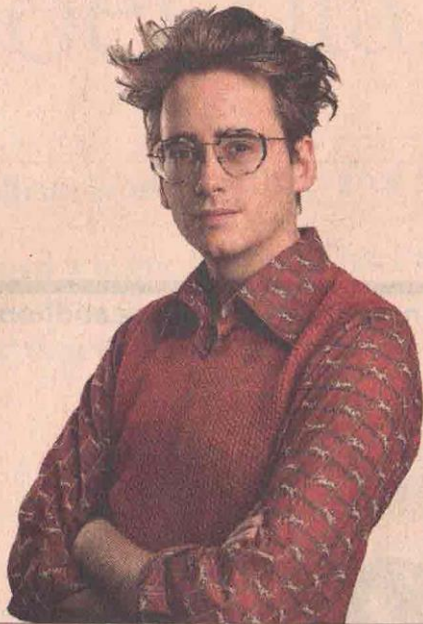


## House &amp; Home

# What to do with an empty room



**Luke Edward Hall**

## Readers' questions

**Since our youngest has left home, we have a games room that we don't know what to do with. I was thinking: a library, perhaps? Or a space for entertaining? What would you do?**

To have spare rooms: what luxury! Granted, we have a good amount of room out here in the country compared to our flat in London, which consists of a living room, a bedroom and a bathroom, but I still often dream of superfluous spaces. How would I transform an unused room? Well, top of my list has to be a dressing room.

I collect clothes, you see. I have a penchant for battered blazers, embroidered waistcoats and bold knitwear from the 1970s and 1980s. Some of these items I hardly ever wear, but they are beautiful and I don't wish to be parted from them.

I love the idea of a room lined completely with wardrobes, with fabric panelling, perhaps, and painted a very glossy cherry red or deep chocolate brown. I would want a thick carpet and an enormous ottoman in the middle of the room. (I am into needlepoint furniture at the moment, and love Max Rollitt's large coffee table design, pictured.) Finally, my waistcoats would have the space and surroundings they quite frankly deserve. One can dream.



Burns's own library in her 18th-century barn features a clever built-in bookcase, which also works as a secret door, opening into a hidden bathroom.

For further inspiration, look to the Antwerp home of the Belgian designer Gert Voorjans. I've always loved looking at pictures of his eclectic rooms. His sitting room-cum-library is stuffed with colour and texture, books, furniture and decorative items from around the globe, and his violet bedroom is one of my all-time favourite rooms: I adore the way, in one corner, shiny red shelves of books teeter over a cast-iron bath.

It would be fun to shop for library furniture: I would love large, handsome freestanding bookcases, such as the late 18th-century Irish pair currently available from Lorfords, with original brass grille in the doors. What else? A hugely comfortable armchair, of course. See Soane Britain's Panther Chair, which can be made with elegant loose covers.

Essentially, your future plans for this room should rest on your needs and what you enjoy doing. If you need a home for books, make a library; if you need a space to work in, turn it into a library-cum-office, and kit it out with a handsome desk. (A current favourite: a superb 1940s French panelled oak

As for your ex-games room, I very much like the idea of a library. We have a pair of low freestanding bookcases in our dining room and the books that don't fit in these (ie most of them) are stacked on chests of drawers, under tables and in piles close to beds and baths. I like the chaos. However, the splendid order of a room given over to books alone certainly appeals.

The interior decorator Emma Burns of Sibyl Colefax & John Fowler told House & Garden magazine that she likes a mix of fitted and freestanding shelving; and a library must be comfortable, with sofas, ottomans and window seats. I concur: if you choose to go down this route, make your new library a place you will want to lounge in. In a recent column on dining rooms I mentioned I like the idea of eating surrounded by books — perhaps you already have an agreeable dining room but, if not, this could be worth considering.

With a dressing room, my waistcoat would finally have the space and surroundings they frankly deserve