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Creating New Spaces

Transforming a bonus room into a favorite area of your home | By Iyna Bort Caruso



Suddenly, finally, thrillingly, a spare room in your home becomes available. Maybe it's the happy result of moving to a larger home, or the bittersweet reality of a child's departing for college. Whatever the reason, the room's to-be-determined status is likely fueling your imagination.

Gaining access to extra interior square footage is on many homeowners' wish lists. Some, for years, imagine redecorating the space, planning for just such an eventuality. And home builders are taking notice. According to the National Association of Home Builders, "flex" spaces—rooms designed to take on the task of the moment—are increasingly being incorporated into the floor plans of new homes, as well as remodeling projects.

If you're in the enviable position of having a spare room, here are some tips for a smooth design process.

Pick your purpose

Excitement might be the first reaction homeowners have to a bonus room, but indecision is often the second. What to do with the room? Where to begin? From man caves to music rooms to home theaters, there's a multitude of options to choose from. Some homeowners even opt to create new rooms to generate income. One Santa Monica, California, owner cleared out multiple filing cabinets from her garage earlier this year, installed a bathroom and kitchenette, and turned the garage into a vacation-rental unit. Talking to a real estate agent in your area can help you determine if establishing a rental is a viable option.

To determine how to best take advantage of an available space for your own purposes, jot down a list of potential uses—for example, a yoga room or an artist's studio—thinking about how, and whether, engaging in these activities at home would enhance the experience. You might be passionate about fitness, for instance, but if a full-service health club is a better match for your lifestyle than a middling home gym, reconsider the options on your list.

One of your ideas might be a perfect fit. This was the case for Wendi Freer when she and her husband, Michael, decided to

transform a spare second-floor bedroom in their Encinitas, California, home into a meditation room. To remake the space, the Freers emptied it of furniture, repainted the walls light yellow and laid interlocking padded flooring that resembled bamboo. The room is comfortable and easy to clean, and the closet now stores blankets, cushions and candles. "All the necessities for great meditation," Freer says.

Before the project, the couple would meditate in their master bedroom. "Having a room completely dedicated to meditation has made a big difference in the quality of our [practice]," says Freer.

"Designating the room for a specific purpose and putting my attention and care into the process makes it feel like a sacred space," she adds. "There is a sense of energetic relief that I get when I enter. It feels soft, loving and vital."

Have a game plan

Once the intended purpose of the spare room has been determined, the next step is setting a budget for the project. Having a dollar figure in mind for how much you want to spend will help you decide where to splurge and where to save.

Some rooms, by their very nature, require a more



COURTESY, RESOURCE FURNITURE (2)



Resource Furniture's Goliath Console/Dining Table morphs from a sleek 17-inch-long console (above) into a modern dining table that extends to a length of 115 inches (left).

modest financial outlay. In a meditation room, for instance, less is more, and Freer says her expenses were minimal.

When you're planning a room requiring big-ticket items, such as equipment and furnishings for a home theater, on a limited budget, designers recommend making purchases in stages. The room may not be done in a week or even a month, but when it's complete, it won't feel as though your vision has been compromised.

Once you know your budget, create a spreadsheet on which to itemize every new purchase, whether it's a roll of wallpaper, a can

of paint or a new desk. Note when the items are ordered and are scheduled to be delivered. This will help you come up with a project timetable.

James Swan, a Beverly Hills, California-based interior designer and the author of *101 Things I Hate About Your House* (HCI Books, 2011), recommends working from top to bottom. For example, paint the ceiling first, then hang the chandelier and paint the walls, and finally install the carpeting or other flooring.

"If you flip the order around by installing the carpeting and then painting, you won't sleep at night, I promise," says Swan. "Open cans of paint on top of a brand-new carpet are a recipe for disaster." He remarks that drapes should be hung last, because the length needs to be set to the installed flooring.

One important consideration when planning a new space is resale value. Prospective buyers view for-sale homes through very personal lenses. They want to walk into a house and picture themselves settling in. Rooms adapted for niche purposes, such as workshops and photo studios, can unsettle that vision. In most cases, however, a custom-designed ancillary room of the home is rarely a deal breaker. Removing cabinetry, repainting and reworking the lighting are not jobs that require deep pockets, and many of today's buyers are sophisticated enough to understand that.

