



'Round the clock

Dressed as a throwback '50s diner, a Wayne basement becomes an entertainment hub

MALTED MILK SHAKES, burgers and fries seem to be the only thing missing in this basement—not that you couldn't easily whip up a quick order for a few friends while rockin' out to Johnny B. Goode on the jukebox.

Designer Vanessa De Leon won't soon forget the day a couple strolled into the studio asking to have their basement transformed into a 1950s-style diner. "We're all about taking

bold chances with design," says De Leon, 24, a graduate of the Fashion Institute of Technology and co-owner of Trendy Interiors in Fairfield with her husband Rolando. "This project was perfect for us."

Inspiration for the design came from a Johnny Rockets restaurant the homeowners visited while honeymooning in Los Angeles in the 1980s. The husband was so taken with the retro décor that he immedi-

ately wanted to buy into the franchise. "I couldn't afford it then," he says. "Now we've built one in our home instead."

The 1,000-square-foot basement of the couple's five-bedroom colonial in Wayne, New Jersey, always gets a reaction from unsuspecting guests. "I love that 'wow' factor when people see it for the first time," says the husband, who was like a kid with a new toy during a recent tour.

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Rather than doing a straight replica of the restaurant's design, De Leon decided to take a few risks. "Our red is more vibrant and we have more chrome detail against the metallic black," she says. "I think it's more shocking." Fire engine red upholstery and black-and-white checkerboard floor tiles combine to make a bold color statement.

The L-shaped bar, custom-made by Trendy Interiors, features a white Boomerang laminate countertop with red glacier design. Thick stripes

finished in metallic black Wilson Art laminate alternate with shiny chrome detail on the high-gloss red base.

Behind the bar, shelves are lined with '50s and '60s seltzer bottles stamped with the family name—they were rescued from a seltzer factory owned by the husband's great-grandfather. The chrome bar stools and matching booth are upholstered in red and white vinyl, and were custom-made by Valiant Diner Company in Florida.

Can a mere trip downstairs bring Ike back to the White House? Yup—when designer Vanessa De Leon gives you a basement like this. A black-and-white checkerboard floor, fire engine red stool cushions and a white Boomerang laminate countertop with red glacier design all help foster that '50s diner feeling.

Other décor details include a glossy-red, hard plastic 65-inch-tall Betty Boop waitress. Behind her, a red-and-white vinyl sofa features reproduction Cadillac tail wings as armrests, both pieces from All Continental in Washington State.

The color scheme carries over into the 35-square-foot bathroom and shower stall. Custom tiles feature signed handprints from each family member—even Shaggy the dog left his tiny padded print on one of the squares.

In the kitchen, a fully functioning stove, microwave, refrigerator and dishwasher make entertaining easy. "We wanted to do something different," says the wife. "If we just threw a rug and couch down there, what would be the incentive to hang out? We have a family room upstairs for that. We wanted something fun for us and the kids." And with two girls, ages 12 and 15, the room gets plenty of traffic.

A big-screen TV and jukebox, plus gumball, pinball and slot machines, provide entertainment. Inside the patio door, a bench covered with a black-and-red vinyl cushion hides pool towels stored underneath. (The door opens onto a stone patio with a path leading to the swimming pool.) "The kids have everything they need down there," says the wife. There's just one minor drawback when the girls want to have friends over: They have to share the space with Dad. □