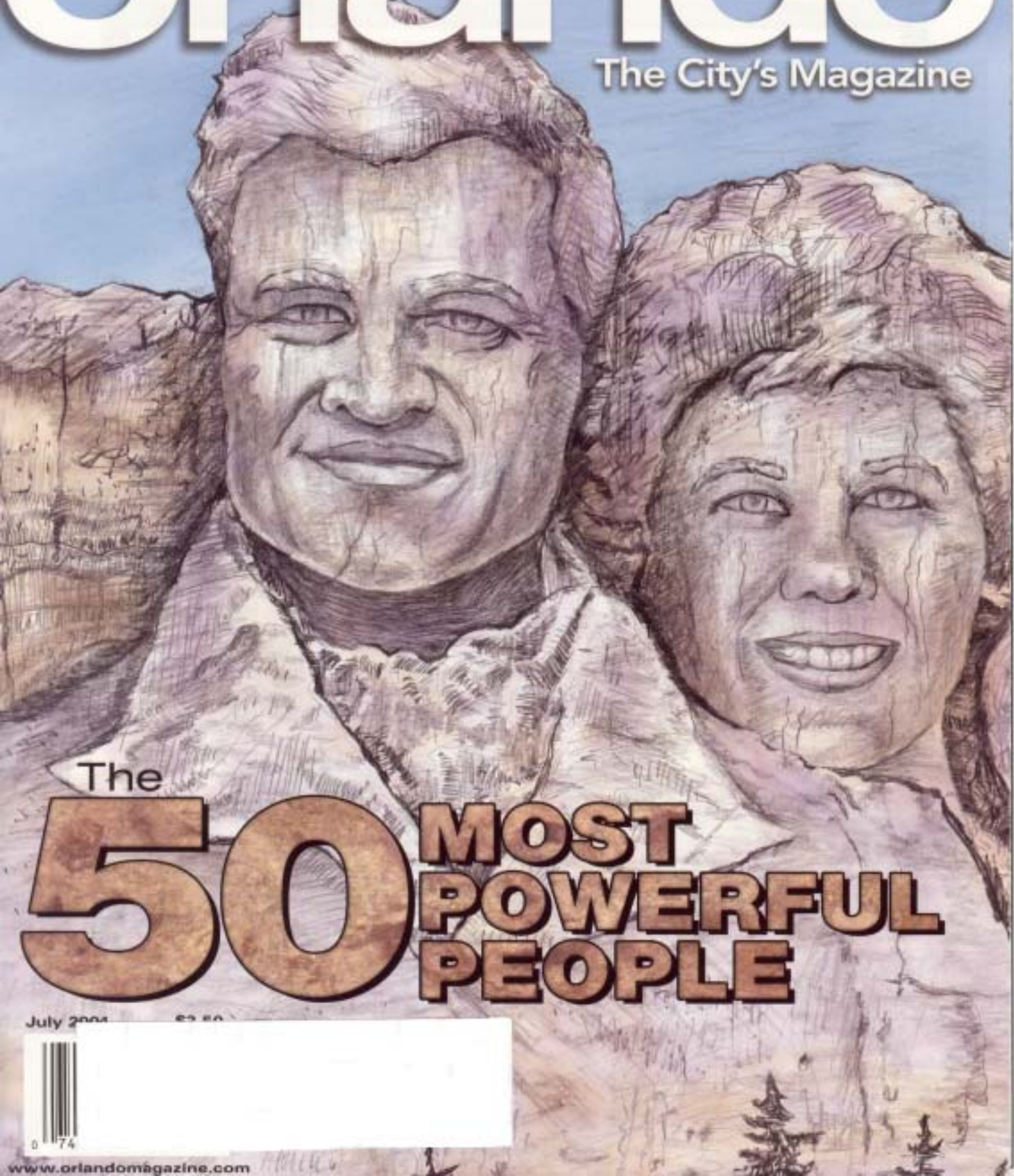


Who Calls the Shots: Al Weiss, Toni Jennings

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# Game Room

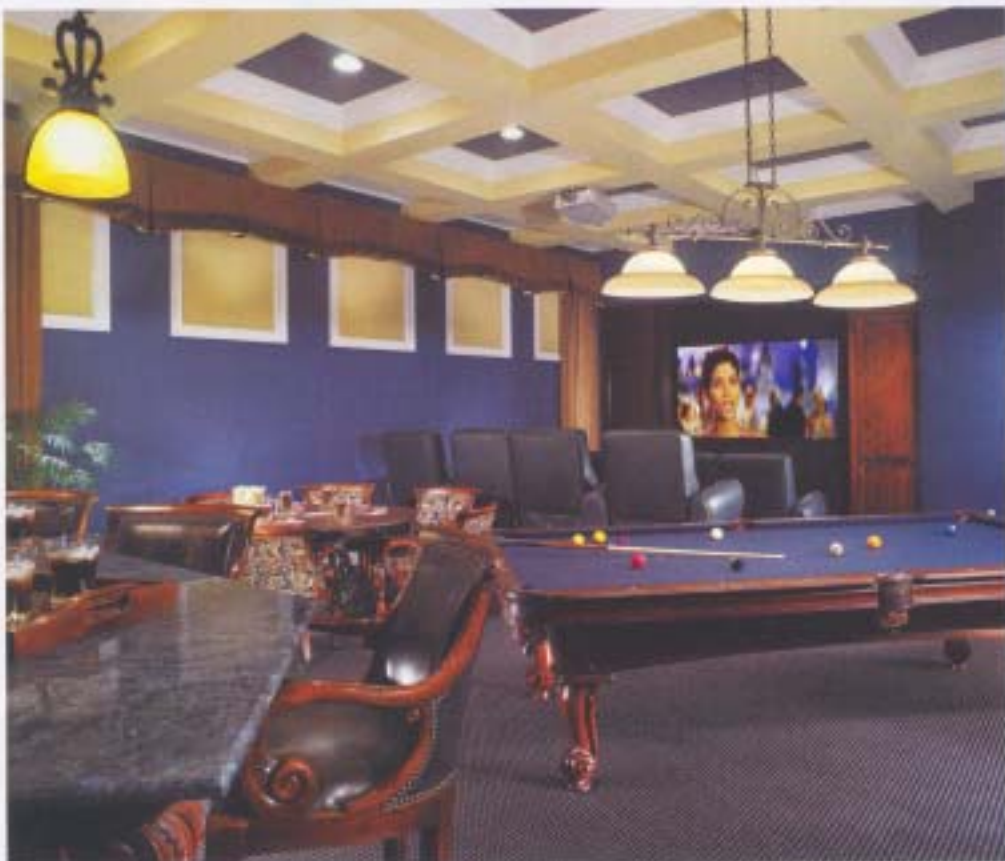
BY SUZANNE R. BARNES

With each generation, it gets a new name. There was the recreation room, playroom, den, and family room, and now it's evolved into the game room and home theater. And with each change of name, it's become grander. No longer some sparsely furnished cavern with knotty pine walls and a parquet floor, it's become a center for the latest technology and a

multipurpose room for the entire family.

Creating such a room can still be as simple as converting an unused bedroom into a game room by adding a television, a video game and a folding card table. Or it can be as elaborate as building an addition to the house and outfitting it with tens of thousands of dollars in electronic equipment.





The key to a successful game room is planning. Lack of planning can leave the homeowner with a large, little-used shrine to good intentions gone wrong. Or it can create a room that in a few years will appear dated and unsuitable for a family whose needs are changing. A room that is perfect for toddlers today may be unused when they get older.

The first step is to decide what you want. A game room for the entire family can sound wonderful, but do you really want each family member's favorite pastimes arrayed in the same place? Is it going to be a room for the kids, a room for adults, a room for entertaining guests, or a combination of all three? Figure out if the things you want to use the room for present conflicts. A pool table is great for Dad and the older kids, but toddlers will find that it's just something taking up their play space. Furniture designed for kids will be popular with them, but won't work for entertaining adults.

Randall Slocum of Orlando-based Slocum Platts Architects recommends beginning the planning process by planning the types of games and activities the room will be used for. "Different games take up different amounts of space," he says.



