Basement Space Utilized For New Television Room

By ANDREW C. LANG

It started this way.

I said to my wife, "What we need is another room."

She said, "Why?"

I said, "So we can watch TV without rearranging the living room furniture every night, so we can entertain more than two guests at one time, so the boys can play host to their friends without stumbling all over us."

She said (and this was a big surprise), "You're right."

Since there was no place to build an extra room except in the basement, we decided to build the extra room in the basement. Since there was no one else to build the extra room except me (the boys are allergic to building extra rooms), we decided that I should do the job.

There would have to be a built-in space for a TV set . . . another for some books and a couple of trophies . . . a way to read the water and gas meters . . . a place for a refreshment bar . . . a plan for covering the overhead pipes . . . and half a dozen other things you ordinarily don't think about when you blithely decide to make a room in the basement.

First came the job of making the basement waterproof and dry, but that's another story.

I used a piece of chalk to outline on the basement floor the planned location of the walls. decided to put the studding two feet from the concrete walls rather that attach furring strips directly to the masonry. It would allow plenty of room for builtins, and it would enable me to get behind the walls if there ever was a water problem. Besides, its always preferable to have a free circulation of air behind any finished walls in a basement where condensation could occur.

The usual way to put down the sole plates — the wood on which the studding rests — is to attach them to the floor with cut nails, expansion shields and bolts, or some other method involving making holes in the concrete floor. But I thought I'd try something else that had been recommended by a professional . . . attaching the sole plates to the floor with what are called (Miracle) anchor nails.

These nails do not go into the floor, only into the sole plates. Each nail has, at one end, a 2-inch square of perforated metal. When the nail is driven into a 2 x 4, the metal plate then lies flat against the wood. After enough nails are hammered into the wood — I used one every 12 inches or so — a dab of a special adhesive is placed on each metal plate. The 2 x 4 then is placed in position on the floor, with the metal plates against the concrete. After a day or two, the wood will not budge. As I found out later, this type of construction is now being used even in heavy industrial work. But you must use the special waterproof adhesive sold by the same dealer from whom you buy the nails.

Any one who has ever put up studs knows what the biggest problem is — getting the studs to remain perfectly straight up and down. You'll notice I say "remain" straight, because it's easy enough to put them into position and get them properly vertical with a level. But keeping them that way under the stress of nailing is another matter.

The professionals toenail one side into place and then the other, assuming that the slight movement either way will balance. It works most of the time — for the pros. It works only sometimes for the amateur.

Since I had 80 studs to put up, and knew from past experience how annoying it could be, I worked out a little scheme that meant spending a little more money for wood and a little less money for aspirin. However, let me say right here that it's something none of you should attempt without a power saw, because it involves cutting up a lot of 2 x 4's into pieces exactly 14⅜ inches long. Here's how it works:

The sole plates are down and the headers are up, (the headers are nailed into the basement ceiling beams so that they are directly above the sole plates) and you must now put the studding between them. You want the studs to be 16 inches apart — 16 inches on center. So you nail a piece of wood 14⅜ inches to the sole plate. Now you place a stud flush against the piece of wood and nail it. You nail the stud sideways into the wood — not, in the conventional manner, into the sole plate. You do exactly the same thing on the other side; nail a stud sideways into the 14⅜-inch piece of wood. Presto — the studs are automatically 16 inches apart on center. That's because a 2-inch stud actually is only 1⅝ inches. Add 1⅝ to 14⅜ and you have 16. Of course, the same procedure is followed along the header as along the sole plate — a stud, a piece of wood, a stud, a piece of wood, and so on.

After changing my mind (with my wife's help) about 15 times, I finally decided to use plywood for the walls. Some intensive shopping-around followed. I almost abandoned the idea of using plywood. The cheaper varieties would have required too much work in finishing; the hardwood varieties would have required an extra mortgage on the house.

