

BERGEN

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Playing Games With the Décor

Dedicated rooms at home for board games, jigsaw puzzles and toys are making a comeback among the whimsical at heart.



A tile coffee table with a built-in chessboard in a Boise, Idaho condo from the owners of the curiosity shop, Art of Play. Steve Buss

Recently, the company partnered with the lifestyle, fashion, and fine art photographer [Nick Mele](#) on the release of the eight-piece [Pause Life, Play Games](#) furniture collection. The goal of the line, which includes a game table, stool and chairs, is balancing function for game play and style.

Aesthetics haven't always been a given in game rooms. It doesn't help that games often feature unsightly or boldly hued pieces and boxes, which in aggregate can create visual cacophony.



When the owners of a curiosity shop, [Art of Play](#), renovated a [condo](#) in Boise, Idaho, there was no question how they would decorate it. They knew games and puzzles would be thematic throughout the apartment, which they rent out through [Airbnb](#).

On the console in the foyer, mechanical wooden puzzles double as decorative objects. A tile coffee table with a built-in chess board is the focal point in the living room. Instead of spirits, board games, jigsaw puzzles and toys congregate on a bar cart. A cabinet serves up even more games, many available at their Brooklyn, N.Y., retail shop and online store.

A home designed around play might be impractical for most. But game spaces have been popular throughout history and have recently been making a comeback. "There's such a longing for real, analog connection right now, especially in a fast, very digital world," said Roxy Owens, founder of the lifestyle brand and home décor company [Society Social](#). "When things feel uncertain, there's a natural tendency to revisit the things that brought us happiness. For so many people, that's games."



The right piece "Pause Life, Play Games" furniture collection from Society Social and the photographer, Nick Mele, balances function and style. Nick Mele

"We didn't want an overflowing shelf of ugly plastic games," said Dave Buck (a co-owner of Art of Play, with his twin brother, Dan Buck, and their friend, Adam Rubin). That's why the business partners try not to exceed 30-40 games and puzzles in their two-bedroom Boise rental at any given time.

The result is a space that Mr. Buck said "sparks your curiosity. There is something on every shelf, on every surface, to introduce you to something new that you might not have been familiar with before."



The firm, Workstead, commissioned Blatt Billiards to create game tables for Bergen, a new residential building in Brooklyn, N.Y. Gieves Anderson

Style and play also commingle at [Bergen](#), a new residential building in Brooklyn. The firm, [Workstead](#), designed the interiors, including a game room, and commissioned local company, [Blatt Billiards](#), to create tables and furniture in warm wood tones. "We wanted to avoid a sea of mismatched furniture," said Ryan Mahoney, a Workstead partner and creative director.

Aesthetics are an especially important consideration when a game room is in a highly trafficked area in a home. That's the case with the Dallas home office of Megan Jett Trottier, founder and chief executive of [Oh My Mahjong](#), which produces stylish mahjong tiles, mats and tablecloths. It's where Ms. Trottier works, displays products, and hosts mahjong games. She collaborated with Dallas-based interior designer, [Ro Rynd](#), on the space, which includes a small seating area, game area (with a custom lacquer table), and a burl wood dining room table that she uses as a desk. Behind the desk, an accent wall clad in Thibaut Mystic Garden fabric lends drama.



The mahjong table in the home office of Megan Jett Trottier, chief executive of Oh My Mahjong in Dallas. Green Saver

The whimsy and sophistication are fitting for a space centered around mahjong. The game can be an outlet for creative visual expression, said Ms. Trottier, who founded her company during the pandemic. Ms. Trottier said she knows women who own as many as 17 mahjong sets, using them to compose what she calls "tileescapes" (the mahjong version of tablescapes). Hosts coordinate their game sets, tabletop décor and even the cocktails they serve. "Mahjong is becoming this beautiful way of hosting — not just slapping a game on a table," she said.



Jackie Moy, the owner of Greenwich Mahjong Club, in the new mahjong room in her home in Greenwich, Conn. via Alchemy

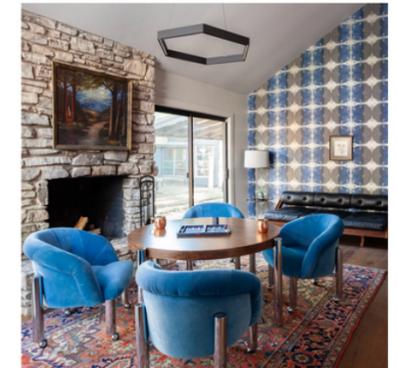
Jackie Moy, owner of [Greenwich Mahjong Club](#), recently worked with the design firm, [Alchemy](#), to outfit a mahjong room in her home in Greenwich, Conn. The space includes an antique Mandarin-style chest, Chinese Chippendale chairs, and a pagoda-top étagère displaying an heirloom mahjong set. "Players in town can gather around the table, bring their own sentimental mahjong sets, and share the stories behind them," Ms. Moy said.

But a space designated for play need not be large or elaborate. Ms. Ryne suggested creating a multipurpose room, like Ms. Trottier's office, with areas for work and play. She also recommended repurposing an underused area, like a formal living room.



Pull-apart tables can be separated for game play or combined for large family meals, as in this dining room by Morgante Wilson Architects. Werner Straube Photography

"Dining rooms are well-suited to do double duty as a space for cards and other games," said K. Tyler, a partner at [Morgante Wilson Architects](#) in Evanston, Ill. Ms. Tyler said her firm sometimes incorporates pull-apart tables, which can be separated for game play or combined for large meals and gatherings.



Erin Williamson, a decorator in Austin, Texas, created this retro, screen-free game room for a client. Erin Williamson

[Erin Williamson](#), a designer in Austin, Texas, said she sees game rooms overtaking home bars, as drinking alcohol declines in popularity. For a male client, she designed such a space, outfitted with board games, a record console and poker table. "There are zero screens throughout. It's a place to unplug and reconnect on a human level," Ms. Williamson said. "We kept the finishes dark and moody to give it an after-work vibe. This is where you go to chill out and have good old-fashioned fun."