

A Room of One's Own

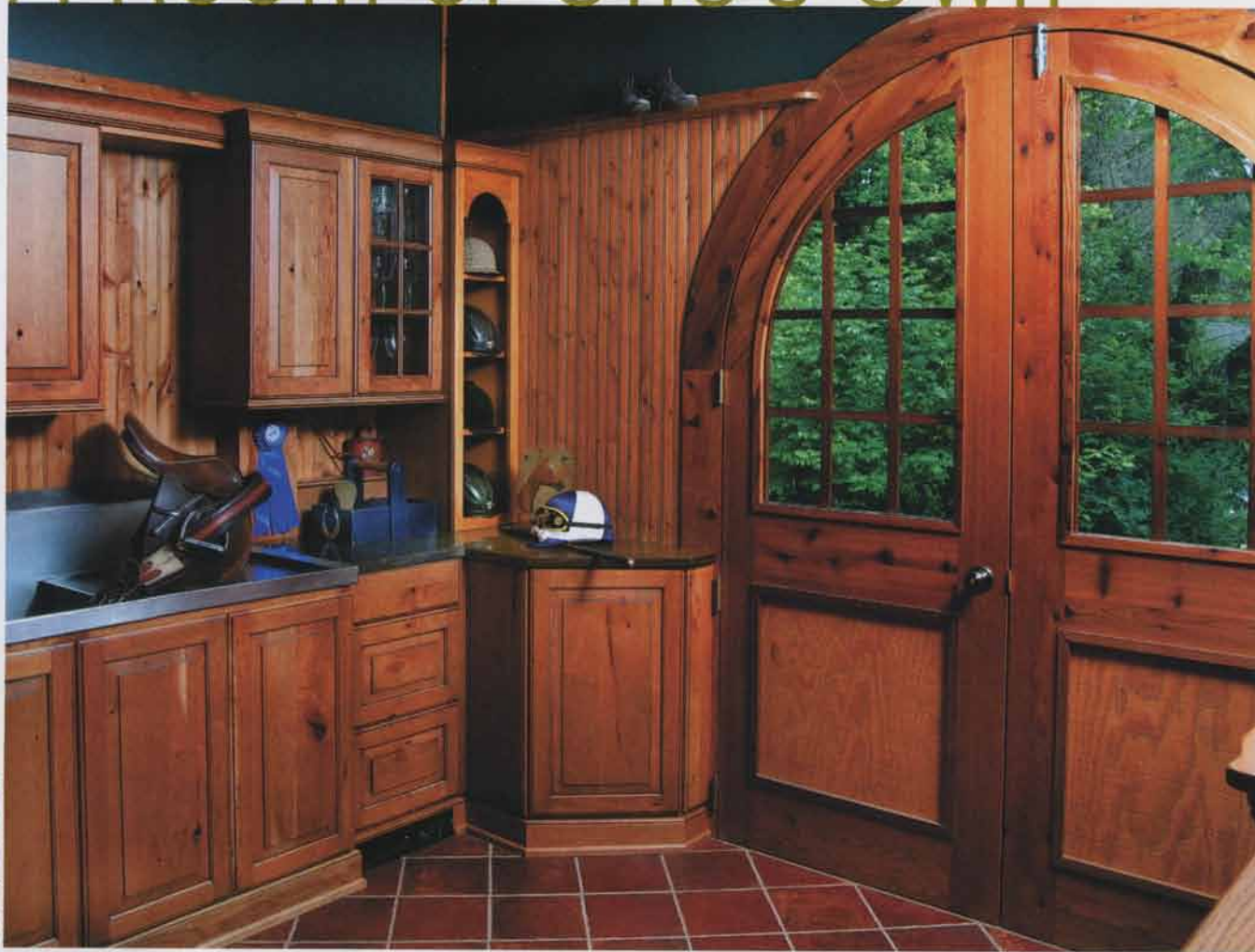


Photo by John Quinn

Designer John Hall created this beautiful tack room with an eye toward detail, functionality and harmony.

