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DESIGN & DECORATING

ANATOMY LESSON

Advanced Basement

How a subterranean space can get heavenly

BY KATHRYN O'SHEA-EVANS

CELLARS are often sunless warrens of persistent dankness—making a basement guest room about as inviting as steerage. Such was the hurdle San Francisco designer Heather Hilliard faced with this in-law suite, set 14 feet below ground level in a newly built contemporary home in Los Altos Hills, Calif. Even with a window well on one wall, it isn't a bright room, Ms. Hilliard said. "We

wanted it to feel cozy, not like it's underground."

The designer turned to textures to soften the space and add luxury, she said. The client's parents visit from Nagoya, Japan, which led Ms. Hilliard to take cues from Japanese design traditions such as low-lying furniture. Shoji screens inspired the wall behind the bed—a mix of walnut and "thick, toothy paper." Linen Roman shades take the edge off the black steel sliding doors. The result: a homey hideaway. Here, how to ace a basement space.



VELVETY UNDERGROUND Designer Heather Hilliard warmed up this basement room in Los Altos Hills, Calif., with oodles of texture.



1 TOSS IN A GOOD-FEEL WEAVE

To give snowy bed linens some ballast, Ms. Hilliard had custom throw pillows made. "The black and white stripe has these raised threads that sort of recede below white fabric—it's textural," she said. For similar tactility: Try this striped, roughly woven cushion in a cotton and poly blend. Margaret 15-inches-by-25 inches Lumbar Pillow, \$205, onekingslane.com



4 FELT THE FLOOR

For fleeciness underfoot, Ms. Hilliard chose a timeless rug striated in gray and off-white wool. "I don't like things to have an expiration date." This well-priced version is 5% cotton for extra softness. Sweater Rug, from \$200, west-elm.com

5 ROUND UP SOME OTTOMANS

Ms. Hilliard selected faux-fur poufs for their unexpected blobiness. "It's nice to offset linear lines with softness, to mix things up. When you walk into a room and everything follows the same line, it doesn't give your eye somewhere to go." Give your own eyes a destination with this Aspyn Faux Fur Shag Ottoman. \$129, urbanoutfitters.com



2 GET A WOMB

The bouclé in which Ms. Hilliard swathed an armchair (inspired by a 1956 piece by Brazilian designer Sergio Rodrigues) is "just so nubby, like a chenille," she said. "It's very soft, and looks great on the walnut splayed legs." Equally hospitable? This lounge-y armchair. Space Copenhagen for Fredericia, from \$3,055, hivemodern.com



3 GO FOR A GLOW

Blackened metal sconces masked with thick-cast bubbled glass create a warm glow, Ms. Hilliard said. These particular visitors "didn't need bright task lighting because they often sit in bed with iPads." For an equally industrial look, check out this bubbled Murano-glass number. Salviati Feraì Codega Gray Sconce by Alberto Lago, \$830, artemest.com



6 WEIGHT THE WALL

"A room with 10-foot ceilings and a very low bed can look out of proportion," said Ms. Hilliard. She inset the walnut paneling with tweedy-looking paper, inspired by Japanese mulberry "washi" paper, to give the outsize space above the headboard more presence. To make any expanse comparably noticeable, try Cole & Son Foundation Collection Tweed 92/4017, \$109 per roll, decoratorsbest.com

7 ADD SUBTLE STORAGE

Made of rich walnut like the wall panels, the discreet nightstands that flank the bed add warmth in an otherwise cold underground room, said Ms. Hilliard. She didn't need them to make a statement. "These bedside tables are very clean-lined and simple. We wanted them to disappear into the paneling," she said. For a similar wallflower silhouette with a welcoming veneer: Gallery Walnut Nightstand, \$349, cb2.com



8 GIVE AN URCHIN A PERCH

"You want to touch it. You don't know if it's a natural piece from the ocean or if it's handmade," said the designer of the ceramic objet inspired by a prickly sea creature. A celadon interior glaze further evokes the ocean. For an ornament that's pulled from the same net, try: Element Clay Studio by Heather Knight Sea Urchin, from \$95, fourwindscraftguild.com