

# THE TRENDY CAVERN

*ALFREDO MUBARAH AND BEAU AERO INCORPORATE SO MUCH CONTEMPORARY CLASS, THEY'VE TURNED THE PHRASE 'MAN CAVE' INTO AN ELEGANT GROTTO*



BY JENNIFER LIU  
PHOTOS BY ANGELIQUE HUNER

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When you think of the term "man cave," what exactly comes to mind? A giant flat-screen TV? Memorabilia from a slew of favorite sports teams? A worn-in couch to sink into after a long day at the office? A foosball table, perhaps?

If that's the case, then Alfredo Mubarah and Beau Aero's newly remodeled basement kicks the definition of man cave up about 10 notches.

When the two moved to Columbia from New York City in 2011, their friends already considered their house a "spaceship house." Months of work with Jeff White and the crew of Midwest Remodeling and Restoration successfully transformed their '70s-built home into a welcoming space of modernity. But something was still missing.

Unlike the bright and open atmosphere of the main and top floor, the basement was dark and uninviting. That all changed when White and Andy Werth, cabinet maker and owner of Stickman Productions, came back for repairs on the home.

#### Starting from scratch

The first thing to go in the basement remodel was the flooring, followed by the walls and several rooms. The basement originally started with the run-of-the-mill two bedrooms, bathroom, living room and a sauna room. During the summer of 2012, White and his team opened up the space to one bedroom, one bathroom, a kitchen with a fully stocked bar, a living room and even a dance floor. The transformation captured

the sleek, industrial feel the homeowners had in mind.

"We basically started from scratch," White says. He had helped finish the upstairs floors the previous year and returned to help remodel the basement. Also back for the project was Werth, who collaborated on the design and contributed the majority of the woodworking.

Because the four had all worked together before, the basement remodel meant an influx of creativity and working off one another to generate ideas.

"It was kind of like an open canvas with what we wanted to do," White says. "This is by far the most modern project I've worked on. The most challenging thing was bringing the idea into reality."

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"Lori has an amazing ability to take my personality and my lifestyle, mix it together with furniture and accessories, and create a space that looks and feels like my home, only better. Everyone who comes into my house says the same thing: 'It's so YOU!'. The plans that Lori came up with for my space, and the things she has brought into it, complement me and my life so seamlessly that it's hard to tell what she picked out and what I selected.

She is a great "partner" in decorating. When I ask her for help with a space, she includes me in the process of figuring out what needs to be in the room, how I want it to feel, how I want it to function, and she always adds amazing touches to the finished room that I would never in a million years come up with myself.

Lori is very down-to-earth, and knows how to best utilize my decorating dollars. She understands what pieces are best to spend a little more on, and where to best save money to stay on budget. She helped me pick pieces that would stand up to my young children, but still have the style I wanted. She truly has the vision and creativity required to make a room into a showpiece."

- Sarah Pitterfield, homeowner

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Werth agrees that creating such a modern space took a bit of research, whether in magazines or travels or through other woodworking groups in the industry.

"When you do something modern, it looks like a very simple piece with clean lines," he says. "But it's more difficult than you think to make it look simple."

### Clever concealers

Walking down the stairs to the modern man cave, even the simplest of design elements demonstrate a high attention to detail and craft.

The four wanted to apply direct and indirect lighting to every setting and function of the design. The staircase itself, which has floating treads supported by sleek beams, addresses this idea. Thin panels of LED lights are installed along the treads and cast geometric patterns along the wall when lit.

Other aspects of redesigning the atmosphere of the space weren't so easy. The basement originally had several pillars placed around the rooms for structural purposes. However, they didn't do much for the aesthetics. That's where innovative design came into play.

To conceal the eyesore, White and Werth brought in inspiration from a recent trip to a Kitchen and Bath Industry Showcase in Chicago. An additional stop to Ann Sacks Tile and Stone in the city gave them the idea to use wooden tiling to transform the pillar from a structural nuisance to a work of art itself.

Back in Columbia, Werth crafted several hundred wooden blocks ranging from ¼ to ¾ of an inch. Over the course of several hours, he meticulously arranged the pieces to cover the pillar.

### Shaken, not stirred

When White thinks back to what a man cave is, it mostly comes down to one requirement: liquor. By those definitions, Mubarah and Aero's new basement hangout matches up perfectly. What used to be a sauna room and additional bedroom was taken out to create space for a kitchen and well-stocked bar.

The kitchen continues the polished textural patterns throughout the space. In addition to a few traditional wooden cabinets, half of the kitchen cabinets are made of high-gloss acrylic. In the basement bar, the glass plates and wine rack installed in the wall also light up, giving off a nightclub effect.



ABOVE: Jeff White

The living room features a massive entertainment center made of walnut and built by Werth, along with a deceptively artistic linear fireplace and low floating mantel. Although White hadn't done much with fireplace remodeling, Mubarah's idea for a fireplace with an unconventional focal point made the project an interesting design process.

"That's what's cool about working with Beau and Alfredo," White says. "They like to do things outside of the box. So you get to work on things that most people aren't ready to step out there and do."

Off from the living room is a three-season room, a 12-by-16-foot addition to the original building that opens onto a two-story wrap-around deck.

### Saturday night fever

Stepping back inside, it's hard not to notice one thing that doesn't click with the ultra-mod feel of the basement. With a flip of a switch, a disco ball stirs into action in unison with the booming of dance music and flashing of a high-tech lighting system. Oh yes, the basement even has its own dance floor.

"When we were doing the upstairs, they would always have parties with a disco ball," White says. "So I said we needed to put a disco ball in the basement."

White calls this room the "roller rink," which is a stark contrast to his reference of the house as a spaceship. But with all the modern influences, industrial sleekness and simultaneously welcoming and entertaining environment, Mubarah and Aero can finally rest easy with their home and coveted man cave finally in place.

"Everyone's always saying that it's the coolest club in Columbia," White jokes. "It's like an after-hours man cave."

"What other man caves have you found?"  
Nothing quite as cool as this. **CH**



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