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A Color, a Texture, and a Ceiling that Meet the Challenge



Photo courtesy of Lauren Kay

Interior designer Lauren Kay transformed a plain-white catchall basement room into a moody, comfortable hideaway for reading and games.

GRATON, CA, 2024-July-23 -- An interior designer's home often becomes a laboratory, a place where they can experiment with new ideas and materials, and find out what works. Designer Lauren Kay (@thelaurenkaway) decided to take the One Room Challenge and redesign the basement room from a catch-all into a library and gaming getaway. Working within very limited space, she brought to life a comfortable, moody, contemplative environment laced with the unexpected, just by making just a few bold choices of color and material, including a stunning drop-ceiling solution using Ceilume decorative ceiling tiles.

Lauren Kay and her husband have been working on their split-level house in the Atlanta suburbs for three and a half years, but the basement room kept getting pushed to the back burner. She decided to get it done by joining the One Room Challenge (@oneroomchallenge) in April 2024.

Actually just a few steps down from the entrance level, it was a modest space, 11ft x 13ft, with a window on one side. Its wallboard walls were painted warm white. There was a drop ceiling with the usual flat white mineral fiber ceiling tiles, and a vinyl plank floor. The room was dominated by a green velvet sofa.

It hadn't been designed; it had just accumulated. It had been serving as a man-cave, recalls Kay, "but we also kept all of our books, special travel mementos, things like that, down in that room. It was more like a stockpile previously, it didn't have much intention. I'm a big thrifter – I love thrift-shopping, I love vintage finds – and it was where the 'leftovers' went."

Kay had been compiling images of moody home libraries for several years. She wanted to integrate the lower room into rest of the house by echoing elements from the main level, yet give this new library its own distinct personality. Also, whatever she did had to complement the anchor piece of the room - the green velvet sofa. Green was used for decorative accents in the home's main level, so it became the primary color of the library. Surfaces of parallel lines, found on some of the Mid-century Modern pieces in the home, became the visual motif.

She and her husband put up wood paneling (White Nickel Gap Shiplap Panel from The Home Depot, turned 90 degrees to have the gap lines run vertically), texturing the walls with parallel lines. They painted it a dark shade of teal (Yorktown Green by Benjamin Moore). Daylight was altogether too harsh and bright for this dark, cozy place, and Kay installed blackout curtains to control it.

The mineral fiber ceiling posed a puzzling challenge. "The ceiling we had previously had honestly been the bane of my existence. It's a part of our house that I've wanted to change because, in my experience, you don't see a lot of homes with that kind of ceiling. I'm used to seeing that in a day care setting or a doctor's office. It felt so sterile and out of place.

"I can't take the grid out," Kay explains, "it's necessary." The dropped ceiling hides overhead ductwork. "So, I started researching. 'OK, is there an actual ceiling tile made that looks good?' Ceilume came up (ceilume.com), and I immediately saw the Southland pattern, and I was like, 'Oh, indeed! That's awesome!' Because the design is very reminiscent of our Mid-century Modern TV cabinet upstairs, the lines and things like that. It spoke to me in that design style, even though I know Southland fits more modern and contemporary, as well. I saw the Mid-century Modern value in it."

Southland in the Caramel Wood finish closely resembles a wood slat ceiling, found in many Mid-century designs, though at a fraction of the cost or weight of a natural wood. Kay was able to install the new ceiling tiles herself. Ceilume tiles are lightweight and flexible, and she describes installation as, "so quick and easy, I think I was finished in 30 minutes. The more time-consuming part is when you get to the walls, where you're cutting to size, but even that was super easy. Taking down the old ceiling tiles was a different story: dirty, dusty crumbling, it was hard to get them out. I think the flexible nature of the Ceilume tiles is the game changer for installation." Kay also painted the metal grid bars a close color-match to the woodgrain tile, which blends well at normal viewing distance.

"The color tone is very similar to leather furnishings that we have in our home, and other wood pieces. Creating that rhythm and repeat of lines, but in a different way, I thought would be an awesome design element. I love the contrast between it and the paint color. I think it's unexpected. I'm just really, really happy with it."

