

BEFORE + AFTER

An Interior Designer Drastically Transformed This Long Island Bowling Alley

Phillip Thomas pulled off the colorful reno with the help of the entire community

By Lauren Jones

Photography by Aydin Arjomand

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“We kept everything manual,” says interior designer Phillip Thomas. “It’s not motorized, so that means the pin setters you have to push with a foot pedal, and the ball return just uses gravity.”

For New York-based interior designer Phillip Thomas, the renovation of the Bellport Community Center’s bowling alley is a project that brims with nostalgia. He’s been visiting the charming village since he was just four years old, and when the opportunity arose to restore the 90-year-old alley, he knew it was one he couldn’t pass up.

“I sit on the board of a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) of the Bellport Village Program Fund, and every year we try to help the village execute projects they don’t necessarily have the budget for,” he says. The entire committee saw the promise in renovating the basement recreation area and bowling alley, and asked Phillip—the only designer on the committee—to oversee the entire project.

It's easy to fall in love with the charm of Bellport, located on Long Island's Great South Bay, which the designer states is a "wonderful town with a year-round community, with its own natural private beach and bucolic ferry. It's also been rated one of the top 10 seaside villages in the U.S." Throughout the year, it's common to see residents driving to the marina at the end of Bellport Lane paying "homage to the Great South Bay," he adds.



BEFORE: The alley was basically unusable, with no color, and paint chipping everywhere.



AFTER: There was a lot of heart and soul put into this project, and a ton of paint. “Sometimes it takes a lot of detail to make something look simple,” Phillip says. “That was the case here.”

But the community center, which was home to town meetings, the village theater, and the children’s summer camp, had fallen into disrepair, and Phillip realized it was time to revamp this important mainstay of the community.

“I am the youngest of three and remember going down to there in the mid-1980s,” he says. “I remember how big a part of the summer community that alley was.”



BEFORE: The recreation area was a jumbled space that didn't make full use of the area.



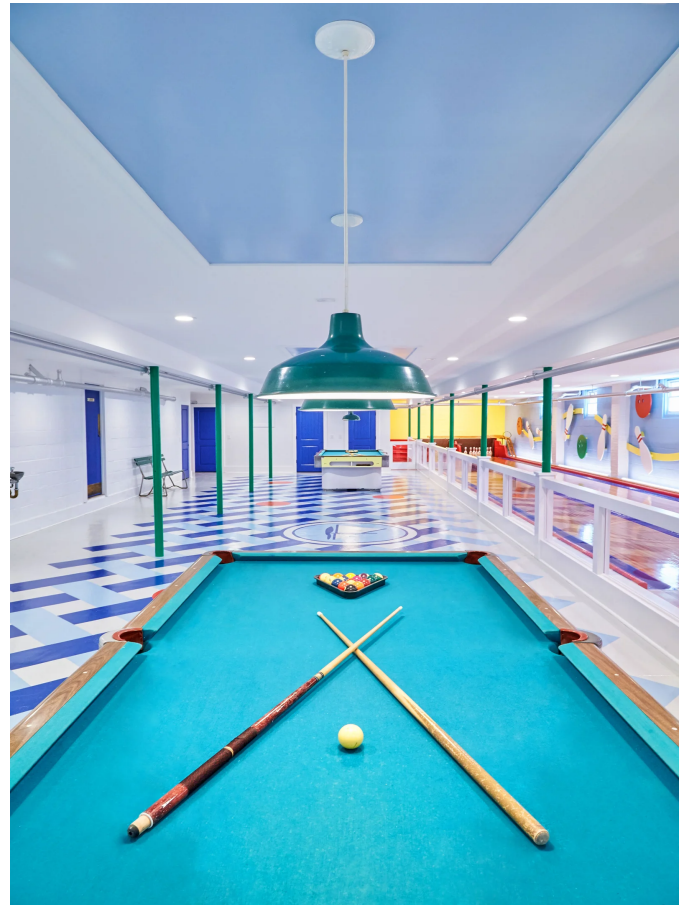
AFTER: Phillip enlisted the help of a bowling alley restorer in Massachusetts for particular details like how to treat the floors. "You can't treat them like normal floors," he says. "There is a method to the madness of how a bowling ball gets down the alley."

The renovation began in January 2019 and was completed in May, just in time for Memorial Day Weekend, “to draw a lot of the year-round and summertime residents,” but it would be quite the challenge. Originally built in 1929, the lanes were damaged—pieces of the polyurethane were missing so balls couldn’t roll straight down the lanes, and the paint hadn’t been touched in decades.

Alongside fixing the obvious, one of the greatest challenges was creating an aesthetically pleasing divider between the alley and the main recreation area. The existing divider was the “most mangled pile of chicken wire and wood I had ever seen, and really presented an obstacle of the room acting as one large space,” he says. The ceiling was also not up to code, and had to be upgraded.



To add another personal touch to the alley, Phillip ordered custom bowling balls with the village logo and the Bellport Village Program Fund logo on them. He still has a few of the tester balls in his office back in New York City.



Because the project utilized community funds, Phillip had to get creative when it came to delivering on his vision. Rather than using expensive tile, the floors were hand-painted by village workers. “I was blown away by how well the art on the floor was executed,” he says.

When it came to the design, color palette was very important, as the space lacked natural light. To give the illusion of there being light inside the alley, he “took cues from the existing yellow tiles in the bathrooms,” continuing the primary feel with red, green, and blue. Plus, he added in some unexpected Bellport love via the flooring. “The light and dark blues represent the surf on the bay, and the red circles represent the buoys,” he says. The floors were hand-painted by the village’s maintenance crew to save on money, while the highway department helped with heavy lifting.

To add visual texture and depth to the space, Thomas added cascading bowling balls and pins on the wall across from the entrance. It's backlit with LED lights to make it seem like each piece is popping off the wall.

"It was truly a treat to get to see people I don't know or those I haven't seen in years enjoying the space," says Phillip. "It makes it all worthwhile."



The designer added another playful touch to the alley by stacking the original bowling balls into columns.