



protective element. Thus, the game room provides a euphoric release for both children and their overworked parents.

With each generation, the central destination in American homes has shifted. Fifty years ago, the kitchen was the main place to cluster around the table and discuss the day's events, go over homework or play a family game of Monopoly. Then, the adults claimed their own destination zone, the living room, to sit quietly and read *I'm OK, You're OK* or complete a crossword puzzle; meanwhile, children flocked to basements. In the 1980s, families discovered each other again, thanks to the appropriately named family room, the perfect place for card games and *Cosby Show* viewings. Then McMansions entered the picture in the '90s, bringing a high-end makeover called the great room: high ceilings, skylights and perhaps a Steinway piano to encourage proper decorum.

Game rooms are a loud, proud departure from the stuffy great room. And they help resolve a space dilemma: The National Association of Home Builders estimates that the average new home is more than 2,400 square feet, up from 1,645 square feet in 1975. "Face it," says architect Deborah Pierce, a top adviser

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ONE BIG PLAYHOUSE

An HGTV pro shows how game rooms are changing the American home.

BY ANGELO SURMELIS

AS LONG AS homeowners have lived under a roof (as opposed to inside a cave), they've sought to define certain space as the room of central focus. That destination has evolved, and these days I'm asked more and more about the latest incarnation: the game room.

"The game room?" I asked, the first time a client brought up the topic. I was not sure what that meant. Since then, I've discovered that the game room is emerging as the leading space concept in the 21st century. According to recent findings from the American Institute of Architects, game rooms are now a "hot" home space, moreso than the home theater, exercise area and kids' wing. One reason is because the concept is so adaptable: Its location may shift from the main floor to the basement to above the garage. It can be lavishly designed with brass rails and mosaic glass, or involve a collection of used plush furniture and framed children's artwork. Oh, and

ANGELO SURMELIS' show, *24 Hour Design*, appears on HGTV on Fridays at 9 p.m. ET/PT. Visit hgvtv.com for more ideas.

then there are the games, which can be your standard air-hockey table or something far, far more dramatic.

Just ask Rich Kamerman, who has designated the largest chunk of his 1,500-square-foot basement in Long Island, N.Y., as the game room, complete with a 60-inch plasma TV, professional-quality karaoke machine and vintage pinball machines. "We may have 20 kids at a time down there," says Kamerman, a partner with the firm of Paul Kelloff Construction and father of Jason, 8, and Kate, 5. "We'll have the pinball machines dinging, and the karaoke machine blasting on the big screen with lyrics lit up, and all the kids going crazy. It's a madhouse. I like it that way."

It may be a madhouse, but it's still aesthetically appealing. With furniture and design help from a family member's business, Suite New York, Kamerman's game room space features kid-safe rubber floor tile. It's positioned next to a home gym, so that parents can work out while keeping an eye on the children. That is a key to this space: The room must represent gleeful abandon, but one with a

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WANT TO KNOW WHAT TO FILL YOUR GAME ROOM WITH? Go to page 24

Building a dream game room isn't just a matter of pushing your dirty clothes off of the couch and turning on the PS3. It takes the right gear. Turn the page for a list of cool gadgets to spruce up your ultimate game room.



« Global Arcade Classics

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on home projects for the AIA, "you can only put so much in a kitchen. At a certain point, you want to get a new room out of this additional space, and home owners are starting to think about what makes them happy."


Today, even overachieving families are ready to loosen up and have fun. "We essentially did not have a home market before 9/11," says David Young, founder of BMIGaming.com, a Boca Raton, Fla.-based national distributor that supplies gaming products for the home such as *Ms. Pac Man/Galaga* (\$3,675). "We used to sell mainly to bars. Now, parents want a place that's safe enough — but cool enough — for kids to gather and play. Some of these games are positive outlets for physical activity. So you have parents ordering *Dance*

Dance Revolution, and moms heading to the game room as well to get a dance session in."

Count Alan Gossard, an insurance underwriter from greater Chicago, among the converted. Gossard used to pass hours at sports bars before he turned his home into one, and it's a magnet for his two kids. The room combines all the fun of an ESPN Zone, but with distinct elegance highlighted by a mahogany-framed bar. And if the noise level gets a little high, it's OK, because the tan-paneled walls are soundproof. "It's the most popular room in the house," he says. "We have a *Lord of the Rings* pinball machine, an arcade machine where we can play 150 classic games, like *Defender*

and *Centipede*. When the guys come over for poker, they gravitate toward these games."

Entertaining certainly was on Lisa LoVallo's mind when her family moved into a 1940s home in Lincolnwood, Ill. They jazzed up the basement by mounting a flat-screen TV above the fireplace and refinishing the bar area. Next came a pool table, futons and Barcaloungers — all of which are used by the family's four children, two of whom are still in high school.

"As our kids get older," says LoVallo, who has since added a bedroom and bathroom next to the game room, "wherever they end up in the world, they always have somewhere to come home to." And play. 

**Game rooms
are a positive
outlet for the
entire family.**