

Niche remodeling: new uses for old spaces

The secret to carving out new niches for yourself in your house is to view old spaces in a new light and eliminate clutter that crowds out a prime space with niche potential.

The best way to start is to dump items that have outlived their usefulness but that you can't bear to part with, to reclaim spaces such as basements and storage areas.

When insulated properly, basements make excellent darkrooms for photography buffs. Block out light sources with double-lined curtains and poster-board. Look for wall and floor coverings that are suitable for below grade spaces and varying temperatures.

Attics can be transformed from catch-alls to clever caches for your hobby-related materials. You can wall in a breezeway between the house and garage or turn a portion of the garage into a workshop. Add indoor/outdoor carpeting, a workbench made from a board over a sawhorse and line the existing walls with pegboard on which to hang tools.

Old milk cart cases can be spray-painted and stacked to form neat shelves and cubbyholes that will reduce clutter and make for easy cleanup.

A good source for clever ways of revamping nooks and crannies in your house is "The Complete Basic Book of Home Decorating" (Doubleday). Here are some ideas you can follow to create your own niches in no time:

• **Music rooms:** Wall-to-wall carpeting and lined draperies are not only a luxury but also a wise acoustical move for music-lovers who want to keep their music to themselves. Check the climate control system for this niche to protect valuable instruments, tapes and stereo equipment.

• **Game rooms:** Since you'll be moving the furniture around, look to washable vinyl floor coverings or tiles that form a fun checkerboard pattern. Instead of wallpaper, try stenciling or stick-on letters and graphics you can buy at an art supply store. Go to unfinished wood furniture stores to find some pieces you can paint in bright primary colors to add to the spirit of the room.

• **Hobby rooms:** Look for places in your house with good light and ventilation, such as areas adjacent to the kitchen. An enclosed porch could be converted into an artist's studio so that paint fumes aren't a bother, and the outdoors can provide inspiration for budding artists. An unused wet bar could be an ideal place to set up your pottery work station with access to a sink.

If the niche is located in a corner of the living

room or family room, hide projects in the works behind tall folding screens that complement the rest of the room's decor.

Bookshelves can instantly wall off a hobby niche, as well as provide needed storage space. Import stores offer baskets of all sizes and shapes that will hold hobby supplies. You can also use fishing tackle boxes or rolling microwave carts to make a mobile hobby niche.

• **Gyms:** According to Home magazine, home

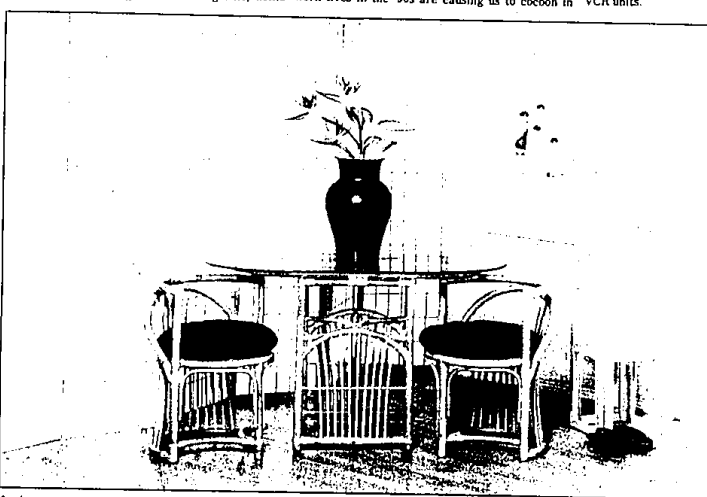
gyms are eclipsing private tennis courts or lap pools as a status symbol as the fitness regimen of choice. With the wide variety of machines and equipment available, it isn't hard to find a machine that is trim and light to fit even the tightest spots in your house, which may include balconies for workout alfresco, alcoves located off master bedrooms or even garages.

• **Media centers:** Sociologists say that our hectic work lives in the '90s are causing us to cocoon in

our homes, so many people are turning their living room into a home entertainment center. Video sales and rentals are shaping lifestyles and even product design. Black is hot, with clean lines reflecting the minimalist tastes of Eurostyle.

Sleek audiovisual components that disappear into cabinetry are selling well, as are armchairs that feature sliding, pull-out shelves for big-screen TVs and VCR units.

Bookshelves can instantly wall off a hobby niche and provide storage space.



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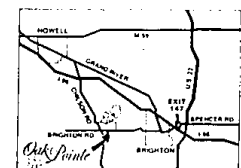
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