REAL ESTATE • LUXURY HOMES

The Parents Building Bowling Alleys and Wellness Spas to Keep Their Kids Home

Wealthy homeowners are pouring millions into pricey perks for their older children, but even arcades and pickleball courts don't always keep them around

By Sarah Paynter | Photography by Chet Strange for WSJ

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Before a homecoming dance in September, 28 teenagers gathered in 16-year-old Chiara Cooper's Colorado basement, which is tricked-out with arcade games like a snowmobile-racing simulator and a Guardians of the Galaxy pinball machine. The roughly 2,500-square-foot space was plenty big for the gathering, which turned out to be almost three times the size anticipated by Chiara's dad, Jonathan Cooper, and her stepmom, Amy Cooper.

Sipping on Spindrifts as Journey's "Don't Stop Believin'" pumped through the home's speakers, they pulled up the lyrics on the big-screen television for a singalong, said Chiara.

In 2021, the Coopers spent about $3 million redesigning the house outside Denver with these types of gatherings in mind, hiring Rodwin Architecture and Skycastle Construction for the job.



The Coopers' basement has a pool table.



For how often the children use the trampoline, it was the Coopers' 'best return on investment,' said Jonathan.

Jonathan, the 50-year-old chief executive of the mining company Veruna Minerals, and Amy, 52, have a blended family of four children, ages 10 to 16.

"We wanted to design the house in a way where the kids could hang out here and have fun," said Amy.





The Cooper family at home with their Bernedoodle, Rocky.

Wealthy homeowners across the country are spending millions on amenities designed to draw their teenage and adult children back home, designers said. The hope is that features like golf simulators, juice bars, vending machines, and dance studios—often costing

hundreds of thousands of dollars—will encourage more family time. Many are finding, however, that salons and pickleball courts only go so far, especially when long distances are involved.

“You can’t force your adult children to visit, but you can make home a very easy place to say yes to,” said interior designer Kristen Kinsella of Soucie Horner Design Collective in Chicago. Her clients have requested karaoke rooms and wellness centers for their children with $300,000 budgets, she said.



The Coopers’ basement also has a cocktail arcade table with Ms. Pac-Man.



Rocky sometimes joins Che, Chiara, Ayla and Axel Cooper for games.

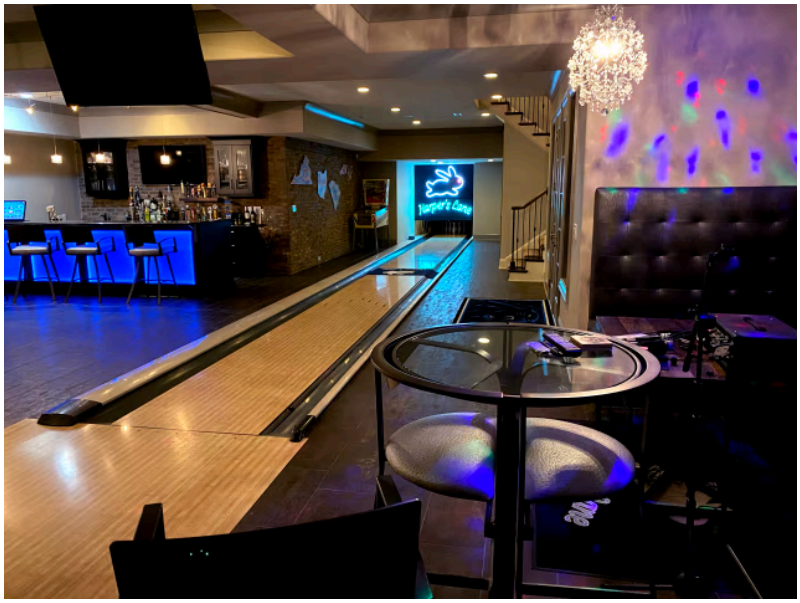
Architect Wells Megalli of the New York City-based firm Person Place Thing said she’s had clients install screening rooms, game rooms, craft rooms, athletic facilities and spas for their children. Ironically, however, Megalli said for teens at least, these types of specialized amenities are usually unnecessary.

“Most kids, even wealthy ones, are pretty thrilled with great food, a comfy and casual space to hang out in that is big enough to host a couple friends, and the ability to put on their own music or show,” said Megalli.

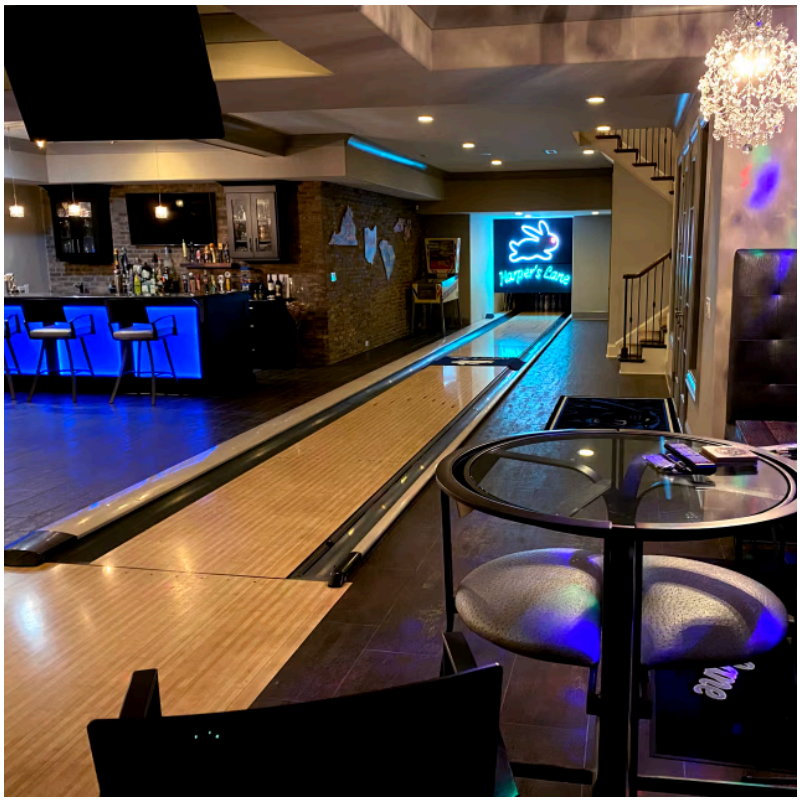
‘Free but bougie’

