

upgrade

The \$1,000 Basement

Grab a drink, dim the lights. It's showtime in this Connecticut basement that was dramatically transformed by a DIYing movie buff on a budget.



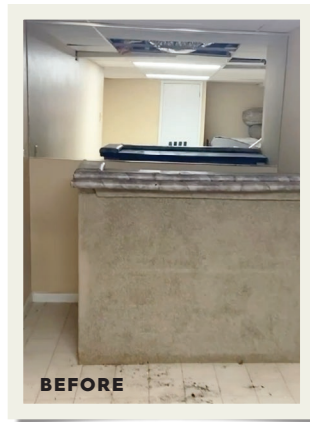
Spaces below ground provide universal design challenges like little to no natural light and fixed structural elements, but these intrepid homeowners were undeterred. Interior designer Ryan Rabuska had a refined vision for the basement of his Wolcott, CT, home. He imagined a swanky lounge for watching movies with his fiancé, Jeff Pelletier. “We figured since there were no windows, we might as well lean into the dark,” Ryan says of the space he transformed with gallons of paint, yards of velvet curtains, and plenty of DIY ingenuity.

Ryan Rabuska, shown left with Jeff Pelletier, spent six hours and used 5 gallons of paint to spray the basement. He hung 10 curtain panels from three rods to “build” the wall.



"I WASN'T AFRAID OF ALL THE BLACK BECAUSE I KNEW
IN THE END I WAS GOING TO LIGHTEN THE LOOK WITH
TEXTILES AND REFLECTIVE FINISHES." —RYAN RABUSKA, *homeowner*

WALLS &
CEILING
CRACKED PEPPER
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The couple's basement lounge isn't just strategically dark, it's light-years away from what it was. Although the room was finished, it was dated and soulless—drowning in carpet (even covering a built-in bar) and with a basement-basic drop ceiling. Ryan confidently dove into a transformation that cost around \$1,000. "I'm a pretty handy guy," he says. "I kind of inherited the gene of: How hard can it be? I'll figure it out."

That go-for-it approach included daringly color-drenching the walls, ceiling, trim, and door in black paint so the background faded away and the low ceiling seemed to disappear. Another layer of black in velvet curtains creates a makeshift wall, Ryan's easy and affordable way to hide two structural posts. The monochromatic foundation counters a high-contrast

● The carpet on the bar didn't make the cut, but the bar's size and shape did. Ryan used PVC pipes, cut in half vertically, to mimic a reeded detail. The checkered floor pattern was made with a DIY cardboard template and concrete paint.

● A wall with a long alcove seemed like an invitation to build an oversize floating shelf, *right*. Ryan used 2x4s to build the frame, which he screwed into wall studs. A plywood top and front piece, both stained, screw into the frame. "It ended up looking expensive and chic," Ryan says.

● Behind the bar, *below*, self-adhesive wallpaper from Target dresses up the wall where a large mirror used to be. A pair of sconces bought on clearance light up the space—with a little trickery. Rather than having the sconces wired, Ryan attached a battery-operated, remote-controlled puck light to the socket.



"WE WANTED TO MAKE THE BASEMENT FEEL SPECIAL WITHOUT SPENDING A LOT OF MONEY."

—RYAN RABUSKA

black-and-white floor Ryan painted after ripping up the carpet. "My personal design style is I like a lot of contrast," he says. "Most of our house is light and bright, so I like that the basement contrasts that."

His DIY punch list also included adding a media center—a straightforward and chic floating shelf that holds the TV—and updating the bar area. There, he got extra creative by cladding the once-carpeted bar with PVC pipes to emulate a reeded look. Furnishings, including a modular sofa, were mostly repurposed from items the couple already owned, supplemented with a few glam reflective accent tables.

Now the space Ryan and Jeff never contemplated using has become their secret getaway—a bonus spot for watching rom-coms or relaxing with a drink in their 1970s A-frame house. "We look forward to our time down there," Ryan says. "We both work a lot, so it's nice to have a dedicated space to relax and unwind. The extra space has definitely been a benefit to our house." □