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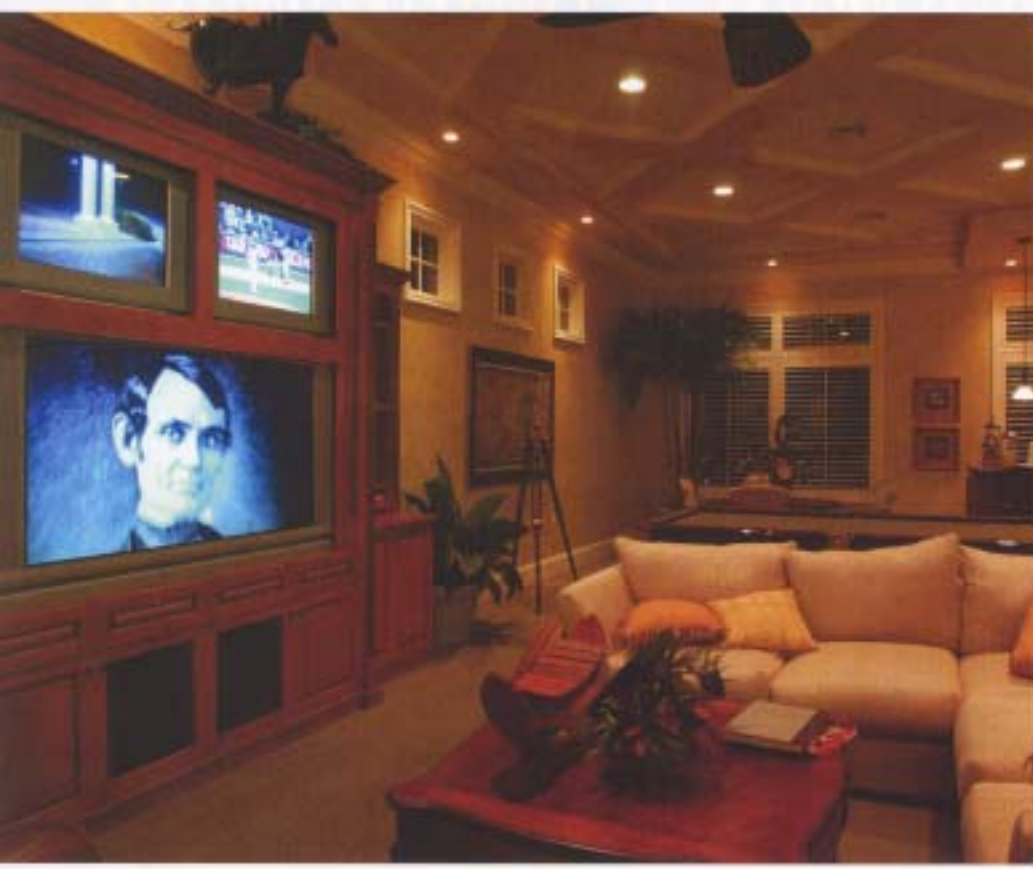
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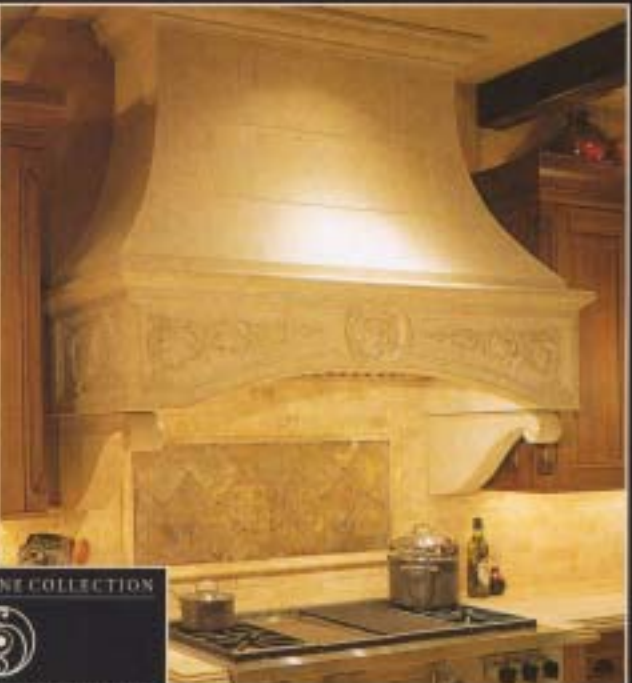




Some items, such as home theaters and pool tables, can be inviting and lots of fun, but they can also limit the use of the room. A home theater is great for watching movies, but it has few other purposes. A pool table—and the space around it needed for the pool cue—leaves little space for other things. Florida Billiards says that a typical table is eight feet long, and five to six feet of additional space is needed around the sides. Slocum adds, "Although a billiard table requires a large amount of space, it can also function as a multipurpose table base for parties, ping pong and other games as well." Video games and soda machines are great draws and lots of fun, but they can create awkward spaces.

If the room is planned for adults, consider the newest craze—what is being called the "pec room," which is an exercise center. Another increasingly popular option is adding a refreshment center—for sodas and even snacks—to avoid multiple trips to the kitchen. The game/media room concept is also becoming popular. The room can include the latest televisions and components ranging from TIVO to stereos.

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Once you have decided what you want to use the room for, the next step is to figure out where to put it. This can be one of the most important decisions. Steve Guidus, whose firm, PSG Construction, is a leading home remodeling company in the Orlando area, worked on one house where the existing game room could only be reached by an outdoor walkway, not exactly an ideal situation for young children. Bill Maroon of Maroon Development, Orlando, says that "recent trends show a huge movement away from separating game rooms and theaters from the main rooms in the house."



