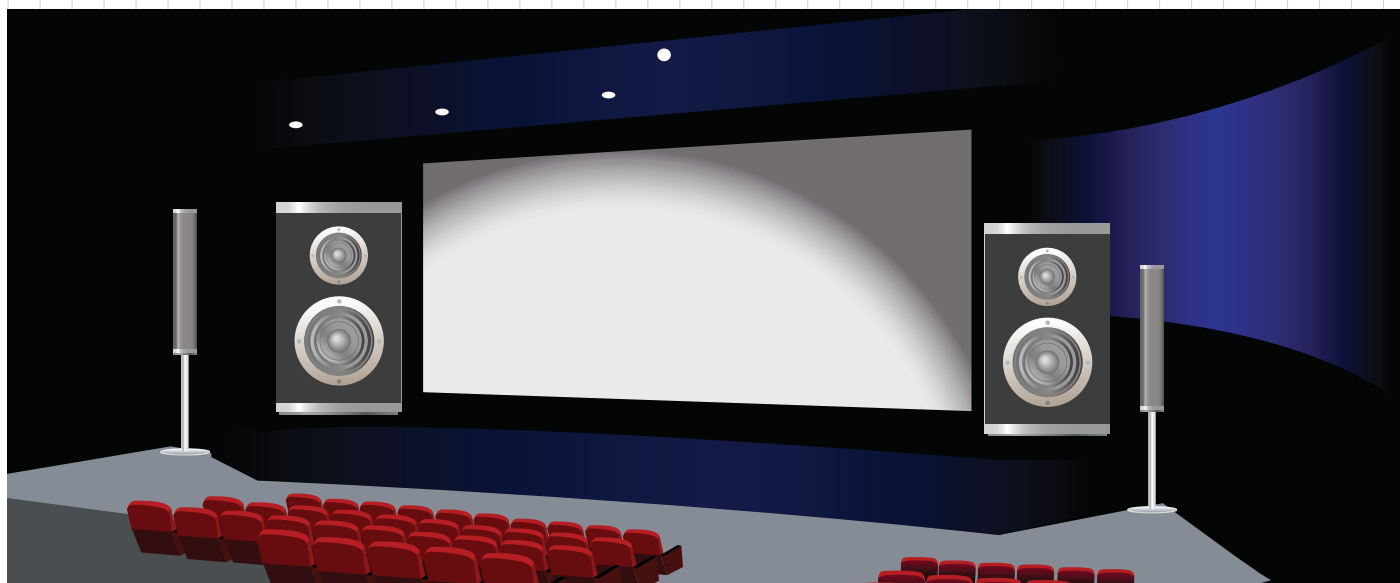


Nesting entertainment



Even in these uncertain economic times - or maybe because of them - the significant up and coming trend that seems to be emerging in residential interior design, is the space and money homeowners are devoting to home entertainment. It's no longer enough for hosts to clear out some furniture in the living room to host a party or throw-up a ping pong table in the garage for the kids. Nowadays entire floors are dedicated to bowling alleys, ice skating rinks and movie theatres, rivalling those in the swankiest restaurants, private clubs and gyms worldwide.

Project after project, owners are rethinking the idea of the home and how it can aptly reflect and incorporate their passions and interests. No doubt, people are in nesting mode - but the luxury and fantasy in which they now want to nest has sky-rocketed.

Architecture firms and interior decorators are being asked to come up with creative ways to fulfil some pretty outrageous design requests. When California-based architects Ian Moller and Stephen Willrich were asked to build a regulation size interior basketball court in a clients Pacific Heights mansion, it wasn't a question of cost, it was

a question of where exactly to put it. Unable to expand on either side (because of adjacent properties) or up (due to height restrictions) the architects excavated under the home - a Neo-Classical structure built in 1910 and the former Russian consulate in San Francisco. Now the couple's four boys can shoot hoops in the privacy of their own dwelling.

In Beverly Hills, the epicentre of Hollywood glitz and glamour, screening a not-yet-released blockbuster movie in your home theatre has been *de rigueur* since the days of Clark Gable. But instead of the usual comfy couches and a retractable plasma screen, owners are now building 50-seat cinemas with state-of-the-art projection equipment and fully equipped concession stands.

The good life, indeed. Homeowners are shifting their budgets and splurging more on the entertaining or leisure pursuit areas of their residences. Take, for example, the Russian property Eurasia, which consists of a 3,500 square-metre manor house; and an eye-popping 28,000 square-metre recreation centre that features a pool, Turkish and Russian baths, a gym, sauna and lounges (That's almost twice the size of Madison

Square Garden in New York City).

In London the current residential fad seems to be all about clubbing - nightclubbing, that is. Residents are outfitting special rooms with dance floors, DJ booths, high tech refreshment stands and even separate entrances for guests. These creations often resemble chic private clubs just down the road, like Annabel's. Many double as cool playrooms for the kids during the day - equipped with games like Wii and karaoke. Interior designers working in Knightsbridge and Notting Hill, say the trend has been influenced by the surge in design-forward hip boutique hotels that this group of sophisticated aesthetes has come to frequent. "These owners are often trying to replicate the experience, style and service that they fancy and expect when travelling and going out," says one such interior designer. Entertaining friends and family, without lines, with only your favourite music playing and a personalised cocktail list always at your fingertips is undoubtedly nice. But the ultimate freedom to having your own entertainment centre? The chance to thumb your nose at those annoying smoking bans. 