

DAILY NEWS

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YOUR HOME

House of Games

Forget home theaters — \$80,000 pool tables are all the rage in the luxury world



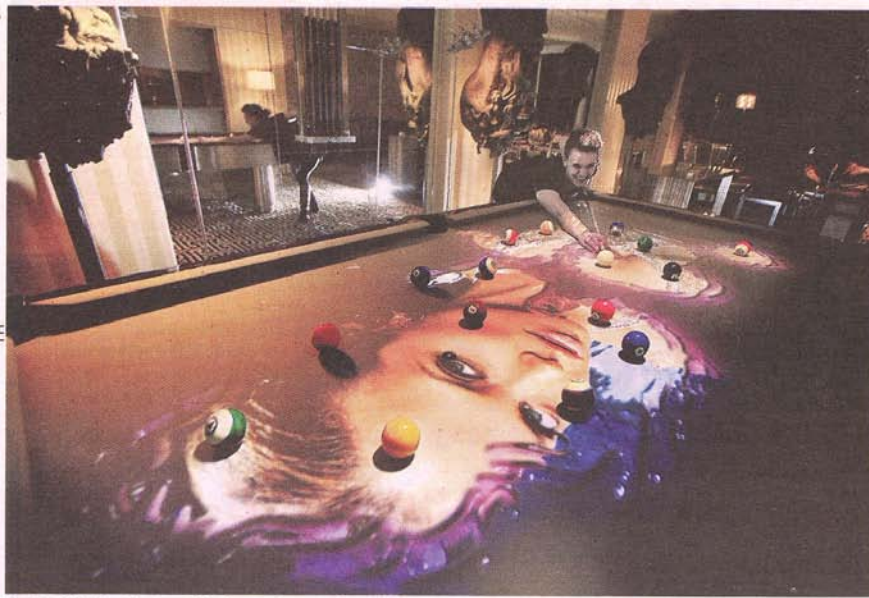
"Entourage's" Adrian Grenier, Rex Lee and Perrey Reeves play table tennis on the \$55,000 table at the W South Beach Hotel

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The games people play just got a lot more expensive and innovative. Even in one of the toughest economies in half a century, luxury shoppers and designers are stepping it up when it comes to traditional entertainment available for the home.

Price is no object. In the past six months the home-entertainment sector has seen the rollout an \$80,000 pool table, watched as nine of 10 sculptural table-tennis tables sold for more than \$40,000 each, and witnessed the creation of a \$55,000 hand-crafted chess set made by an ancient Japanese carving method. Buyers haven't blinked an eye. A Las Vegas hotel gobbled up the pool table, art lovers purchased every edition of the table-tennis table, and museums and art galleries are preparing to showcase the chess sets (there are three of them) around the world.

Whether the recession has made those with money more apt to stay and play at home or has made the super-rich more prone to say, "What the heck," functionality and art have come together to spell glamorous recreation in today's home sector. Here's a look at three recent games that stand up next to any Gulfstream V, yacht or penthouse. You reading this, Diddy?



The CueLight by Obscura Digital, seen here at the Esquire "Ultimate Bachelor Pad" in SoHo, retails for \$80,000

THE CUE LIGHT POOL TABLE

Front and center at Esquire's recent "Ultimate Bachelor Pad" at SoHo Mews, the CueLight from Obscura Digital combines traditional pool play with interactive technology that tracks the balls as they roll around, revealing a hidden image on the table's felt. An overhead projector splashes the image (say an Esquire cover of Halle Berry in a bikini, orange flames, or trippy liquid) on the table and everywhere a ball rests or rolls. The result is a futuristic game of billiards that rivets attention.

"Today's ultimate bachelors work hard, are dedicated to their careers, and pay attention to their finances," says Esquire publisher Stephen Jacoby, who put the show house held at SoHo Mews together and keeps a keen eye on the buying habits of today's young affluent male. "He deserves to enjoy himself. Games like this, that no one else has, give him pride. He wants an environment at home that has the latest in innovation, art and pop culture. This is it."

The pool table isn't the only thing coming from Obscura Digital that's wowing folks in the home sector. The San Francisco-based company with a downtown New York office is working on a project called "Home Immersion" where a small 360-degree projector can change the content on any home walls.