The parallel pattern is reflected on a different scale in the area rug she found online (Brown Blakely Indoor/Outdoor Area Rug, rugsusa.com) a synthetic that looks like jute. The warm natural browns of floor and ceiling frame-in the deep green walls, making the room dark and rich without becoming heavy.

Within that frame, there is a vintage leather Palliser swivel recliner found at an antique store, and a couple of ottomans sourced from Target. And of course, the green velvet sofa that anchors the room. “Everything else is thrifted, from yard sales, or an antique store,” Kay declares. “When the construction piece was finished, I was able to decorate the room in one day, just by going through all the things I’ve collected and sourced over the past few years, and giving them a place. It took time to collect them, and they were all things that I was drawn to and loved. It’s eclectic, it’s collected and curated, it feels very much one-of-a-kind, but it’s also a personal expression of what both me and my husband like.”

Kay completed the project in the last week of May, and submitted it to the One Room Challenge in addition to sharing it on her Instagram. She feels that the challenge was the push she needed to get the project done, and she’s very satisfied with how it came out. Kay’s partner in the project, her husband, “didn’t love the process, but he loves the result.”

About Ceilume

Ceilume is the leading manufacturer of thermoformed ceiling and wall tiles and panels. The company’s roots go back to the pioneers of modular ceilings, when “Mid-Century was Modern.” The family-owned business is located in California’s wine country and occupies a historic apple-packing warehouse. With an eye on the future, Ceilume’s research and development continues to improve interior finish systems to meet changing environmental, performance, and aesthetic needs. For more information, see ceilume.com/pro.

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Photo courtesy of Lauren Kay

The old room had plain white walls, a white mineral fiber tile ceiling, vinyl plank flooring, and an un-curated assortment of décor.



Photo courtesy of Lauren Kay

When the construction phase was complete, before any kind of furnishing or decoration, the essence of the space was already dramatically transformed by dark teal walls and decorative faux-wood ceiling tile.



Photo courtesy of Ceilume

Ceilume Southland 2'x2' lightweight thermoformed ceiling tile in Caramel Wood faux-wood finish closely resembles a wood slat ceiling, but at a fraction of the cost or weight.

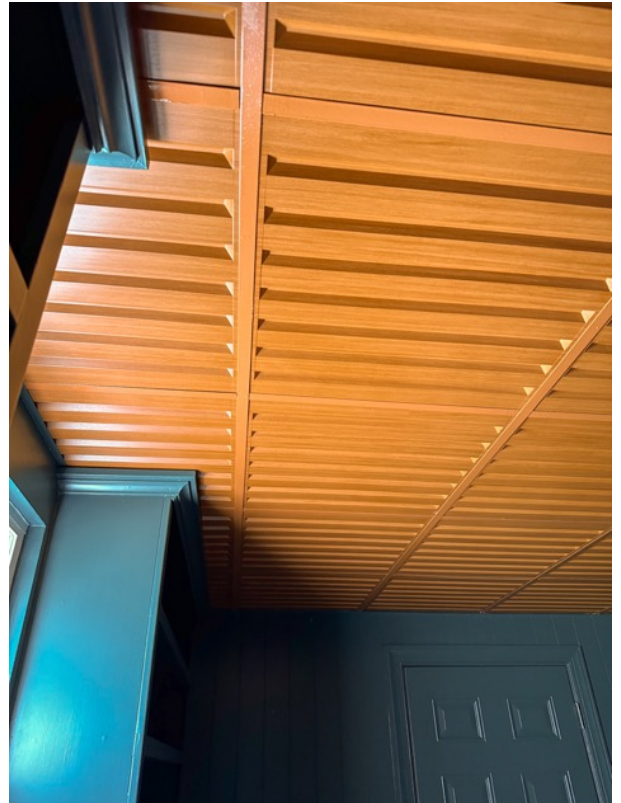


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The walls and ceiling make the room distinctive, while the art and objects that Kay connected with and collected over a period of years make it highly personal.

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