Resale value was a consideration for Stewart Adam, a Plymouth, Massachusetts, homeowner in the process of converting the unfinished basement of his saltbox colonial home into a state-of-the-art recording studio. Tired of operating his audio-restoration business, Creative Audio Works, out of a cramped extra bedroom, he was eager to set up shop in the new space.

Adam budgeted around \$7,500 for the project, and has been able to save money by doing much of the work himself and carefully selecting materials. These included secondhand cabinets picked up at a Habitat for Humanity store, and recycled flooring and countertops purchased from local salvage yards. As the renovation nears completion, Adam says he's looking forward to the better acoustics and ability to provide a higher level of restoration services to clients, as well as to presenting a more professional image.

"We were concerned that a recording studio in a private home does not add much resale value, if any," he recalls. "But with the design we settled on, if and when we decide to sell our house, the studio could be easily converted into a home theater, thus adding value."

Pick a palette

Color is one of the easiest, fastest and most cost-effective design tools available to homeowners.

Another idea is to use color in ways that make certain elements in the room pop.



LESLIE REITER/SCOTT COURTESY: APARTMENT THERAPY

"Color is the key element to any room you're designing or redoing," says Shannon Kaye, a color expert and design consultant for CertaPro Painters. Choosing a pleasing palette is a key factor to a successful room makeover, especially when the colors complement the room's functionality. For example, a meditation studio is most effectively adorned with calm, soothing colors, while an exercise room often works best with energetic, vibrant colors.

According to Kaye, "You always want to consider the activities [you'll be doing in] the room."

The amount of natural light should also be factored into the decision. "The reason that's important is that if you have, say, a room on the dark side of the house with a lot of shade, and you paint the room a pale blue, it might feel really cold," Kaye says, adding that the darker the room, the warmer the color should be.

Another idea is to use color in ways that make certain elements in the room pop. In a crafts room, for instance, colorful fabrics and papers can be part of the decor, and a quiet color on the walls would make those accessories stand out. For moldings and trim, the perfect shade of white or another color that contrasts with the walls will help accentuate architectural details.

Above: Color is used to set a lively tone in this dining room, while the piano (properly protected) doubles as a table, buffet or bar. The playful chevron pattern on the piano is repeated throughout the home, helping to create a sense of continuity.

Of course, picking the ideal color or suite of colors out of the thousands of hues available is not an easy task. To make the selection more manageable, Kaye suggests going to the paint store with

an item from the room—a decorative pillow or material from a curtain—to help you narrow your choices. Realize, however, that the light in a paint store will be different from the light at home, so buy some samples and test them out on an area of the wall before making a decision.

Ultimately, says Kaye, the “right” colors are shades that suit your personality. “Rather than looking at trends and what’s in fashion, think about what helps you feel good. Those colors will always be right for you.”

Sometimes white can be the most dramatic shade of all. Interior designer Marge Philley of Marge Philley Interiors in Plano, Texas, designed a special place where a female client can go to relax.

“The men like their man caves. She wanted her woman’s space,” Philley says. The client’s child had moved out, freeing up a bedroom. Against white walls, Philley designed a mostly white



Paula Yoo’s revamped spare bedroom, now nicknamed the “writer’s retreat” and used as a study and a guest room, features warm colors and smartly selected furnishings, including a versatile office center by Room & Board.

room that includes a lounging sofa and soft window panels. She added mood lighting, contemporary art and a statement-making zebra-print rug. The result is a light, airy and calming retreat.

Consider continuity

A spare room can be transformed into a fantasy, but what about maintaining

continuity with the rest of the house?

“As long as there’s a door that can be closed, you can do anything,” says designer Swan. But he prefers that every room maintain a connection with the rest of the home.

“Even if I take a right or left turn stylistically with what’s going on elsewhere—if I turn up the color saturation or turn it down from what’s used [in other areas of the home]—I like to at least see one thread of commonality to create an overall sense of belonging,” he says. This “thread” might be a repeated color family, common moldings or accessories, or complementary lighting.

Like color, light is a powerful design tool that can transform the feel of a room. Lighting can accentuate details or hide flaws.

“[Maintaining continuity] doesn’t preclude interesting, new or different things, but I want to make everything feel like it belongs under the same roof,” says Swan.

