

black and white— and fun all over

With a monochromatic scheme, an unfinished basement in Old Tappan is transformed into an inviting poolside entertainment hub.

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The sleek and minimalist kitchen and open living/lounge space in this Old Tappan home are now "tailored, refined, cool and hip," says designer Rosario S. Mannino. He and his team designed the sophisticated black-and-white interiors to mirror the design of the home's in-the-planning stages new exterior of white stucco with black windows.





This page: The custom diamond-patterned V-groove chevron ceiling takes its inspiration from the kitchen's oversized TruStile barn door, which conceals a fitness room. Opposite page, top: Creating a sense of light and spaciousness, the multi-slide patio doors—kitchen to patio and living room to pool deck—help blur the lines between indoor and outdoor spaces. No dark and dowdy basement here! Just ask Sophie, the family's puppy, who likes to jump onto the side counter chairs to wait patiently for treats, her head propped up on the island's Silestone countertop.



Pulling off a black-and-white design concept is simple—deceptively so. In the wrong hands, the aesthetic runs the risk of coming off overly stark and antiseptic or, even worse, boring and uninspired. In the right ones, however, it can shine with all the crisp clarity and purity of a minimalist work of art. Luckily, it was a case of the latter when the owners of a contemporary style home in Old Tappan chose Rosario S. Mannino, principal of Rutherford-based RS Mannino Architects + Builders and his design team, to turn their unfinished basement into a sophisticated study in black and white that appealed to their modern sensibilities.

Homeowners Katherine and Kaliq Chang, a fun-loving, family-oriented couple with three young kids, enjoy entertaining family and friends poolside. They envisioned doing so in a bright, modern, refreshing space that felt like a luxurious pool cabana. For the kitchen, their wish-list order included features that were high in functional practicality and dramatic flair. They also hoped for a year-round retreat for when guests, especially grandparents Remito and Teresita Masaganda, came to stay.

“We wanted the basement in a more modern, transitional style than the original design of the rest of the house, and for it to match the renovations we had made so far on the first and second floors,” Katherine explains. “We also wanted to use a bold, contrasting black-and-white scheme with gold accents for fun.”

Working with these guidelines, Mannino and his design team set about reimagining the existing unfinished basement into a multi-use entertaining space

that would include an open kitchen and living room overlooking the outdoor pool and entertaining areas, a home gym, a guest bedroom suite and a full bathroom. They planned the lower level to harmonize with the design language of the 3,800-square-foot home’s eclectic brick-and-stucco-style exterior, as well as with the newly decorated upper parts of the house.

“The first floor has a modern update with clean lines, minimal trim work and a fresh and lively feel to the spaces,” Mannino notes. “We also wanted to replicate the future design of the exterior upgrade we had discussed with the clients, which would replace the dated brick and pale stucco with white stucco and black windows.”

However, this more immediate phase of the project, which took eight months to complete, was limited to the lower level and the adjacent outdoor patio, which the design team transformed from a continuation of the driveway into the current well-defined patio space.

“Since we were changing the location of the bathroom, adding a kitchen and essentially altering the entire blueprint, the biggest challenge was trying to figure out the layout,” says Katherine.

Before this project, the space was a large, open, utility-like room with awkwardly located components such as a water heater, a water softener and a raised platform room with no walls. (“Not really sure what the purpose of that raised platform was,” Mannino puzzles.) Everything seemed to be in the wrong place,



making the overall spaces difficult to lay out and furnish. Accordingly, Mannino and his team got to work to establish creative order. They leveled the floor and restructured the configurations to create a new mudroom space, a new second laundry closet, a storage room, a home gym and a guest bedroom.

To bring in more natural light, the design team created new, larger openings on the exterior walls of the kitchen and living/lounge areas. “The existing lower space had different levels—it was a 16-foot-tall space—so we had to make all of the various openings into one uniform window height to have it appear that this was the original intention,” says Mannino, adding that they accomplished this by cutting openings into the original concrete foundation, an extensive process.

Under the new schematics, the farthest sliding door leading to the pool was enlarged to create an easier, more inviting transition between the pool and the “cabana.” Adjacent to the kitchen island, the other sliding door is entirely new and leads to the new, porcelain-tile patio. Additional light is plentiful thanks to recessed lighting throughout the space. Further assuring warmth and coziness while staying true to the prevailing modern aesthetic, the cement-like tiles on the indoor floors are heated with hydronic radiant heat tubes; emitting an urban-hip vibe, they look cool to the eyes, but are warm to the feet.

One of the most striking features is definitely the custom black, diamond-shaped, V-groove chevron ceiling. Its centered paneling, radiating outward, makes a dramatic statement as it continues the home’s black-and-white color scheme.

Pops of bold black punch up the drama even more. For instance, the custom white cabinets with black accent doors—in Benjamin Moore Decorator’s White and Onyx, respectively—“just scream energy and add vibrancy to the space,” the designer says.

In the kitchen, the ceiling works perfectly against the Mitzi gold pendant lights and Emtex hardware fixtures in satin brass to imbue the space with a jazzy, Gatsby-type feel. The custom cabinets, made by Mannino Cabinetry’s bespoke collection team, and the Silestone countertops and backsplash in eternal calacatta gold seal the style deal with élan. A reflection of the diamond pattern ceiling, the custom TruStile barn door features Rustica hardware—it’s another standout. Acting as a pleasing contrast to the white cabinetry, the understated Mannino Cabinetry custom black wood-panel hood fits in with the design aesthetic, while the Artistic Tile floors impart a polished concrete feel and look.

When it comes to style and appeal, there’s no gray area here. The finished basement—which Mannino calls “fun, energetic, young, refreshing and elegant”—has been elevated to a stylish entertainment hub that draws compliments from all who spend time within its inviting spaces.

Says Katherine: “We love how Rosario was able to design the layout of the basement to exactly fit our needs—and to make our vision for the look of the basement real.”



Located between the kitchen and the new guest bedroom, the bathroom offers all the comforts and amenities of a high-end hotel. "We love the bathroom," says the homeowner. "It's clean, modern and just beautiful." Its color scheme follows the rest of the lower-level space, adding another rich layer of luxury with an all-natural marble stone countertop and oversized accent niche wall in the shower that gives "beautiful movement and richness to the space," according to the designer. The freestanding, double-sink vanity is custom-made by Mannino Cabinetry; all tiles are by Artistic Tile; plumbing fixtures are by Brizo and lighting is by WAC Lighting.