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Family **Matters**

Move out the clutter to make room for family.

These days, families have perfected the art of multitasking: afternoons spent shuttling between soccer practice, piano lessons, volunteer projects and work. Family time is more limited than ever, so many families have said "so long" to formal living rooms, opting for more casual family spaces instead. We're not talking about cluttered and busy romper areas but rooms that can easily transform into a spot fit for entertaining.

Kass & Associates, an architecture firm based in Philadelphia, has come up with a sophisticated yet economical plan for a den that's devoted to the entire family. Rather than using the room as a catchall for individual pursuits, the space places an emphasis on socializing and family time. To create a room like this in your own home, first think about your family's interests and hobbies. What is it that you like to do together? If you're a bunch of bookworms, then you'll want plenty of reading lamps, while movie buffs will want indirect lighting for movie-theater ambience. In this case, the homeowners wanted a place to display their art, and so Kass placed windows in the corners of the room, freeing up wall space. The result is a living room casual enough for the children to enjoy movies with friends. (But the space is refined enough to allow grown-up entertaining, too.)

Before you begin redesigning your living room, it's important to determine what furniture you'll need. "Most rooms don't require that much," says Betty Kim, a Philadelphia-based interior designer on HGTV's *Mission: Organization* and *My First Place*. "You need a place to sit, a place to set your coffee and a place to store things." A sofa that's scaled to fit the room is most important, and Kim suggests picking one that's appropriate for the size of your family. Choose a fabric in a neutral tone so that it can be relocated if needed, and look for a material that's machine washable and stain-resistant, such as micro-fiber and micro-suede.

"Keep the room really simple, without too many trinkets or things that kids can break or spill," Kim says. Every family has had its share of mishaps. She recommends a coffee table constructed of a heavy wood (nothing made of glass), a streamlined entertainment center and casual, comfortable pillows for the kids. "When you entertain, bring out the nice things, such as trays and candles," she says.

There's still one more danger when it comes to your family room: clutter. Messy piles of papers and junk can turn your otherwise sophisticated den into a jumbled and very unstylish space. In this living room, the all-important television is housed in a built-in entertainment center that anchors the space and provides a place to store books, DVDs and other objects. "Minimize what the family room is used for and you'll keep clutter out," Kim says. "Devote it to spending time together as a family." That means the toys and video games stay out or remain stored away when not in use. (The same goes for home office equipment.) After all, everyone needs a little break from multitasking once in a while. —*Rebecca Harper*