SPECIALTY SPOTS ARE ALL THE RAGE THESE DAYS. WHAT KIND OF ROOM COULD YOU DREAM UP FOR YOURSELF?

A house is a structure — walls, floors, a roof. A house is transformed into a home through living, and by revealing individual personalities through home décor, design and decoration. The newest trend in home design is the ultimate in customization and personality — specialty rooms.

“A lot of people who are building or using designers want something out of the norm ... they want to specialize their home and make it their own,” says Andrea Sims, ASID, of Spectrum Design. “That’s how niche rooms have evolved.”

Homeowners are choosing to have designers help them achieve dream spaces specifically for the purpose of pursuing hobbies, entertaining guests, tranquil relaxation or providing children or adults with age-appropriate work or play space, from scrapbooking

rooms to wine-tasting rooms to Zen-meditation rooms.

“Houses are so big nowadays, you end up with these large box rooms. This is a way to bring the character back into the house. In a smaller house, you’ll see space very creatively used, because it has to be. You can maximize on the space,” Sims says. “These niche, or specialty, rooms have grown out of that.”

A 2006 study by The American Institute of Architects (AIA) shows that special function rooms are on the rise. Its Home Design Trends Survey reports that the most popular specialty rooms in 2006 were home offices, followed by media/home theater rooms, then exercise and fitness rooms and finally hobby or game rooms. But that’s just a sampling of what’s available — creativity is the only limit.

Animal House

Americans have an ever-growing love affair with pets, and it's beginning to show in our living spaces.

"People are now discovering what the possibilities are," says John Hall, ASID, owner of J. Hall Design Inc. He has created several high-end tack rooms for owners of private stables in areas like Gates Mills. For one particular tack room, Hall re-imagined a typical, utilitarian tack room into a space of heightened aesthetics, while also improving the usefulness of the space.

Hall installed hot and cold fresh water, as well as storage space for equine medicines. Special storage was created for all of the tack — saddles, bridles, saddle pads and the like. Wrought-iron hooks were installed over the sink areas, providing a place for bridles to hang to dry after a washing. Riding helmets double as decorative pieces — they're artfully displayed on the wall.

A window-seat bench was installed to double as storage for things like quilts, and a beautiful oak table and chairs were

Pets are treated like the beloved friends they are at the Barkley Pet Hotel & Day Spa. Designers from Herschman Architects created pet spaces deserving of animals who are part of the family.



Photo courtesy of Herschman Architects

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placed in the room to create a gathering area. The space is now not just a place for horses, but also a social area for the horse-loving family.

No detail was overlooked — a cabinet was even created for the barn cat's kitty litter. And this, Hall says, is one of the many benefits of working with designers to create specialty room: the innovation they bring.

"To have somebody handle the job from start to finish [is an advantage]," Hall says. "Somebody that specializes in organizational storage facilities, somebody creative."

Chris Mierke, AIA, and Julie Black, ASID, were part of a team from Herschman Architects that created the Barkley Pet Hotel & Day Spa in Orange. Modeled after a posh, luxurious resort, everything in the Barkley is top dog. From the executive suites and garden suites, to the grass-like-turf indoor play area, the Barkley is stocked with colorful, opulent materials that are also durable and hygienic. The fountains, greenery and attention to lighting and architectural details put both the animals, and

the humans who tend to them, at ease. A Kitty City also is part of the Barkley, featuring multi-floor condos surrounding a custom-made fish tank.

While not every homeowner has the spare space to install a doggie whirlpool and acupuncture area, the principles of combining aesthetics and function can apply your pet area. Easy-to-clean surfaces that are also beautiful are a must, Mierke says.

"Higher-end materials ... in durable-yet-warm, inviting colors [work]," Mierke says. "Very sustainable products that can take the abuse. That's the crucial thing."

Black says that it was a unique challenge to find high-end materials to match the elegant feeling of the doggie day spa that were also low-maintenance and animal friendly. This is precisely the type of situation where the expertise of a designer is so helpful.

