

THE HUNT

SPRING 2006

Life in the Brandywine Valley

THE ULTIMATE
Country Wedding

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SCENTS OF SPRING

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First, you must know my bias. I love hanging out in elegant spaces. To me, lounging on silk upholstery, resting my teacup on an antique side table adorned with porcelain accoutrements feels natural, relaxing and comfortable. For many people, such spaces are unnerving, full of what-ifs. What if the tea spills on the chair, what if I accidentally knock the Meissen on the floor while reaching for said tea, what if a kid or kitten scratches the treasured furniture? Contrary to the what-if mentality, mine's more of a so-what attitude. If something happens, at least I spent quality time with pretty stuff; better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all.

It's against this backdrop that I bring

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you information on the family room, a concept philosophically distasteful to me for two reasons. First, family rooms tend to keep people out of their lovely living rooms because everyone's decided the family must reside in the room so-named. Second, they tend to bring out the worst in the family occupying the family room. Must my beloveds endlessly slouch on big bulky corduroy couches (optimally, the corduroy is the color of dirt) with the television (a big one, of course) always on?

Get over it, says Nancy Neumann of Albing International, a company specializing in home furnishing marketing. The family room is more popular than ever. However, according to Neumann, family rooms have taken a turn away from a kids' focus and more towards the stylish. How so? Neumann says, "Kids usually have larger bedrooms today equipped with computers, music and televisions. So today's family room is more sophisticated and adults dictate activity." Not to say that kids are forbidden. There are still cozy spaces for reading and tabletops for kids and parents to work together on homework projects. And the family room "must"—the television—nowadays flat screened, is openly displayed. The difference is, TV viewing is more often devoted to whole family viewing as a shared event, a shared favorite home movie and a shared interest such as college football games. Youth-only television is now relegated to kids' rooms.

Canvassing Brandywine area interior designers, your intrepid reporter has gleaned seven trends which were named as "keepers" in today's family rooms.

The TV is no longer crass, it's the focal point. The bigger, the flatter, the better, and surround sound is becoming *de rigueur*. For those who can't stand the ever-present television, Barbara Cresswell of Barbara Goodman Designs mentions that many furniture companies are making pop-up cabinets to store plasma televisions. Her company makes custom pop-up pieces which allow the television to swivel 180 degrees. This is particularly useful in a combined kitchen/family-room.

Wall-to-wall is clearly o-u-t out, as is scratchy sisal carpeting. A real oriental carpet makes far more sense than even the most wear-resistant solid carpeting. Take the time to scour antique stores and consignment shops to find an oriental that is already nicely worn, or raid your grandmother's attic.

If you use an interior designer, use him here. It used to be powder rooms were given short shrift by homeowners, and designers fought for access, insisting that this is a highly-trafficked place where all guests spend undistracted time. Now powder rooms get their due and have become lavish, anything-goes spots for interior designers. So now it is the family room's turn to demand respect. The thrown together look is over! Most area designers report that family rooms are their third most requested assignments after living rooms and kitchens.

Go color-neutral, texture-rich. Unlike the powder room, the family room is no place to go wild. Neutral colors with interesting, woven or nubby-textured upholstery and bamboo blinds say comfort and effortless style. "For immediate gratification and just about any look you want in Roman shades, just go to a franchise such as Budget Blinds or Next Day Blinds," says Lela Knight of Lela Knight Interiors. "But spend the extra time and small expense to have them measure first. Otherwise, you'll be stuck with something that doesn't fit just right, and that can be a small annoyance every time you enter the room." Annoyance is not what you're after in the family room.

Sectionals make sense. Arg! Isn't this the invitation to the slouching I so feared? Perhaps. Susan Bednar Long is president of Tocar, Inc., one of Manhattan's hottest interior design firms. She owns homes in the city and the Connecticut countryside, so she ought to know. The sectional, she says, will never go away again. "A sectional is simple, practical and promotes together-

ness—perfect for a family room."

Sneaky storage options are vital in the family room. No, this isn't a playroom so toys won't accumulate here. But papers, magazines, card games and slippers will collect. Take a tip from the hospitality industry, says Long. Use a central large square or round ottoman that opens for storage and is covered in leather or faux leather vinyl. "These days faux leather is indistinguishable from the real thing except it doesn't gain a patina with age. It's indestructible and versatile for resting feet or playing a board game." Other clever storage alternatives are trunks as coffee tables, armoires or banquette seating.

A single wall décor feature is clean, classic and restful to the eye. Lela Knight prefers one very large work of modern art from a favorite regional artist to add an effortless sophistication. Prop it against a mantel or table for an artist's studio appeal. Susan Bednar Long likes a single kind of décor but favors a family photo wall with great photos framed in the same size, same style frame.

With elements such as these, even a cynic can begin to love a family room. Barbara Cresswell even notes that many of her clients come in asking for a "gathering room" to differentiate it from the retro image of a family room. This is where both family and guests may gather with style, and Cresswell's goal is a "wonderfully easy, elegant living space."

So, the family room's gone stylish, and it's time to make final peace with the slouchers. Guess I'll just jump aboard and join 'em on the sectional. □

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