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Curve Appeal

So *not* your grandma's basement—Studio IDE puts a new twist on underground living.

By Thomas Connors

Whether kitted out as a man cave or fashioned as a family-friendly retreat, a finished basement is a must for many suburbanites. And while this essential real estate usually takes its design cue from the rest of the home, the far-from-ordinary space in Geneva that was designed by Vladimir Radutny and Paul Tebben of Studio IDE (studioide.com) stands alone. The program doesn't wander from the usual wish list (entertainment area, guest room, yoga/exercise space), but the orchestration and detailing of this reimagined interior reflects both an adept handling of the immediate conditions—mechanicals, ductwork and beams—and the kind of deeply considered response to space and function generally reserved for more complex and highly visible projects.

Homeowners Francis and Chris Martins had lived and travelled extensively in Southeast Asia, so when they decided to transform their unfinished basement, finding the perfect spot for a big screen TV was not their primary concern. "I am pretty conventional upstairs," admits Chris, "but when I walked down those stairs, I wanted a Baliesque, five-star spa. I said, 'I don't care how you come up with that. I want to be transported to another world.'"

The architects' primary device for taming the unforgiving rectilinear floor plan of this concrete void is the curve, expressed in walls crafted of Baltic birch plywood. Inspired by seating woven of water hyacinth the couple brought back from Singapore and underpinned by research into the role screens play in the design strategies of Eastern cultures, the lattice-like walls—which stop just short of the ceiling—are constructed from 12-by-4-inch lengths of wood and

assembled in a staggered pattern. "They work with the idea that privacy can be achieved without an opaque wall," explains Tebben. "It's a matter of porosity, providing boundaries that aren't complete barriers, and allowing light and air to permeate."

Although the Martins' basement has a higher-than-usual ceiling, the guts of the house are strung across it—a situation that required extensive camouflage. By installing soffits with rounded edges to hide the ductwork, the architects lessened the visual weight of those necessary elements. "The effect is something that's been carved out," suggests Radutny, who partnered with the contractors at Harder Brothers Inc. to achieve his vision. "So it's less about soffits and more about the ceiling organization."

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In order to maintain a free flow throughout the space, the bar Francis requested was positioned close to a wall near a sliding glass door leading to the outside. This location is fairly narrow, so the team created a series of five pier-like forms, two of which project into the space just enough to provide the elbow room necessary to uncork a bottle of wine or shake a cocktail. "Like the rest of the basement," notes Radutny, "this was the result of something in our way—in this case, the door—prohibiting us from doing what we might like to do. But obstacles can be opportunities."



GREAT DIVIDE
Studio IDE's custom
undulating wood wall

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