"Designers are familiar with finishes and materials that would be easy to maintain, and can make the right choice for the space," Black says.

Signature Space

Whether for hobbies, pets, or just for personal pleasure, a specialty room can be created to suit any desire. Andrea Sims and Paula Boykin, ASID, of Spectrum Design, created a personal sanctuary for a client who craved a space to call her own.

In a sunroom overlooking a lake, Sims and Boykin designed a tranquil respite. To maximize window space, plantation shutters were installed just on the lower windows to maintain privacy while still allowing light and the view to spill into the room. The designers employed light colors and decorated with a water feature, a large comfortable sofa, a hand-painted Bombay chest and a tea set. Televisions and electronic equipment were purposefully left out to create a truly restful sanctuary; the view of the lawn and the lake are fest enough for the eyes. Either as a quiet place for solitude or a conversation room for guests, the room has become the client's favorite in her entire home, since it was designed exclusively for her.

"[Homeowners] really enjoy having something done that is their own, that is unique, that is a place to show off in the house because it's unexpected," Sims says.

Creating specialty spaces within rooms is another way of bringing personality into your home. Kim Smith, Allied ASID, of i. design studio says that homeowners are coming to her to help maximize the utility of the rooms in their homes.

"People want to make use of the space they have — a lot of houses have wasted space," Smith says.

One of Smith's clients had a dormer space at the top of the stairs on the third floor, near the guest rooms. Rather than leaving the space unused, Smith designed a cozy nook around a pre-existing window seat. The window seat has a 5-inch mattress cushion, pillows and a scarf, and, paired with a lamp and framed picture, it makes the area an unexpected retreat.

"A lot of clients have a hard time visualizing a space. They have a general idea of what they'd like, but it helps having a designer come in who understands space planning and color and making a space function well," Smith says. "It just helps tremendously to

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Photo courtesy of Kim Smith

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Double Feature

David Hawkins, ASID, of David L. Hawkins Design Management Inc. has also noticed a rise in requests for niche rooms, from specialty cigar-smoking rooms with separate ventilation to luxurious wine-tasting rooms. Hawkins says that home-theater rooms have also been incredibly popular — and he's become a pro at executing them. Last year, a home theater he designed received first place in the 2006-2007 ASID Design Competition in the "Residential — Single Space" category.

The client, who had already installed home-theater equipment, came to Hawkins looking for someone who could create his dream theater to showcase his top-of-the-line equipment. Practicality and aesthetics were equally important, so Hawkins installed motorized blackout shades to block the light from

A niche room can be a niche space, if that's what you've got to work with. Designer Kim Smith created a getaway in this unused third-floor window.

windows. The acoustics were calibrated to suit the space, taking into account the lack of a rear wall.

Hawkins built special platforms for stadium seating, so every moviegoer has a perfect, unimpeded view. He installed stairs to get to the seating with recessed blue lighting in the toe kicks, providing safety without impeding the quality of the picture on the screen. Hawkins built a high-impact curved wall that hides the seating from the rest of the house, and crafted an art installation on it, with continuous ribbons of neon light and glass beadwork to create a jewel-like effect. The wall became a gorgeous focal point when viewed from the rest of the house, rather than an eyesore.

Hawkins designed an inventive way of artfully camouflaging the ceiling-mounted projector, without sacrificing its function. He used stretch-fabric and fashioned it into sail-like layers, creating a visual element that's both beautiful and useful. Custom cabinetry, shelving and grill cloth hides the AV components, as well as giving the homeowner a way to enjoy the room even when he's not taking in a film.

"We gave the owner space to show off his collection of

Designer David Hawkins utilized technology and lighting to realize his client's dream of a sleek home theater.