Is there existing space in your home for the game room? Just as important in determining where to put the room is deciding where NOT to put the room. Do you want all of the kids and their friends playing in a room next to the master bedroom? Should it go next to the kitchen—which will mean kids in and out of the kitchen constantly—or far away? Remember that a room without easy access and not centrally located may end up unused or make it more difficult for parents to watch young children. Some people in attempting to create a sanctuary end up creating a little-used room far from the rest of the action. Include open passages or windows that maintain ties to other rooms or to the outdoors.

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For those using existing space, an unused bedroom, the current family room, the garage or a bonus room are the best bets. Brett Ogilvie of Innovative Home Theaters says, "Garages and bonus rooms above garages are the existing spaces people most often turn into game rooms."

Working with a builder or architect, work out a plan for the existing space to make sure there is enough space. And involve other specialists—such as a good electronics company. Measure the room, taking note of fixtures such as windows, doors and built-in cabinetry or shelving, and figure out where electronic components will be optimally placed. Leave room for future growth—and for electronic gear that may come along in a few years. Rule number one is to figure out the wiring before you finish the room. And be sure that any electronics you purchase will meet your expectations. Ogilvie says, "Many people think they can add a simple home theater to their game room by buying the home theater in a box. Most people actually expect a more complete, full-blown media kit." Ogilvie says the top-end units start around \$5,000 and can cost more than \$13,500.



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If your current home isn't big enough for the game room or home theater, expansion is the answer. Maroon, whose upscale homes can be found in Lake Nona, Isleworth and throughout Orlando and Winter Park, says homeowners usually spend \$235 to \$300 a square foot for a new game/media room. At those rates, building a 300-square-foot room would cost \$75,000 to \$90,000.

Themed rooms are increasingly popular, but be sure to think through the theme's appropriateness for your home. One of the most popular themes is the sports-bar theme, which can include a pool table, bar and multiple televisions. But keep in mind that playing beneath a beer sign may not be the perfect environment for children. And some themes don't work with others. Slocum says, "There are things that work together and things that don't work together using themes. For example, an



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antique or carved billiard table doesn't coordinate well with pinball machines." And keep in mind competing lighting requirements. Pinball machines and home theaters may require darker, enclosed spaces, while a playroom or place to read may require open spaces and lots of light. A more traditional family room will use lots of light—large windows often opening out to a swimming pool or outdoor play area.

In addition to items relating to the sports theme, there are a number of other popular items that are showing up in game rooms. Linda Caskey, owner of Lots of Slots in Winter Park, says, "Oval poker-style game tables are selling off

the shelves. They fit over typical card tables." The tables are popular because they work on lots of different levels. They can be a simple and inexpensive route to starting a game room or the first step in creating a six-figure game room. Caskey's store sells pinball machines and soda machines along with game tables.

One way to envision your ideal game room is to try to see as many game/media/home theater rooms as possible before beginning. Baldwin Park model homes are an excellent

resource, as are other upscale new model homes.

One final word of advice: start out with a budget and know what you want for the money you spend. Some people build a beautiful room only to run out of money when it's time to buy the electronics. Others buy state-of-the-art electronics and stick them into a room that is unsuitable. Either way, it can create a room that leaves the homeowner saying, "I wish we had ..." @



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## Setting Up the Media Room

Once upon a time, electronics were simple. Plug in the television set, adjust the rabbit ears antenna, and you're in business. Today, it can take a degree in electronics to make everything work. So much so that companies have sprung up just to hook up the latest electronic gear in your home.

Here are some guidelines to make the process go smoother.

1. From the start, keep in mind what electronics you want to put in your new game room, and how long you plan to keep them. Remember, creating a built-in for a television set may look great today, but what happens if you

buy a different-sized set next year?

2. Figure out how the electronics will work with the rest of the room. Will you be able to see the television or movie screen from the seating area? Some newer television sets offer great pictures when viewed straight on, but aren't as sharp from the sides.

3. Is there plenty of room to store videotapes and DVDs?

4. Plan for future developments (and it seems as if each year there are new developments). Leave room for expansion as new electronics come onto the market. Make sure there is room for additional wiring to support what may come.



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5. Allow for plenty of ventilation for all your electronics.

6. Whether you hook up the electronics or hire someone to do it, be sure to label all the electronics. It will make future changes so much simpler.

7. For an addition or new home, make decisions on speaker locations during construction so that you can install speaker wiring within the walls.

8. Most builders recommend installing Category 5 twisted-pair wires for voice and data transmissions and RG6 quadshielded coaxial cable for video. They cost more, but will be worth it in the long run and will enable higher-speed reception.



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