

Spaces within Spaces

Thoughtfully designed nooks offer refuge and comfort in the hustle and bustle of larger rooms

BY MARK HUTKER

The houses we build are meant for family gathering. Increasingly, that means creating hybrid spaces that can accommodate large groups when the whole family is present but that also feel comfortable for just Mom and Dad. The key is to create spaces within spaces—nooks and recesses with their own unique attributes that create intimacy in bigger rooms.

Inhabiting these spaces can be very pleasing. Being half in and half out of a public space fosters the feeling of being connected to people and activities while experiencing the shelter, relative privacy, or utility of a smaller, customized haven. We often make desirable berths out of edges and corners of rooms that might otherwise be underused, turning them into breakfast spots, window seats, and even playful hideouts for children. Purposeful lighting, custom cushions, and built-in storage bays are little luxuries that enhance the specific identities of these alcoves.

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4 DESIGN TOUCHSTONES

To inform the design of spaces within spaces, focus on four main aspects:

Scalability Can a large room have one or more smaller, ancillary spaces that function with the whole as well as independently?

Adjacency Do the rooms relate to one another in ways that make sense for a variety of inhabitants and activities?

Material and thematic connection How will the smaller spaces relate to the larger ones?

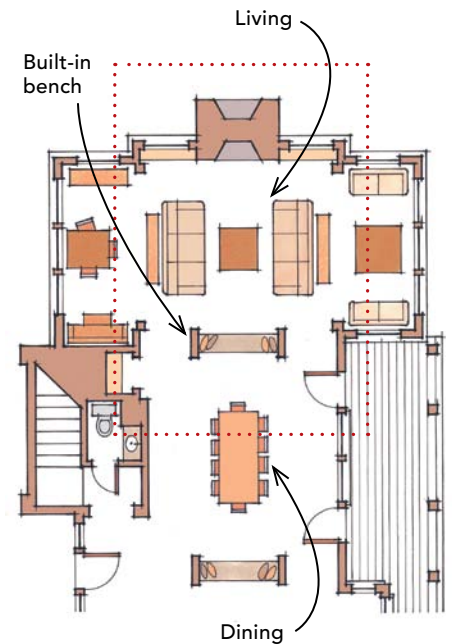
Right-sizing Does the room's size foster the kinds of activities it is designed for?



Great-room island

The clients who commissioned this great room wanted a space that would be comfortable for both large family gatherings and intimate weekends. Vaulted ceilings and two stories of windows bring light and openness to the living room, making it a dynamic space for entertaining. A lower, wood-paneled ceiling gives the

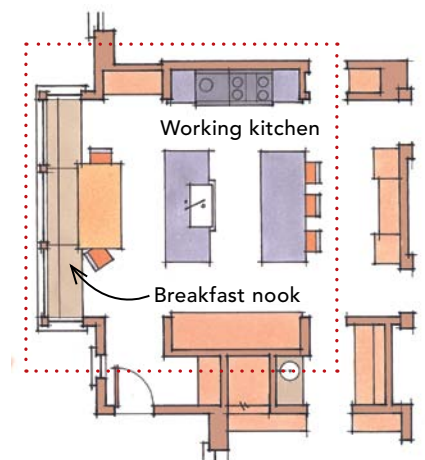
dining area a more intimate atmosphere for meals. The built-in bench nestled between the living and dining areas takes this intimacy to an even smaller scale, providing a harbor that's perfect for a nap or additional living-room seating when needed. Clear wood trim helps to link all three spaces.





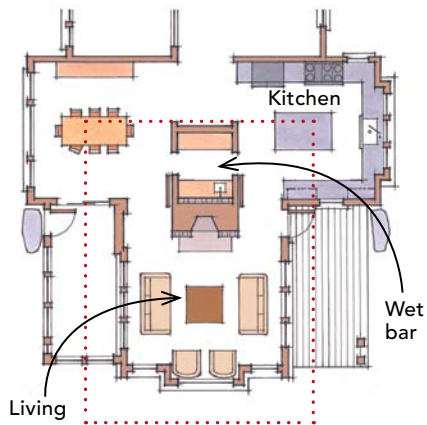
Cooking and eating

This farmhouse kitchen is broken into several different spaces that are thematically linked by shapes yet separated by material choices. Two large islands and a niche for the custom range create distinct, rectangular work zones. To create a visual link between these zones, the same stone is used for their counters. A rectangular, weathered-wood dining table breaks materially from the other zones, suggesting a shift in purpose: from the work of preparing meals to relaxing and eating. Scaled for conversation and comfort, the table and a custom bench occupy a nook that is surrounded on three sides by windows. Timber framing traverses the entire kitchen ceiling, in simple spans across the working areas and in a more elaborate pattern above the dining nook.



Hearth and bar

The focal point of this home's great room is a central fireplace that allows circular movement between the great room and the kitchen and dining areas. A wet bar hidden behind the fireplace creates a sheltered eddy for private conversations. Fostering this sense of shelter at the wet bar



is a low pergola that contrasts with the high, timber-trussed ceilings of the overall space. Exposed stonework connects this interstitial space to the great room, while its cabinetry links it to the kitchen beyond.