Jennifer Howard, a 54-year-old retired executive, has three children ages 15 to 24 with her husband Mike Howard, a 56-year-old manufacturer’s representative.

At their primary home in Marvin, N.C., the couple installed a roughly $100,000 bowling lane they call “Harper’s Lane” after their 15-year-old daughter, Harper. The space has a custom white neon bunny sign, a nod to Harper’s love for bunnies as a child. Outfitted with about seven televisions and built-in banquettes, Harper uses the space to spend time with her friends, who like to bowl and watch sports over bowls of chili, said Jennifer.



The bowling lane has a commercial ball return system. HOWARD FAMILY



The bowling lane has a commercial ball return system. HOWARD FAMILY

“We want our kids with us as often as possible, and even their friends,” said Jennifer. The house cost about $2.5 million to build in 2015.

Their 19-year-old daughter Lilly, who is in college, likes to host spring break parties and sleepovers with her sorority sisters at the family’s beach house in Hilton Head, S.C., which the Howards built for about $3 million in 2023. The firm J. Banks Design gave the house a bright, airy, colorful look to create an Instagram-worthy space, said Jennifer.

“It’s really nice when they have some downtime to be able to have a place to get away that’s free for them,” said Jennifer. “Free, but bougie.”







The Howards' Hilton Head house is decorated with golden light fixtures, high-end wallpapers and custom drapery. KATIE CHARLOTTE LYBRAND

It isn't always easy to guess what amenities children will gravitate toward. When they downsized from a single-family home, retired executive Conrad Wredberg, 85, and his wife, Norma Wredberg chose a unit at the Ritz-Carlton Residences, Estero Bay in Bonita Springs, Fla. Part of the attraction was the building's "teen room" with video and arcade games, which they hoped would attract visits from their total of eight grandchildren, ages 10 to 22, who live in California, New York, Michigan and Georgia. They liked that there are also guest units in the building for visiting family members.

The Wredbergs paid $4.225 million for the three-bedroom, roughly 3,680-square-foot condo, moving in this spring.



Norma and Conrad Wredberg at the marina. WREDBERG FAMILY

But on a recent visit, Norma's grandchildren only visited the teen room once. It turned out they were more focused on arranging a fishing trip including Norma and two of her grandsons through the building's on-site marina, said Norma. When they returned, staff fileted the redfish and snapper they caught.

"It was probably one of our most fun times we've had," said Norma, who enjoys fishing "as long as I don't have to touch the bait or touch the fish."

'I don't think they need a slide'

Homeowners often have to figure out how to adapt their living spaces as their children and grandchildren age. Sometimes, that means downsizing or a change of location.

The Coopers, for example, listed their house—which they bought for $2.425 million in 2019—in June for $7 million. They are moving to Boulder, Colo., where their children can have more independence thanks to public transportation and bike trails.

Now that they are older, "we want to be back in an environment where they can venture out a little more on their own," said Amy.







The Migons' house has a pool, sports courts, an indoor slide, a pool table and a play loft with a climbing rope. JOSUE MEDINA FOR BROWN HARRIS STEVENS; LUXHUNTERS FOR BROWN HARRIS STEVENS

Outside Miami, in Pinecrest, Fla., Todd and Samantha Migon spent about $8 million around 2020 building a house with a dance area and play loft with a climbing rope for their three children. Todd, a 51-year-old construction administration manager at Royal Caribbean, said he spent $60,000 to build pickleball and basketball courts, and over the course of eight months, he hand-carved a black-walnut slide that descends from a recreation room, he said.

Their children loved to spend time there, especially during the pandemic, he said. But now, they are in their 20s and spread out in Utah, San Francisco and Hawaii. The Migons have realized the roughly 10,000-square-foot house is now too large for them. The six-bedroom house is listed for $6.45 million, he said.

When they sell it, they plan to buy one or two smaller houses with amenities their kids will enjoy as adults, like a boat, he said.

"I don't think they need a slide," said Todd.

Corrections & Amplifications

An earlier version of this article featured a photo incorrectly labelled as the Ritz-Carlton Residences, Estero Bay. The photo depicted a property not mentioned in the article and has been removed. Corrected on Nov. 9.

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Sarah Paynter is a reporter covering luxury residences for The Wall Street Journal's Mansion section. Her stories follow the trends and money behind high-end living. Sarah frequently covers premier listings and sales across the U.S. and internationally, from Bucks County, Pa., to the British Virgin Islands. Her features spotlight design craze…