

The Ultimate Great Room By Jason Landau

The heart of a 21st-century house—a wide-open space, serving many functions, that’s ideally suited for entertaining and daily family life

The term “great room” denotes an area within a home that merges the functions of several traditional spaces into one unified space.

A busy family of five (six, including the dog) in Riverside, Connecticut, asked me to design the ultimate great room. They wanted a casual but elegant space that would include a kitchen, a family room, and an informal dining area. The space had to allow circulation between the mud-room, formal dining room, butler’s pantry, foyer, playroom, back stairway, and rear patio.

The key to the success of this great room was early collaboration among the members of the project team, including architect Richard Hein, to get the size and shape of the space defined. My 20 years’ experience in architecture and interior design have given me unique insight into residential space planning. (To learn more about my firm, Amazing Spaces LLC, visit www.amazingspacesllc.com, or call 203.542.0936.) For this family, the kitchen was to be the central hub that both defined the individual areas and unified the great room.

The design includes three separate islands. The middle island is both the main preparation area (complete with second sink) and an eat-in-kitchen counter. The other two islands border the family room and the dining area. They are flanked by columns that help differentiate the various spaces but keep them connected visually. The islands’ borders play a dual role: one side of each border bears kitchen cabinets while the other side is treated as a furniture piece, including a media center and shelving.

To create the room’s casual elegance, I designed cabinetry with furniture details and selected major appliances that could be disguised with matching front panels to lessen their impact on the room. Materials in soft hues and varying textures were chosen and repeated throughout the room so that no one area was visually stronger than the other. This allowed the lighting design to give each area its individual character. Wide-plank pine floors tie the whole design together. ❖



1. China hutch cleverly conceals the entrance into the butler's pantry.
2. Architectural columns help to define the kitchen area while keeping it visually open to the rest of the great room.
3. The seating at the teak-and-cypress island invites friends and family into the action kitchen.
4. A bead-board ceiling unifies all the individual spaces, including parts of the kitchen.
5. The family-room TV is hidden within the cabinetry on this island.
6. Appliance garages help to conceal small appliances (the coffeemaker, the toaster oven, the microwave).
7. The refrigerator, freezer, and dishwasher are disguised with matching front panels.



The great room is divided into three sections: the dining room (OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP), the family room (OPPOSITE PAGE, BOTTOM), and the kitchen (ABOVE).