



25 GAME ON!

FAMILY GAME NIGHT GOES NEXT LEVEL, WITH WOW-FACTOR SPACES DESIGNED AS THE NEW IT-DESTINATION TO PLAY IN.

WRITTEN BY JENNIFER PFAFF SMITH

Pool tables, poker chips and billiard cues never looked so good...nor felt better! That's largely because their surrounds have been, *well*, elevated—literally. Unlike years past, when the pool table, workout equipment and poker games were renegaded to the basement, the spaces they inhabit are now emerging into beautiful light-filled rooms with expert craftsmanship, thoughtful detailing and all the bells and whistles that one can dream up. And, much like swimming pools, Sub-Zero appliances and outdoor kitchens, elaborate play areas and game rooms are being added to homeowners' lists of must-haves.

Indeed, the liveliest room in homes out East can be found where people play. One couple who acquired parcels of land over a stretch of time eventually found themselves with a compound dotted in barn-like structures. Of all these dwellings, one happened to be a poor excuse for what was supposed to be a gym and hangout room. "It was just a mildew pit," recalls designer Arthur Dunnam.



PHOTO: ELLEN MODERKOTT

“Nobody liked to go in it. It was not an ideal gathering place. They wanted a specific place that would draw all the different generations to one spot on the property for communal activities.” So the homeowners tore down the structure and, working with Dunnam and architect Frank Greenwald, built anew.

In its place now stands the “sports barn,” a roughly 2,800-square-foot Arts and Crafts-style pavilion featuring pickled-reclaimed-oak walls and a 30-foot ceiling with cerused-oak beams. Largely serving as a gym, the

voluminous structure houses defined cardio, weight and spa areas, each divided by sound-insulated steel-and-glass partitions that move with the nudge of a finger. Indirect lighting and 10 bronze ceiling fixtures offer plenty of light, and mechanical sunscreen solar shades roll down at the push of a button. A television lounge occupies another section, the upper level houses an art studio, and centering the open-floor layout is a mobile Cherrywood-and-nickel Ping-Pong table with a perforated-leather net (“It looks like an Hermes handbag,” Dunnam muses). Now,

Design writer Lynne Byrne created an element of surprise with regatta blue upholstery on her pool table from Patio.com. Overhead hangs Design Within Reach’s Nelson Crisscross Saucer pendant lamp. Byrne added the egress window to bring in light and used wainscoting and a textured wallcovering as a way of preventing mildew in the lower-level space.



PHOTO: PETER MURDOCK.

“it’s a destination on the property,” the designer says. “And with all openness and light, it is a super happy space.”

In the Hamptons, in particular, these areas are especially ideal for owners of large-scale homes who struggle to find a purpose for having a living room, a den and a library, designer Joe Nahem points out. “After all, how many of those sitting rooms can you actually use?” he asks.

Nahem experienced the opportunity to create one when working with a couple on the redesign of their traditional 1920s residence. “They had a large Damien Hirst piece of art we couldn’t fit anywhere except the screened-in porch, so

we came up with the idea of enclosing that space,” he says. “As a result, we thought: What do we do with this room?”

The answer emerged as a game space holding a foosball table, a pedestal table and vintage chairs Nahem re-covered in leather. To avoid architectural changes, he kept the siding for the walls, placed a custom rug on the stone floor and filled in the windows with shelving lined with stainless steel. Curtains and a pair of 1970s glass-and-Lucite lighting pieces complete the look.

The space was executed with the homeowners’ teenagers in mind—a notion design writer Lynne Byrne

A Vidal Grau pedestal table purchased from a Wright auction, Milo Baughman chairs with bent chrome bases and a Lucite chandelier from John Salibello add a slightly retro vibe to this game room by designer Joe Nahem.



PHOTO: NICK JOHNSON

understands all too well. “I have three boys who have lots of friends, and we needed a nice gathering place for people to go,” she explains. She transformed her Montauk home’s expansive lower level into a game area divided into three zones: a lounge space, a card-game area and, in the middle, a pool table. A striped Vaughn rug served as the color inspiration for the pool table—a blue shade that also matches a nearby womb chair. “It’s where everybody hangs out, even on nice days,” Byrne says of the room. “It’s one of the most important spaces in the house.”

Regardless of style or size, a game room shouldn’t be just another pretty space, Dunnam says. “It has to resonate and be tailored for the people who are going to use it,” he says. These spaces should also encourage people to detach from the screen and foster face-time with one another, Byrne adds. “Game rooms are especially important today, because technology’s omnipresence makes it so hard for us to simply ‘play;’” she says. “We all need a place to disconnect from the daily grind.” ■

In the game area of what designer Arthur Dunnam refers to as a “sports barn,” Fuse pendant lights from Dennis Miller Associates illuminate a custom Olimpo Ping-Pong table custom-made in Italy. Guests can cheer each other on while they perch upon the Hellman Chang Tao counter stools from Bright Group.