

THE RISE OF *INTIMATE* *ROOMS:* DESIGNING SPACES THAT GROUND US

by MARIAM ABOUTAAM



As homes have evolved over the last decade, open-concept living became synonymous with modern design. Larger sightlines, fewer walls and shared spaces were celebrated for how they brought families together. But as our lives have grown more layered, I'm seeing a renewed appreciation for rooms that do the opposite; spaces that offer focus, immersion and retreat.

Today's homeowners are asking for rooms that feel purposeful rather than performative. Whether within a large home or a compact footprint, there's a growing desire to carve out intimate spaces that feel intuitive to everyday living. These are the rooms where we gather, work, lounge and disconnect. They may be smaller in scale, but they are often the most intentional.

Dens, gaming rooms, studies and secondary lounge spaces are no longer afterthoughts. They're being designed with just as much care as kitchens and primary living areas. What sets them apart is how they function. Built-in millwork plays a central role here, creating structure and efficiency while reducing visual clutter. Custom shelving, integrated desks, concealed storage and media walls allow these rooms to feel composed and calm, even when they serve multiple purposes.

In gaming and media rooms, thoughtful built-ins help manage technology seamlessly. Consoles, screens, speakers and wiring can be fully integrated, allowing the room to feel immersive rather than chaotic. Comfortable seating, layered lighting and controlled acoustics turn these spaces into true experiences that are designed to be used, not just seen.

Studies and workspaces are also being reimaged. Instead of isolated offices that feel rigid, many homeowners are opting for flexible rooms that transition easily from workday to evening. A built-in desk paired with lounge seating, closed cabinetry and adaptable lighting allows the space to function as

both a productive workspace and a relaxed retreat.

Furniture selection is key in these environments. Purposeful pieces, such as sectionals with deeper seats, swivel chairs, banquettes and upholstered benches encourage longer use and greater comfort. Scale matters more than ever. Oversized furniture can overwhelm a smaller room, while thoughtfully proportioned pieces create intimacy and ease.

While colour isn't the primary focus in these rooms, it does play a supporting role. Deeper, more enveloping tones help reinforce a sense of containment, particularly when used consistently across walls, millwork or ceilings. When combined with texture and materiality, these palettes soften the space and allow furnishings and built-ins to take centre stage.

What I find most compelling about this shift is its emotional honesty. These rooms acknowledge that modern living requires balance. We still value openness and connection, but we also recognize the need for spaces that support concentration, play and rest. Intimate rooms offer that counterpoint within the home.

Designing intimate spaces is about intention. It's about understanding how rooms are used throughout the day and giving them the structure to support that use gracefully. As we continue to rethink how our homes serve us, these quieter, more purposeful rooms are becoming essential, not as luxuries, but as necessities for modern living.



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DESIGN TIPS FOR INTIMATE SPACES

- **Design for function first.** Define how the room will be used most often (work, gaming, lounging or a combination) and let that purpose guide every decision.
- **Use built-ins to create calm.** Integrated storage, desks and media walls reduce clutter and help smaller rooms feel intentional and composed.
- **Choose furniture that invites you to stay.** Prioritize comfort and proportion. Deep seating, upholstered pieces and flexible layouts support longer, more meaningful use.
- **Layer lighting thoughtfully.** Combine ambient, task and accent lighting to adapt the space from daytime use to evening retreat.
- **Let colour support the mood.** Richer tones work beautifully in enclosed spaces, especially when paired with texture, but they should enhance the room, not overpower it.