

THE LAST WORDS

How do you get people to *live* in the living room? Twelve experts put the life back in everybody's most underused room

Interviews by
SHAX RIEGLER

"Make the room a place for activities. Tony [Baratta] and I just designed a coffee-game table for a client. The top is composed of six game boards: backgammon, Clue, checkers, Parcheesi, Scrabble, and Chinese checkers. The drawers hold the game pieces."

WILLIAM DIAMOND

"Give the living room a special purpose. You could build a wonderful set of bookshelves and keep all your family's books there. That creates a visually appealing space that draws people in. Always build a little extra shelving for growing room."

DENNIS WEDLICK

"Don't forget a plush ottoman for your feet. There's nothing better than sitting back in an old-fashioned wing chair and kicking your feet up on the ottoman with a glass of brandy at your fingertips on the side table. Lighting should be soft and ample, but set a special reading lamp next to your favorite reading chair. A stereo definitely belongs in every living room. And have a cashmere throw on the sofa for when nap time rolls around."

MILLY DE CABROL

"Don't create a lifeless stage set, a museum room. Make it an authentic reflection of your interests, accomplishments, friends, family, hobbies, and quirks. Throw in a little sense of humor and a cocktail—why not put in a great well-stocked bar cart?—and you will have a living room where you won't be able to keep people out."

THOM FILICIA

"Know your comfort zone. If you're not comfortable putting your feet up on \$300/yard fabric, don't buy it. Don't overload the room with things that make you nervous, too careful. And as old-fashioned as it sounds, a piano brings people into the room. A lot of my clients have started taking piano lessons with their kids."

SCHUYLER SAMPERTON

"Make it comfortable. Put in overstuffed sofas and armchairs with ottomans so you can put your feet up. No one likes to sit on stick chairs, so if that's what you have, no one will go in there. Cozy it up with wall-to-wall carpeting. And wire it for sound and TV. Don't make it so precious or fussy that people are afraid to actually use the room."

MARIO BUATTA

"Pay attention to lighting. Put in extra outlets if you need to, but make sure there's a mix of ceiling lights, table lamps, and floor lamps so that there's enough light by one chair for you to read a book, by another for your husband to read the newspaper, and in another part of the room so the kids can do their homework."

CHRISTOPHER COLEMAN

"When there are young children, the family room is used more often than the living room. So I encourage the adults to use the living room for cocktails, cards, quiet reading, or coffee after dinner. You need the right coffee table—19 inches is a good height. Get a card table with four chairs and you might be surprised by how much use it gets. And always have a comfortable reading chair with a good lamp nearby."

MARIETTE HIMES GOMEZ

"The harsh reality is, if you want the family to use the living room, put a television in it. Luckily, there are beautiful ways to conceal it. Recently, we hung a two-panel Japanese screen over a recessed television. The lightweight panels are easy to open and close, an important factor to keep in mind. In another living room, we mounted the television on an antique artist's easel, which made it an interesting element on its own. In my apartment, I have an all-black television—no chrome—and hang only black and white photographs in the room, so all the elements blend. Never hang a television over a fireplace and leave it exposed. That just creates one black hole over another."

CAREY MALONEY

"'Comfortable chic' doesn't have to be an oxymoron. Use lush fabrics in carefree synthetics to make it child-friendly and pet-proof. Plan a zone to play in, a zone to work in, and a zone to socialize in, and then you'll go in there every day."

ELAINE GRIFFIN

"Take the label off the room and call it something else. If you're planning a renovation, try to create connecting views. Don't leave any room sitting off all by itself. If you can't see it, you won't even remember it's there. And get comfortable furniture: If you don't like to sit on it, then you won't use it."

SARAH SUSANKA

"Upholster deep, comfortable sofas with cozy chenille, armchairs with linen damask. Save the taffetas and embroideries for the curtains and the pillows. Make sure you have tables near every seat to rest a drink or a book. Light the room well. Table lamps and standing lamps with off-white shades will also make the room feel more approachable and user-friendly. If there's space, put a game table in a corner. Luring the family into the room for a Scrabble challenge is a sure way to bring them into the 'forbidden zone.'"

ELLIE CULLMAN