

Use that formal living room

BY ELAINE WILLIAMSON

If you are like most homeowners, your formal living room is useful for one primary thing: accumulating dust. Originally, formal living rooms were spaces in which special guests were entertained. However, as modern-day life has become more casual, so have our living spaces. Friends come in through the front door and are escorted to the family room, bypassing the formal living room all together.

That leaves you with a wasted space that can cost a mint to decorate. There are an endless number of ways to use this room that would increase its value to your family - and your home's value overall. Your options depend primarily on this room's location in your home.

- If the living room is directly in front of the front door, the formal living room would be well suited to convert into a library or a reading den. In addition to reclaiming the functionality of the room, you would have a place to store your family's books that tend to accumulate and clutter shelves all over the house. You might also consider turning it into a music lounge, where residents and guests alike might go to listen to, and play, music. In each of these situations, the room's aesthetic and functionality



would still be suitable for its prominent location in the house, while also increasing its utility.

- Another popular idea is to use the larger living room space, which often has a majestic fireplace and windows, as the formal dining room, with a larger and

more elegant table, sideboard or butler and other appropriate furnishings. The smaller formal dining space can then be utilized as a cozy and intimate reading den or sitting room where you can still have coffee or tea with special visitors. This smaller dining space can also be

converted into a functional home office.

- Your number of options expand greatly the less the formal living room is visible. It can be transformed into a media or theater room, which has become incredibly popular, a billiard room and bar, a children's play room or even an exercise or craft room. The best room to convert into a media room would have doors and very few windows. Of course, if your house has an open floor plan, you can easily add doors and use heavy window coverings to block out the light. For the other usage alternatives, you would likely want to add doors to preserve the room's privacy or hide its clutter. Adding doors is an easy alteration that would also greatly increase the options available for the room - and the room's resale potential at large.

Today, a "living room" is what a homeowner makes of it. The days of formal living in one's own home and wasted square footage have predominantly passed. Whichever option you choose, rejoice in your reclaimed living space!

Luxury interiors expert Elaine Williamson is the principal of Elaine Williamson Designs - a full service, award-winning firm specializing in high end custom interior design for luxury residences, high rise properties, and commercial establishments. She's online at www.ElaineWilliamsonDesigns.com.

Make your backyard your own resort

BY ELAINE WILLIAMSON

Gone are the days of wrought iron patio furniture. Like the most posh Vegas resort with plush cabana accommodations, the same design sensibility is available for your own outdoor living space at home.

Think a tufted white leather sofa won't work outside? Think again!

Simply spray with a hose when needed and, voila, let the party begin.

Outdoor fire elements are also trending this year in a big way. Glass boxes with eco-friendly fire burn elegantly through the night as you entertain your guests in your fully furnished outdoor living room!

For a study the white hot trend of "backyard resort living," consider a residential pool and cabana project I recently designed.

This 7,200-square-foot home belongs to a couple with five children who were ready to add a pool and cabana to their otherwise large empty backyard. I was brought in to design all exterior layouts and finishes as well as fully design and appoint the cabana.

The foundation of this resort-esque backyard begins with a three-tone stamped "flagstone" concrete with an Oklahoma flagstone coping. The back of the pool area is surrounded in boulders, as is the oversized hot tub that is focuses front and center on a 52" flat screen television.

Two fire pits flank each side of a grotto

waterfall feature, and a full size fireplace with seating area sits opposite the pool and a winding covered walkway with flagstone wainscoting and brick that matches the main house and cabana.

As the owners entertain often, an outdoor kitchen was added close to the main house with granite countertops, a flagstone base, built in refrigerator and top-end grill with custom vent hood.

The new 2,500-square-foot cabana opens fully to its own covered porch via a Nana glass wall system. The cabana features 20 x 20 tile floors with "wood" tile insets to maintain a casual yet elegant feel. The primary focal point of the cabana living room is a dry stacked stone fireplace with stacked and laid hearth, which serves as extra seating and a podium of sorts. A home theater system wall also enhances the cabana's main living room.

The cabana also boasts a fully functional kitchen with a copper backsplash, and an Advantium oven, dishwasher, double sink and refrigerator. The lunch bar feature Saturnia granite with a dry stacked based to continue the rustic flow. Oil rubbed bronze fixtures are utilized throughout, while colorful, yet simple draperies add a touch of softness.

Also notable to this project is the steam room located in the back of the cabana. This steam shower has slate walls, ceiling and floors, and also features a metal focal point design along to back wall for visual



interest. The cabana's full bath also includes a walk in shower and vanity area with walls covered in Venetian plaster for durability, and split-face tile on the wall below the chair rail. A crystal chandelier adds a touch of elegance and glamour to the space.

This backyard renovation was not only for the humans, but for the resident's dogs as well. A special dog room was, in fact, constructed - fully tiled from floor to ceiling in

slate. In this space, the dogs now benefit from their own water faucet as well as central air conditioning and heating.

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