"One minute you can be sitting in a

jungle or a really cool rainforest, the next you can be in the middle of a surfing beach in Bali or in the Tuscan countryside," says the company's CEO, Patrick Connolly. He notes that the company's main business is making marketing and consumer tools for Fortune 500 companies such as Google, Visa or Hewlett-Packard. "We're trying to revolutionize how people interact with computers and data. The tone of your voice can soon change the music in a room or what's on television. We're finding better ways to use a computer than a mouse or keyboard."

The cost of the Cuelight, one of which was bought by the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas, comes to \$80,000 without the pool table. In Esquire's case, it would cost buyers \$32,500 more for the table made with Makassar ebony wood and stainless steel legs by Blatt Billiards. Go to obscuradigital.com and esquiresoho.com for more information.

'THE FUTURE WILL BE CHROME' TABLE-TENNIS TABLE

New York landscape architect Nathalie Karg admits she is no decorator. When clients asked her to fill their gardens and spaces with interesting outdoor objects, she wasn't sure where to start. Interested in modern art, Karg thought why not commission emerging contemporary artists to come up with ideas for functional objects for the outdoors. Her Cumulus Studios has since produced a birdhouse, tire swing, firepit (in a mirror-polished oil drum), and regulation-size table-tennis table made of

mirror-polished stainless steel.

Conceived by Rirkrit Tiravanija, a Thai artist born in Argentina, the table is made from steel polished and brushed to the point where it becomes a reflective mirror surface. It was handcrafted in Berlin.

"I give artists carte blanche to do anything they want," says Karg, who notes all 10 table-tennis tables sold, the first five for \$45,000, the next four for \$55,000. "The only criteria? It had to be functional for the outdoors. When Rirkrit came up with the table, we had a feeling it would be a hit but no idea it would be this big so fast."

At an exhibit, the table caught the eye of interior designer Anna Busta and marketer Sarah Goodnow. Working on the "HBO 'Entourage' Bungalow" in conjunction with the launch of the W South Beach Hotel, the two jumped at the chance of putting the table in the bungalow's backyard.

"As soon as I saw it I knew we had to have it," says Goodnow, an account director in Manhattan with Civic Entertainment Group. "Who else besides the boys from 'Entourage' would have something as extravagant and over the top as this in their bungalow? It immediately became the centerpiece of the outdoor space. Everyone wanted to play."

Daytime playing can be a challenge, notes Goodnow, who reported seeing several balls at once in the bright sun. The table, though, gets better with time.

"The more you play on it the more marks it gets," says curator Karg. "Those marks start to look like little diamonds. It's absolutely magnificent, flashy and superminimal at the same time. Art col-



Gelman's three chess sets range in price from \$10,000 to \$55,000

lectors and people who love to play Ping-Pong bought it. This artist is known for community-based and interactive work. It's ironic how this does both."

Go to cumulus-studios.com for info. Calling table-tennis enthusiast Susan Sarandon — there's one table left.

GELMAN'S CHESS

Strange for a \$55,000 chess set, made from an ancient lacquer-carving method in a small corner of Japan, to be named after a one-word New Yorker of Russian

heritage under the age of 40. But Gelman, a world-renowned graphic and media artist who has designed campaigns for Nike and Apple and had work shown at the Museum of Modern Art, is anything but normal.

Who else would spend 10 months to design and oversee the creation of three chess sets by Yamanaka craftsmen and Kutani porcelain painters in the prefecture of Ishikawa? Gelman, who played the game as a child but was never obsessed, thought it the perfect way to show the world the precision of the local craftsmen, and at the same time preserve the importance of their handcrafted art.

"In the business of advertising and branding we try to make things so fast and cheap and cut corners," says Gelman, who sold the interest in his New York-based media company before setting up a base in Tokyo. "You realize in Japan, a very visual culture, that there is a different approach. This art comes from generations of trial and error. There is a connection to eternity in how they do things. This captures that."

Each chess piece is made employing the 400-year-old 12-step lacquer technique known as urushi. They are polished with charcoal, and use gold dust, silver plating, platinum leaf and washi paper finishes. They take six months to dry. One set is made using the Japanese porcelain painting technique called Kutani. It can be purchased locally at Felissimo Design House, a boutique and cooperative celebrating the collaboration of East and West in product design, at 10 W. 56th St. The sets range in price from \$10,000 to \$55,000.