

Sliding glass doors and transom windows let natural light into Bill Dorsey's lower level bedroom. The new master suite enjoys direct access to the garden.



# FROM BASEMENT TO BEDROOM

BY MIKHAEL ROMAIN PHOTOGRAPHS BY JAMES CARRIER

A San Francisco resident transforms his dark and dowdy basement into a sun-filled master suite, gaining additional living space for down time.



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Imagine having the room you need for an extra bedroom and bath but not realizing it—until the space presents itself as a surprise. That’s the perpetual dream for anyone living in limited space. And it is a dream that came true for Bill Dorsey, who, while renovating his basement for earthquake safety, discovered a good deal of potential living area.

The earthquake upgrade prescribed a shear wall, a newly bolted foundation, and reinforcement beams. When the structural engineer that Bill hired to do this job noted the basement’s unusually high 9-foot ceilings, he suggested converting the space into a bedroom. Bill liked the idea and decided to move the master suite downstairs.

Built in the 1940s, Bill’s home had a traditional San Francisco layout—a garage and adjacent basement for storage on the ground floor, with the living quarters upstairs. To convert the basement into a 450-square-foot bedroom and bath, Bill enlisted the help of architect Michael Mullin. “The fundamental concern was to avoid feeling like you are in a basement,” Mullin says. To incorporate natural light, he installed sliding glass doors and transom windows along the wall facing the garden. Shoji-style doors divide the bedroom from the bathroom and create a sense of uninterrupted space. Industrial concrete floors paired with Eastern design give the room a clean-lined modern look. >> on 90

The closet and bathroom, delineated by a sliding shoji-style door, span the length of the suite—about 20 feet—and open to the bedroom. Four separate doors run along two tracks and provide versatility when connecting or dividing the bedroom from the bath and closet.



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To reinforce the atmosphere of a bright and sunny space, Mullin painted the walls pale yellow and added natural wood finishes. White beaded board above the shojis complements the white trim around the windows, and the green pigment-dyed concrete floor reflects the verdant garden outdoors.

Prior to the renovation, the 25×25-foot garden was accessible only by a narrow alley that runs alongside the house. An avid gardener, Bill uses the sliding glass doors to make indoor/outdoor living a reality. “I have a rare open space behind me, and the almost rural view I have in the middle of the city is great,” he says.

“It’s all come together in such a pleasing way. I rarely went in the basement before. But now that I have this room, I feel like I could spend all my time down here—if only I could relocate the kitchen.” ☺

A second sliding shoji system divides the bathroom from the closet. Traditional shoji doors have rice paper panels; these are made from translucent Warlon acrylic, which is fire retardant, easy to clean, and stronger than rice paper. It’s also water- and weather-resistant, making it suitable for use around the shower.

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