

Shopping the House

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'Shopping the house'

Interior redesign can be easy and inexpensive

by Teresa C. Brown

Sometimes you just can't see the room past the color, the furniture or the clutter. But any room can be transformed from a boring, unfriendly space into the house hotspot, where everyone wants to be.

It's called "interior redesign" and it's a simple idea: Move the sofa here, hang a mirror there, and add a splash of color. Voila! You have a new inviting room in the same house.

"People get stuck; they're too busy," said redesign expert Jill Denton of Changing Space, an interior design company. But nearly everyone has a design "flair," she said, adding that if a room feels uncomfortable or is not appealing, you may need to open a critical eye to look for decorating faux pas: The room is off balance. People will put a heavy piece of furniture along the same wall where another heavy element is located, such as a fireplace. Denton advised to break up the heavy items and balance the overall room. Furniture-lined walls are a big "no" in Denton's book. Every wall does not need a piece of furniture against it and sometimes, bringing sofa and chairs closer together creates a warm, inviting place to sit. In a rectangle-shaped room, people will set up the furniture to make one large grouping, using the entire room. Denton recommended creating two (or more) smaller, intimate seating areas. "Make the room cozy and inviting. When you walk in, it should scream, 'Sit on me!'" said Denton. Furniture without functionality. The furniture should also be placed so it is functional. Have a focal point, whether it is art or a fireplace. "People need to know what they are sitting there for," she said. In bedrooms, sometimes people put the bed against the wrong wall. Consider the room's balance and the traffic flow. This advice is also true for other rooms, such as a home office. Don't position your furnishings so the traffic flow forces you to walk into furniture, Denton said. Sometimes just flipping the furniture to the opposite wall opens up a room. Don't be afraid of color. If white and beige are your comfort colors, try using a light tan or a pale blue, Denton suggested. When choosing paint colors, consider the room's lighting. If it has poor natural lighting, do not choose a dark color. Also, consider the room's function, its activity level, architecture and what furniture will be in the room.

When considering a redesign, Denton follows several basic steps that anyone can try: Get rid of clutter. People usually have too much in a room – too much furniture, too many accessories, too much clutter. Consider painting. A room's atmosphere can be quickly changed by painting a different color on the walls. Denton creates a large swatch from wallboard that she paints a sample color. She leaves the painted wallboard in her room and "lives with it" for awhile to get a feel for whether or not she wants to paint the room in that color. Determine what will be the focal point in the room. Whether it is a piece of art or an architectural element, such as a fireplace or window, arrange the furniture in a conversational style around that focal point. Look at the room size and architecture, and then begin by arranging the largest pieces of furniture first, followed by tables and rugs. Blending styles is OK. Take lighting into consideration, and think in threes. "I like tri-lighting," Denton said, explaining that different levels of lighting – high, medium and low – are functional and important, from lighting the overall room to providing task lighting. Denton advised "shopping the house." Shopping the house is scouring the home for furniture and accessories to decorate a room, Denton explained. Sometimes a room has "great bones, but no jewelry," she said. Window treatments can also add a dramatic difference in a room, and while they can be expensive, they do not have to be. Denton suggested building a simple cornice, a three-sided wood box to fit over the top of the window. Paint it and decorate it with wallpaper cutouts or wallpaper border. Another one of Denton's easy solutions to give a curtain a fun, finished look is to hang the curtain, then install a rack with pegs above the window, and hang several hats from it. Hang art, whether it is a single large piece or a collage of personal photographs. Denton offered this tip: If you want to hang a collage of photographs, start on the floor. Arrange the framed work on the floor until you find an appealing arrangement. She cautioned not to put a large collage on a large wall. Instead, break a huge grouping into smaller ones to hang onto smaller walls. Consider moving art around. Sometimes people get into a rut and do not consider moving art into a different room, Denton said. Add accessories. "I love mirrors," Denton said, adding that her pet peeve was a mirror that does not reflect an interesting or appealing element. She explained that a mirror hanging opposite a window brings the outdoors inside and gives someone facing the mirror a pleasing view. Consider changing accessories seasonally. Denton has a closet at her home devoted to storing seasonal accessories. She suggested rotating photographs in frames, changing pillows and revitalizing furniture with slipcovers. "If the houseplant is dying, get it out," Denton said, adding that silk plants have a shelf life, too. If they are dusty, wash them. Fresh flowers always brighten a room. Even a bowl of fruit adds color and interest, she said.

If you are not sure about your own style and taste, Denton suggested collecting magazine pages with pictures of rooms you like. "You'll eventually see a pattern," she explained.

In the end, she said, the room should feel comfortable to you and it should be filled with things you love.