESIGN PARTNERS, LLC

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In our first visit with you we LISTEN to your needs and wants for the project. Only then, we propose ways to accomplish them. Please call or email, we will respond promptly.

BASEMENT INTERIORS

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PART 1

Why do Basements Exist?

Most buildings in North America include a basement, a floor partly or entirely below ground level. In areas of cold climate, foundation footings must be constructed below the frost line of the soil (the depth at which the ground freezes in winter), typically 6-7 feet. As frost expands the soil it exerts tremendous pressure on the foundation of the house, which can cause major damage to its' structure. Constructing foundations below the frost line prevent structural damage while also creating an underground space that becomes the basement.

(Note that basements are not typically constructed in warm climate areas or on grounds made of hard bedrock, but the reason has to do with cost, not ground frosting).

Basements of most residential buildings act as extra storage, housing for heating and cooling systems, washing/drying appliances, and other utilitarian needs. These spaces are typically not finished and therefore not equipped for comfortable living. Many homeowners choose to finish the underground space, creating an additional functioning floor to the property.

Why Invest in Your Basement?

In these economic times, more and more homeowners consider renovation as opposed to relocation. Taking into account the complexity and cost of buying a new house, renovating a basement (or any other space) can add real value and usefulness to the property at a fraction of the cost. Remodeled basements may accommodate a multitude of necessities, such as family entertainment, play space for children, additional bedroom(s), kitchen, bathroom, exercise, storage, arts and crafts, bar and wine cellar, music center, home or business office, and many more.

Challenges in Remodeling a Basement

Since most residential basements are built to offer utilitarian functionalities, converting them into spaces one would enjoy using requires skills and attention to interior layout, aesthetics, emotional appeal and CFM (color, finish & material). These interior design specialties must accommodate all existing infrastructure needs (such as plumbing, water, sewage, electrical, gas, HVAC, etc.) and offer easy access to them in case of future need for repair.

Renovation must also address safety concerns (i.e. meet city codes) and usability needs such as proper access for people, equipment and furniture.

In our next issues of INVISIONS we will discuss planning, design, execution and custom built pieces for basement remodeling.

Before and after images: *Details showing portion of an unfinished basement (above) and a CAD concept for the same space intended as a family area. Also shown is a custom-designed media center built partially into the wall under the stairs (below). Pittsford, NY.*

PART 2

In the previous issue of INVISION we explained the reasons basements exist in the first place, and discussed the purpose and challenges for investment in them (you may access the article on our [Facebook](#) page). The next phases in basement remodeling include establishing a realistic budget, design and execution.

Establishing a realistic budget

Most homeowners begin their basement remodeling project with an idea or a vision for their space. Their thinking typically focuses on functional usage such as a family entertainment, art or exercise areas, but sometimes includes aesthetics preferences, such as traditional or contemporary look, as well.

Nearly all of our clients present long wish lists of what they would like their basement to include. Their lists are often not prioritized, let alone realistically budgeted. It is for this reason that we begin our relationship with them by suggesting differentiation between needs and wants and establishing a detailed and realistic budget. This portion of the project is complex and requires research for identifying interior items through local or national resources. In addition, it requires soliciting and reviewing proposals for construction from local contractors. These are the reasons establishing a realistic budget is not resolved within a single meeting with a client. However, things do fall into place once priorities are established, design plans are finalized and a master purchase list is created.

Budgeting a basement remodeling project requires taking into account the following specific elements:

- **Visualization:** Cost of design services including the creation of 2D & 3D CAD drawings. These drawings show the owner how the space will be utilized and how the required functions will be addressed. They also attend to ergonomic, accessibility and safety needs. Revisions to the original drawings are made following consultations with the client and a final version is shared with the selected contractor
- **Selection:** Cost of interior items (including discounts) based on owner choices such as flooring, lighting, tiles, furnishing, window treatments, custom design pieces, special needs, etc.
- **Construction:** Cost of labor for executing the final design plan including related material expenses such as walls, ceiling, plumbing, HVAC, electrical, water, gas, trash removal, etc.

This process requires the skills and experience of a properly educated and certified interior design professional who will then guide the client from the initial discussion through the completion of design before construction or purchase of interior items begins.

Identifying a realistic budget is in the interest of the client and should be discussed before a contract to execute the design is signed.

In our next issue of INVISIONS (Volume 22, May 2013) we will discuss basement design, execution and special needs requiring custom solutions.

Photo: Basement design, Pittsford, New York. [See more](#)

PART 3

In this segment of the article we focus on basement design and execution, and highlight the challenges and benefits associated with these activities. *Access to our previous issues of INVISIONS (Vol. 20 and 21) containing the first two segments of this article may be found on our [Facebook](#) page.*

We begin our design process by discussing the project with the client, then observing the space designated for remodeling. The purpose of these activities is for us to clarify and understand the client's vision for their renovated space including its functionality, design style and aesthetics. In addition, as discussed earlier, we also help the client understand the issues that make up a realistic budget for the project, although it is too soon to finalize it at this early stage of the process.

