

PORTFOLIO

# GAME ON!

Designer Debbie Wiener spruces up  
a home where sports take center stage



BY SHARON JAFFE DAN  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY GREG POWERS



Debbie Wiener (above, on right with client Warrenetta Baker) found color inspiration in the home's salvaged red barn door. A vaulted gym (below) complete with climbing wall opens to the main living room (left). The American Leather sofa and Slobproof! Furniture side chairs and chaises were chosen for durability.





Children's artwork hangs above a family heirloom in the foyer (above). "Indestructible" Crypton fabric on the upholstered pieces (opposite, top) withstands the rigors of two boys and two dogs. Larry Baker (left) serves his son Henry (on left) and friend Matthew a snack in the open kitchen, then the boys hit the game room (below, left).

To say that play space takes on a whole new meaning in the Bethesda home of Larry and Warrenetta Baker would be an understatement—it practically takes over the entire house. After settling into the 1980s-era home for a few months, the Bakers decided that the vaulted room off the foyer felt too cold and impersonal for a living or dining room, so they took a leap and converted it into a play space complete with a climbing wall and regulation-height basketball hoop for the enjoyment of sons Henry, 12, and Calvin, 15. The action spills over into a sunroom housing ping-pong, pool and foosball tables. And in fair weather, a swimming pool, trampoline and tennis court retooled into a skateboarding course attract teenage visitors to the backyard like bees to honey.

Since moving in, the Bakers have renovated and enlarged their "unworkable" kitchen and fixed a number of structural problems. They also replaced worn wooden

**INTERIOR DESIGN:** DEBBIE WIENER, Designing Solutions, Silver Spring, Maryland. **KITCHEN RENOVATION:** DON WRESCHKE, Kitchen Engineering, Crownsville, Maryland.

decking around the pool with a flagstone terrace. But with all the fun underway, little thought was given to décor.

Finally tired of boring beige walls, the Bakers called upon interior designer Debbie Wiener to help them choose paint colors and new furniture. Wiener took her cues from the home's bright red front door, which the previous owners had salvaged from a barn. "Warrenetta told me that she loved the barn door but thought the rest of the house was ugly," Wiener recalls. "I thought to myself, 'This is a really fun young couple,' and started showing them brighter colors." She proposed Benjamin Moore's Jalapeño Pepper green for the living room "because I knew that room was all about the outdoors and views to the pool," Salsa Dancing red in the kitchen, sport court and game room to echo the red front door; and accents of Concorde Ivory as a soothing balm to the bolder shades.

Though her painter was "scared to death" of the combination, Warrenetta Baker instantly fell in love with the bright new look. "My office is battleship gray," explains the corporate tax attorney. "I wanted to come home to something



totally different. The architecture in the house really didn't make sense to us, but Debbie did a fantastic job. We never would have thought of painting the walls in different colors but now the architecture makes sense."

Wiener took a practical approach in furnishing this home where two boys and two dogs have free reign, seeking low-maintenance, unbreakable items that would not be ruined by an errant football or impromptu wrestling match. "The number-one skill I find myself relying on," she says, "is my common sense. Will it clean up? Will it hold up? Will it be comfortable? The challenge was to select nothing that was breakable, nothing that couldn't get knocked over—and no glass."

The designer presented her clients with a number of stylish but sensible options, including pieces from her own line of furniture called Slobproof!, upholstered in "indestructible" fabric by Crypton that can be easily cleaned—even when "decorated" with permanent markers, olive oil and ketchup, as the Bakers can attest. For the open-plan main living space, the Bakers selected a durable sofa by American Leather. A pair of Slobproof! arm-



chairs and chaises on casters in bright accent colors complete the mix. Wiener also designed a custom dining table to be located near the kitchen, and surrounded it with comfortable chairs, also from her furniture line.

Playful pillows add further pops of color. “Color is camouflage,” explains Wiener. “Anyone who would put beige in their homes with kids and pets—it just doesn’t make sense. I’m always looking for well-priced items full of color.”

The kitchen was designed as command central for Larry Baker, a former Utah prosecutor who decided in 1999 that he would much rather be a full-time dad. “Our goal is that Larry can work in the kitchen and see the pool and have a view of everything. So the stove and the sink are all facing that way,” Warrenetta explains. An oversized island with bar stools on one side and two 30-inch stoves installed side by side creates an efficient spot for whipping up family meals or throwing a party.

Wiener also revamped the lower-level TV room. Her first order of business was removing the outdated white-painted brick mantel and mauve carpet. Then she created an accent wall of decorative stone. “The emphasis of the house is all outdoors,” she says, “so I really wanted to bring the outdoors in there.” The Bakers selected comfortable Ultrasuede and



New flagstone decking surrounds the pool (top). The boys have a dip then enjoy skateboarding on the converted tennis court (inset). The lower-level TV room (above) now boasts a decorative stone accent wall.

leather seating and Wiener created a playful round rug. The cozy space is now perfect for enjoying TV, xBox, Wii and movies on a seven-foot screen.

The Bakers have no regrets about losing a formal living room—or their traditional tennis court—to create play spaces for their sons. “The climbing wall room gets used more than any other space in the

house,” says Warrenetta. “The kids get a lot of exercise in the wintertime, and I like that there’s nothing breakable nearby so I don’t have to stress. It’s a bit of a kid party house, which makes it a lot of fun for us too.” ❖

*Greg Powers is a photographer based in Arlington, Virginia.*