

ART JURY CORNER

Basements

Those of you who grew up back east may think of a basement as that dark, musty place where you played as a child in a converted “den” during the coldest part of winter, a gloomy room shared with the furnace (and a lot of spiders). Those old basement spaces were never designed for living, they were strictly utilitarian areas that had been recruited for uses other than their intended role. Nowadays, basements are having a renaissance for any sort of use that does not require lots of windows. The Art Jury is seeing below-grade rooms being constructed not only for some of the more traditional underground uses like garages, utility areas, laundry rooms, but also for home theaters, exercise spaces and hobby rooms.

The greater use of below-grade living spaces is a trend that the Art Jury supports because it allows Covenant members to have various activity areas that they desire without creating above-grade structures with a bulky appearance that are inconsistent with community character. A property can only support so much development; too much building on the lot will make the structures look out of scale with their setting. A home that is too large for its property becomes overly prominent and stands out in the scenery rather than retaining a rural character and being visually subordinate to the overall appearance of the countryside. To prevent overbuilding of a site while including room for various uses, many members have been able to accommodate large below-grade facilities such as expansive showrooms for car collections, state-of-the art home theaters (with stadium seating), bowling lanes, wine cellars and excellent home-fitness centers, as well as other uses on properties that are not large enough to contain those uses above ground.

Proper design and modern construction practices can make the “downstairs” floor every bit as bright and welcoming as the upstairs. You can use light wells to allow natural light into the floor below. Don’t think of the old fashioned light wells, but instead imagine the design possibilities of landscaped light wells with small patios, fountains and other desirable features.

In this community where many properties have sloped topography, you can also take advantage of the terrain to incorporate “daylight” basements that have a portion of the lower living area exposed to the outside. These daylight areas are acceptable as long as the exposed daylight portion of the basement doesn’t become so big that it contributes to a tall or massive appearance for the home.

If you are contemplating building a new home or adding on a large addition, the Art Jury encourages you to give serious consideration to below-grade living spaces (the term “basement” hardly does justice to some of the beautiful, architectural spaces that are being created today). You paid handsomely for your property, so get the most use out of it by creating a “basement” space and taking advantage of the area right below your feet.