

A Touch

Class



From Alsip and Co. comes Canoe. The stylish board and oiled canvas dice bag invoke images of luxury boating. Available in cherry, mahogany or leather, games range in price from \$42 to \$85.

Games can be stylish, artistic—even luxe. • By Robert Haynes-Peterson

Games are a wonderful thing, whether they're handmade on construction paper, purchased at a mass-market retailer, picked up at a yard sale or received as a holiday gift. Sometimes, though, you want to spend a little more and take things up a notch—a special edition of your favorite boardgame, a present intended to be an heirloom or simply a decorative enhancement to your game room or living room. The July 2006 issue of *Knucklebones* highlighted the incredible “art games” of German designer Matthias Mauer. Designed from architectural drawings and crafted from the finest hardwoods, Mauer’s one-of-a-kind customized games can run up to \$20,000. But you needn’t break the bank to find upscale variations of your favorite pastimes.

Your Biggest Fan

Perhaps the most common reason to buy a luxury version of a classic game is because it’s your favorite. Whether you’re a tournament player, a weekend warrior or a collector, owning a special edition may not give you better gameplay than the set you’ve had since childhood, but the pieces will certainly feel nicer as they glide across the board.

Perhaps the most common examples of pricey games are chess, backgammon and mahjong, where tournament and exhibition boards (and pieces) can run several hundred dollars. Inlaid hardwoods, gold- and silver-capped playing pieces and intricate craftsmanship are all common in the better boards. The Metropolitan Museum of Art in Manhattan includes displays of intricately

carved chess sets going back hundreds of years, having graced some of the finest palaces and mansions in the world.

In America, the hallmark of better chess sets hail from the craftspeople of Drueke Co., based in Michigan. Boards (\$79.95–\$179.99) and pieces (\$49.99–\$136) can be purchased separately; sets are priced between \$124.99 and \$189.99. You’ll find yourself salivating over boards handcrafted from quality wood and premium chessmen carved from rosewood. (Check carrom.com or drueke.com for ordering and additional pricing information.)

Carrom Co. and Cambor Enterprises also market sleek classic game sets at all price levels. A small Cambor Champion Gammon set will put you back only \$30, while the company’s Sorrento 1 deluxe backgammon set goes for a whopping

\$1,100. While Cambor can boast Italian leather on many of its backgammon boards and handcrafted wood boards from various countries, Carrom and Drueke (now owned by Carrom) products are American made, proving “home-grown” can imply luxurious flair.

More than just the ancient “wargames” are available in aesthetically pleasing special editions, however. Countless anniversary editions of popular games have been released, usually featuring more intricate designs and better materials than simple injected plastic. Last year, Hasbro released the 70th Anniversary Edition of Monopoly (about \$40) featuring “upgraded” tokens, such as a stretch roadster for the racecar and a high heel for the shoe. Unique hotel and house designs, sparkling dice and retro-stylish board graphics are all housed in a shining game tin.

Mayfair Games also recently released a special edition of its remarkable flagship game *The Settlers of Catan*, commemorating the game’s

Right: Target offers “library editions” of popular games—including Yahtzee, Clue and Scrabble—for \$19.99 each.

Below: Game rooms can have a stylish edge with tables from Winning Solutions. Ranging from around \$500 to about \$800 (with chairs), the tables come in cherry, oak, mahogany and black matte finishes. Most include Scrabble, Monopoly and four classic boardgames.



tenth anniversary. The 3-D Special Edition set (\$380) features hand-painted three-dimensional playing pieces and landscape tiles, all stored in a handsome wood “treasure chest” that looks great closed or open to showcase the components.

On Display

Artistically appealing games date back to the ancient Egyptians, who created a number of stylish versions of Senet, including opulent designs reserved specifically for the pharaohs’ tombs to help them in their journey through the underworld (a successful “player” was thought to receive extra attention from the gods). These days, with the success of home makeover shows like *Trading Spaces* and *Design on a Dime*, the concept of maximizing space and decorating even the laundry room to the nines has become de rigueur. Whether you’ve got 800 or 8,000 square feet of living space, displaying attractive boardgames is a great way to show off a collection and give the room an erudite, active vibe.

Some games lend themselves immediately to display. Wooden abstract strategy games, like *Quarto* or *Cathedral*, are sculptural in design and tasteful in



presentation. Canoe, a new strategy/race game inspired by backgammon and chess, is crafted in cherry or mahogany veneer (or leather!) and will enhance any library, study or living room.

“What I tried to create initially was a way of reconnecting people, getting them away from their fast pace, televisions and BlackBerries,” says Canoe’s creator, Bruce Alsip. “I wasn’t necessarily going for a retro design look. But it definitely has a decorative element, and a few people have purchased the game to display it. One guy in Richfield, Conn., told me the game was going to go on display in a little drawing room he’d completed off his master bedroom, and an executive over at Starbucks says that one of his three Canoe games is out on his table at all times.” Available at canoegame.com, prices range from \$42 for the leather version to \$85 for the mahogany. A number of antique-style, canvas-and-leather storage/display satchels are also available.

Vintage and vintage reproduction games are also popular for display. In addition to their visual appeal, they evoke playful childhood memories or complement rustic, Victorian or Americana decors. Winning Solutions Inc. has been licensed to develop special editions and vintage reproductions of popular Hasbro games like *Scrabble*, *Monopoly*, *Clue*, *Risk*, *Stratego* and *Yahtzee*. Featuring retro graphics, specially designed tokens and decorative tins or boxes, the Hasbro vintage games—like the *Scrabble Premier Edition* (\$149) at Restoration Hardware and the *Wood Nostalgia Series* at Barnes & Noble (\$19.95)—are as visually engaging as they are pleasingly tactile.

They’re also great icebreakers. Walking into a room with an open gameboard, ready for play, is a direct invitation to compete in a manner that a silent Xbox will never quite compare. Just be sure to dust the pieces frequently!

Room to Play

Hand in hand with the concept of “games as interior design” is the significant rise in popularity of the game room. Whether incorporated into a new house, added on or carved out, “game rooms are hugely popular,” says Michael Doyle of Winning Solutions, which recently introduced a variety of game