Consult an expert

Roberta Hornbeck, a portrait artist, lives in a three-bedroom home in Las Vegas, Nevada. Until recently, she painted in the corner of her living room—a space that wasn’t quite big enough or comfortable enough.

“I wasn’t really able to work on more than one or two pieces at a time, and was always picking up and putting everything away daily so that [the living room] would look nice,” she says. Eventually, she decided to clear out an extra bedroom that had been used for storage and convert it into an art studio.

Hornbeck designed the basic layout of the room and figured out which items she needed to optimize the space for her paints, canvases and other art supplies. She had a modest budget but decided to hire an interior designer to work with her on finalizing the plan.

“I found it extremely helpful to have another pair of eyes on the design to see what I was missing or could do better,” she says. The designer provided valuable lighting and flooring ideas, and organizational tips. After two months, the studio was complete.

“When I walk into the room, I feel immediately energized and creative,” says Hornbeck. “But it also has a calming effect since everything is in its place. I can immediately start painting without having to set things up or search for them in another room.”

Since she set up her studio, Hornbeck paints daily, for longer spans of time, and has tripled her production. “The room is my favorite place in the house, even when I just want to hang out,” she says. “It’s my sanctuary from the hustle and bustle of everyday life.”

Paula Yoo, a television producer/writer and book author, also opted to consult an interior designer when reimagining one of the four bedrooms in the 1920s Spanish-style bungalow she owns in Los Angeles with her husband. The bedroom was formerly dedicated to the couple’s three cats—their feeding, sleeping and litter boxes—and they wanted to make it more functional.

Perspective sectional
design Philippe Bouix



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"I was completely clueless [about what to do]," says Yoo. "I'm a writer. I didn't know much about crown molding."

Yoo and her husband hired interior designer Melissa Salamoff of Salamoff Design Studio in Burbank, California, to help. The designer transformed the kitty room into a study that easily morphs into a

Relaxing and enjoying
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more enjoyable, project.

guest room for the occasional overnight visitor. The carpet was ripped up and the original red-oak hardwood floor was refinished; the walls were painted a warm, green color; moldings were added; drapes were installed; and multipurpose yet sophisticated furniture was added. The makeover was completed in about a month, and Yoo says it's now her favorite room in the house.

"I like to read and write a lot. Now the room is a little bit of a library—a place to curl up with a good book or do some editing."

"Paint" with light

Like color, light is a powerful design tool that can transform the feel of a room. Lighting can accentuate details or hide flaws. Designers use it like a paintbrush to enhance certain areas and play up specific details.

Experts say most spaces require a layered-lighting approach, with the combination based on the primary activity the room is used for. The layers might include flip-a-switch ambient lighting for general illumination, as well as task lighting for a specific function—such as sewing or crafting—and decorative lighting for a stylish look.

Lighting is a fast-evolving industry utilizing increasingly sophisticated technology. In addition to focusing on the level of light and the fixtures, pros also focus on

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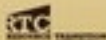
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the quality of light—the evenness and balance—to make a room comfortable and visually exciting. Designers at a good lighting store can help you come up with a successful approach.

Select functional furnishings

When figuring out how best to utilize a spare room, many homeowners opt for dual functionality—such as creating an office/guest room or a TV room/crafts room. Furniture manufacturers are responding to this demand with specialized furniture, says Challie Stillman, design director at Resource Furniture, a company that specializes in space-saving furnishings, with showrooms in New York and Canada.

"The benefit [of space-saving furniture] is that you can use a set amount of square footage for many different purposes and not waste valuable space," says Stillman. The Resource Furniture collection includes wall beds that convert into stylish sofas, shelving or desks; console tables that extend into dining tables; and ottomans that convert into multiple stools. Stillman says the technology for transformable furniture is not new—what's new is how Americans think about it.

"There has been a trend toward bigger and better for a long time, but now there's a collective consciousness about efficiency and using less space in order to conserve energy," she says.

A fun adventure

No matter what your spare room's intended purpose, relaxing and enjoying the design process can result in a more successful, and certainly more enjoyable, project. "One thing that kept me from feeling overwhelmed was reminding myself to take my time," says Paula Yoo. "Be patient, and think of the process as a fun adventure."

"We now call [the revamped bedroom] the writer's retreat, and the cats are no longer welcome." ▲

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