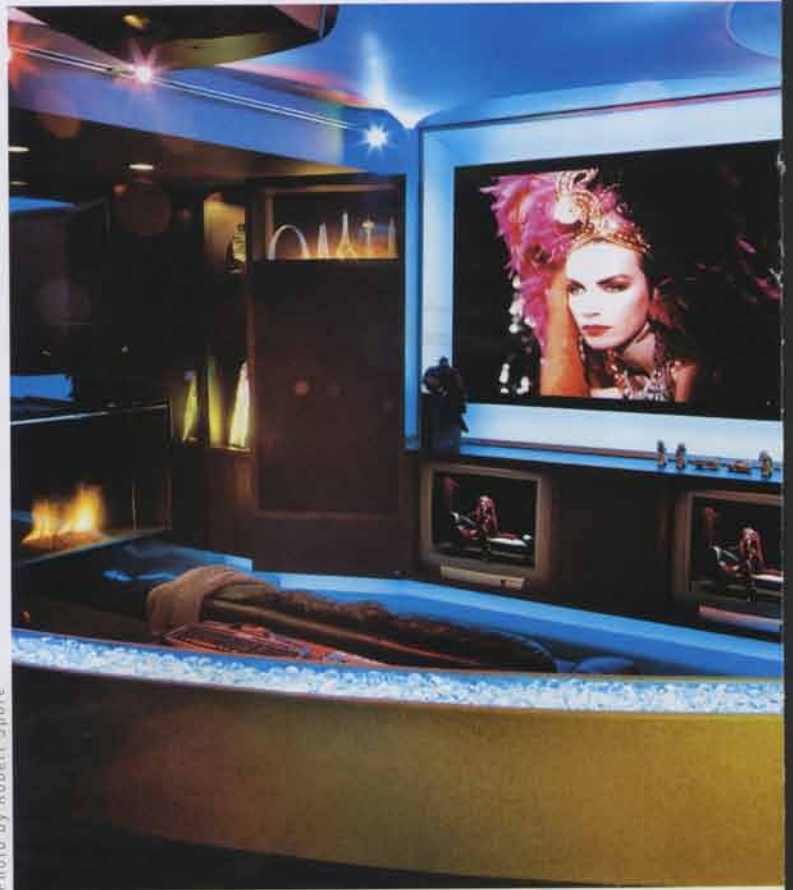


Photo by Robert Spore

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"THE BIGGEST ADVANTAGE IN GOING TO A PROFESSIONAL IS TO AVOID SPENDING MONEY UNNECESSARILY. I THINK THE MONEY THAT'S OFFSET IN FEES FOR HAVING A PROFESSIONAL DESIGN THE SPACE HELPS MAKE UP FOR THE FACT THAT THERE'S NOT GOING TO BE MISTAKES, IT'S DESIGNED AND APPROVED WITHOUT GUESSWORK," SAYS DESIGNER DAVID HAWKINS.

artwork from all over the world. It made the feature wall a cohesive wall of interest, so even if he's not watching a video, maybe just listening to music, he has a very interesting [focal point]," Hawkins says.

Hawkins says that, especially for technologically involved home-design projects, a designer is essential to help avoid costly errors when dealing with thousands of dollars worth of equipment.

"The biggest advantage in going to a professional is to avoid spending money unnecessarily. I think the money that's offset in fees for having a professional design the space helps make up for the fact that there's not going to be mistakes, it's designed and approved without guesswork," Hawkins says. "They have the knowledge and talent to finish the space with colors and textures and materials and other elements that complete the specialty room."

The very nature of niche rooms means that they are custom designed, with a homeowner's specific needs and desires the most important factor. A music room, an exercise room, a yoga room, a breakfast nook, an enclosed porch, an art room, a library ... the options are limitless.

"People are understanding design — what it can do, and what we can do for you. They want to be able to specialize their homes, and these rooms are a way of doing that," Sims says. "[Designers] can help the rooms to be cohesive, to help keep you within budget and timeframe, and to help it keep within the character of the rest of the home."

Specialty rooms are a great way of making a house a home, a personalized space that works for each individual family. An ASID professional designer brings the expertise, knowledge and skills to work with clients to turn a great idea into a polished, sophisticated and cohesive reality. ■