

Photography

in Space



McMillen designers mastermind a picture-perfect basement studio

“WHEN WE FIRST SAW THIS ROOM, it was a finished basement with oversize moldings, a drop ceiling with four or five different levels and 11 doors that led to various closets and equipment rooms—it had its limitations,” says interior designer Ann Pyne of McMillen Inc., who worked on what would eventually become a photography lover’s studio for the Hamptons House and Garden Decorator’s Showhouse. “It was the kind of space that normally winds up as a gym that never gets used. Instead, we thought we’d make it more like a hideaway full of very personal keepsakes.”

After reorganizing the space, which entailed building three walls, Pyne and her colleague Amanda Dreyer used the drop ceiling to their advantage, accentuating the different squares and rectangles to form different areas, each with its own function. Along the longest wall of the 750-square-foot room is a table for organizing and looking at negatives and photographs; further along that wall is a library area with a circular table; in the corner is a darkroom; and at the center of the room is a sitting area.

Pyne used unexpected raw materials throughout to emphasize the underground feel and make the room more organic. For the ceiling, the tiles were covered with distressed drop cloths. On the main wall, sheets of linen were painted solid white and then attached with the reverse side showing—the irregular texture made a fitting backdrop for the black-and-white photographs handpicked by Pyne and Dreyer. “Each area has its own theme,” Pyne explains. “We chose photographs of books by Abelardo Morell for the library area, and over one table is a Matthew Pillsbury photograph of a basement, on either side of which are photographs that have to do with art, including an Andreas Feininger self-portrait and a photograph of Picasso by Henri Cartier-Bresson.” In the darkroom are photos of skulls by Adam Fuss (a reference to the dead art of the

The main sitting area in a subterranean photography studio by McMillen Inc. features a suede sofa by Joe D’Urso and a Karl Springer parchment console. The rugs are from Stark Carpet; the fur throw rugs are from David Netto Collections.

Right: In the library area are a Paul Evans round table and a set of gilt and metal chairs from Gilbert Poillerat.

Below: The corner darkroom functions as a working studio with a sink, projector and timer. Pyne also included photographs by Adam Fuss.



darkroom) as well as a photograph of Pyne’s kindergarten class (a joke from Pyne about youth to the grave). The mostly mid-century furnishings, such as Edward Wormley’s wing chair for Dunbar and a Paul Evans table, round out the space with pieces that coincided with photography’s heyday in the ’50s and ’60s.

“At once it’s a beautiful, functional space, but there is so much depth here,” says Christopher Hyland. “Prominently placed on the table is the Henry Buel catalog with a picture of a hand on it. It represents the touch of mankind in the artistry of the room, the hand in the photographer’s studio and the hand in collecting art.”

While the rest of the house is large and open with numerous windows and porches, the basement is the only area that is truly private and removed. “Not many people have a space where they can leave their projects out,” says Pyne. “Normally you have to remove them from the dining room table and store them in a closet. But down here, it’s just about your passion. No television, no kids, no spouse—it’s just for you.”

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