Then I ran across a new kind of hardwood plywood I had never heard of — something called Samara, which comes from French Equatorial Africa. Resembling light mahogany, it has a beautiful grain and, as I later discovered, finishes very well. It's less expensive than the better-known hardwoods and is imported. (By the United States Plywood Corporation.)

Four by 8 panels of this quarter-inch plywood were placed across the studs in a horizontal position.

To do away with a "too much flat plywood" appearance, squares of striated plywood (Weldtex) were used from the 4-foot level to the ceiling. Before putting up the squares, they were colored with a dusky gray stain. By alternating the directions of the striations during the installation, a pleasing optical effect was created. A special type of moulding was used at the point where the plywood panels and the squares came together. With a hardwood front and an aluminum backing, the moulding was nailed to the studding. There is a groove along either side of the moulding into which the panels and the squares were inserted.

Throughout all this installation, spaces were left here and there for various built-ins and for access to utility meters. Also, small openings had to be cut into the plywood panels for electrical outlets. (I had the electrical work done professionally before putting up the walls.)

There were two problems connected with the ceiling. One involved a couple of small pipes running along the beams. The other concerned a much larger heat pipe suspended about a foot below the beams. By dropping part of the ceiling a couple of inches and covering the area with the striated squares, stained a dark color, it was a fairly easy matter to cover the 2 small pipes.

The large pipe presented somewhat of a problem. Already covered with asbestos, it could have been painted. But I bought a bamboo blind and stained it the same dark color as the striated squares covering the small pipes. The blind then was cut into strips — and the strips were wound around the pipe.

The entire ceiling — with the exception of the row of straited squares — was covered with ivory ceiling tiles in the conventional fashion. This wasn't too difficult a task, but my neck resented it for a couple of days. It would have been a lot worse except for the use of a rented stapling machine for attaching the tiles.

Ordinary crown moulding was used at the point where the walls and ceiling met. This — and other types of moulding used for inside and outside corners — were stained mahogany, using the same penetrating stain which had been brushed on the dropped part of the ceiling.

Asphalt tile, which can be placed directly on concrete, was put down on the floor. There were quite a few irregularities in the concrete. I patched them up with a ready-made concrete mix before laying the tile. Asphalt tile strips rather than wood were used for the baseboard. They were attached with the same adhesive used for the floor tiles.

Two door openings were made. One serves the double purpose of reading utility meters and getting behind the walls if necessary. Because it is in a corner of the room where a door cannot be opened and closed conveniently, bamboo drapes, stained mahogany, have been hung over the opening. The second, a regulation door, is to provide a handy means of getting to the sink while tending bar.

The bar, by the way, is fairly small because I made it to fit a recess at one end of the room. But it's a little different, being made of that new do-it-yourself (Reynolds) aluminum. Except for the laminated plastic top, everything visible on it is aluminum. The front and sides are of the embossed type to avoid that "too shiny" look.

Tile Colors Aid Bathrooms

A few basic rules for selecting colors in bathroom tilework and fixtures have been worked out by experience.

Color experts say that if a bathroom is small, as most of them are, the wisest course is to use the same color for both the walls and the floor. If you have two or more tile colors, you will automatically limit your choice of colors for accessories, since they will have to go with all the tile shades.

With a single tile color, on the other hand, you can use a number of different shades for accessories and still have a satisfactory room. The color scheme can be changed completely from time to time by using towels, shower curtains and bath mats in a different shade. Such a change of accessories will do as much as an ordinary decorating job to freshen up the room.

Hardware Stores Sell New Alarms

For most homes, the fire alarm is the family dog or the family itself. It's an inefficient system at best—with statistics of fatalities and property damage to prove it.

Your hardware store, however, carries home fire alarms that hook into the household electric current but do not use electricity unless they are sounding the alarm.

One company, Edwards, makes a compact detector with transformer that is smartly styled and can be installed flush with the wall or mounted on the surface.

Most units never need adjustment and never require additional servicing.