Equally important for us is to also discuss latent needs that are often considered "given", or "not essential" at project start. Examples of such needs include appropriate traffic patterns in the space, accessible passage for equipment or storage items, intended activities such as play, sports, social gathering and art, that are expected to take place and possible future plans for the remodeled interiors (i.e. converting a play area to a living space for returning college kids). Discussing these issues upfront will enable execution to code and may prevent costly modifications in the future.

Generating space CAD drawings and material specification list

Our next step is to accurately measure and photograph the existing space so that CAD drawings can be generated and design options presented to the client. This process is essential as it includes considerations for the different functions and interior walls needed to separate designated areas. Computer Aided Design (CAD) is a software tool that allows us to visualize our thoughts and share them with others.

Once ideas for the space are represented in a drawing format and furniture and other interior elements are shown in the correct scale, a list of item specifications can be generated. This list includes the color, finish and material selections such as flooring, kitchen and bath cabinetry, tiles, lighting and storage solutions. These items are based on a search from local and national resources and are aimed to ensure that the style and quality of the interiors materials represent a realistic budget for the client.

Generating an accurate 2 dimensional drawing of the space leads the way for 3 dimensional CAD drawings in which optional design layouts are created and discussed with the client. These drawings are helpful in visualizing the space along with its furnishing, accessories and colors as it would be when remodeling is completed, thus enabling the client to "see" for the first time how their vision and investment would materialize. Revisions, if necessary, are implemented at this time as well. (*CAD: Multi-function basement family area concept, Pittsford, New York*). [See more](#)

Designing an unfinished space

Most basements differ from other spaces in residential settings because they are unfinished and as such present unique challenges for both the interior designer and the construction contractor. For the most part these challenges relate to the original utilitarian nature of the space that leaves its infrastructure, machinery, energy delivery system and other vital parts exposed. Other challenges include environmental conditions such as dampness due to cracks in the concrete, walls and floor and insufficient insulation. In addition, basements studs, beams, joists, columns, ducts and electrical boards are all exposed, making an interior design solution a special challenge.

Balancing needs, wants and budget

At the heart of the interior design process is the transformation of customer needs, wants and vision into an affordable and executable plan. The work most always requires a balanced approach between the needs and priorities of the client, the creative solutions of the designer, and the challenges of the space and budget.

In addition to skills such as aesthetics (color, finish and material), style, and layout design a professional interior designer also brings to the project expertise in space and furniture accessibility and efficiency. These skills ensure all basement utilitarian functions (as well as its new functions) are easily and safely accessible for all intended users or activities.

Addressing specific needs: Custom made items

Once basement needs and functionalities are identified, a search for proper furnishing solutions begins and choices are presented to the client. In some cases existing or new furnishing can address the needs, in other cases, however, solutions must be specific or unique and require custom design. Some examples for such needs include dedicated storage systems, media entertainment centers and social/bar and/or wine cellars. Note that these items typically require furniture design expertise and should be built by a professional woodworker. *(CAD: Storage cabinetry designed as part of a wall, Brighton, NY).* [See more](#)

Executing the interior design plan

The next step in the basement remodeling project calls for a review of the selected plan, and construction cost estimate by a qualified, insured general contractor who can advise the client on issues relating to construction, including city code requirements and inspections. Some of the expertise needed involves repositioning infrastructure items (if necessary) such as sewage, water, gas, electric and HVAC, wall and ceiling framing and insulation, egress and preferred construction materials. It is possible, therefore, that certain modifications to the design plan may be needed at this point in order to accommodate the recommendations and suggestions of the contractor.

While some contractors employ experts in certain construction fields such as tile work, carpentry, carpeting, electrical, etc., others are capable of executing all aspects of the work without subcontractors. Ideally, however, and similarly to every project, all stakeholders should support each other by maintaining open communication to ensure project success.

Contractors are expected to have the know-how required for installing the items selected by the designer for the client, including kitchen and bath cabinetry, flooring and ceiling lights. Other interior installations may take place only after construction is completed. Those typically include painting and window treatment. Contractors may also be expected to produce the storage and shelving solutions called for by the design plan. These are "built-in" items that differ fundamentally from the custom designed furniture solutions discussed earlier. *(Photo: Basement kitchenette/small serving area, Pittsford, New York)*

Note that certain selected items need to be ordered ahead of construction start date, as delivery may take several weeks or more.

Furniture and accessory placement

When construction is completed, spaces painted, and dumpsters removed from the driveway, it's time to begin the last phase of the project and place or install the remaining items per plan. Among these items are rugs, furniture requiring assembly, task and ambient lights, entertainment equipment, sports equipment, kitchen

accessories, art and plants.

We hope this article was valuable and useful to you and that your project results meet your expectations. Please contact us for further information on basement or other interior design needs.
