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A Dash of Paint can Revitalize a Room

One of the easiest and cheapest ways of changing the look of a room is with a splash of paint. You don't have to be a master painter or make a huge project out of the effort. While it can be satisfying to make a major paint renovation in a room, here is a simple and inexpensive way of making your room look completely different with a minimum of effort. Choose the wall with the smallest surface area. Perhaps it has a big window, or a couple of doors in it, or maybe it is one of those odd-shaped walls that is really part of an alcove. Remove everything from the wall. Take down the draperies. Look at the colors in the room. If the paint is dark, then go light with this wall. If the rest of the room is light, go dark with this wall.

This is the kind of project that can be done in a matter of hours -- minus drying time. Choose a trim color that matches the rest of the room and paint the woodwork, window and door frames in that color. Then paint the wall in the contrasting color. Get a good brush, use latex paint, lay down an old sheet, use wide masking tape to protect the edges of the trim. Better yet paint the trim one evening, let it dry and the next evening, paint the wall.

Don't bury the wall behind a bunch of furniture and wall decorations once it is done. Let it shine as a feature of its own. Perhaps you can use it as a backdrop for a dramatic piece of furniture or make it more prominent by pairing it with cushions or throw pillow in the same shade or hanging a picture or ornaments on another wall in a matching color.

Less is More

One of the most important interior decorating steps that you can take is to make maximum use of the furniture and accent items you already have in your home. A classic decorating mistake is to think that you have to spend more money, buy more furniture, or buy new accent pieces. Most of the items you have in your current decor are there for a reason. More than likely you bought each item because something about it appealed to you in the first place. Adding more stuff to the decor you already have will not give your home that pulled-together, attractive look that you want. It will just give it a cluttered, disorganized, overcrowded look.

Here's what you do. Take everything out of the room. Stack it in the next room and get to work. Clean up the corners and nooks and crannies that you don't always get to. Bring in one of the chairs that you know for sure you will want to keep in the room and place it so you can survey the rest of the room from it. Sit down and look around. Imagine you have just discovered this room and you can do anything you want with it.

What is the main purpose of the room? Is it a place for entertaining? A quiet place to read and listen to music? A family room? Once you know what the function of the room is, then you can decide on the form. Bring in the large pieces of furniture that suit the needs of the room and place them in the most effective arrangement around the room. Fit in the lamps, end tables, large wall hangings, and other such smaller items.

Look at what else you had jammed in the room and make a quick decision what to do with it. Do not stuff it into the tidy corners, don't put it in boxes and store it for later. Immediately sort it into two piles: keep and toss.

Now that you have used what was already there and gotten rid of the items that detracted from the room, look around again and see what might be missing. Perhaps it is time for a new lamp after all.

The one room all guests see: the bathroom

No matter who your visitors are, chances are high that the person will want to visit your bathroom. Chances are that while they are visiting the bathroom, they will have a few minutes to survey the room. If you have a guest bathroom, they will likely see the usual guest hand towels and the neat little basket of hand soap. This room is likely quite small so it won't take much to make it an outstanding room.

By the way, if you do not have guest towels, don't bother getting a set. They can be relatively expensive and no one really wants to use them because they tend to look too perfect. Hang up a hand towel and matching face cloth instead. If you don't have a container with fancy soaps, look around the house and find a pretty little basket or bowl and fill it with fancy soaps. For some reason, everyone seems to have fancy-shaped soaps around and no one wants to use them.

Your money is better spent on elements that can create a much flashier guest bathroom than guest hand towels can. Guest bathroom are often painted in a neutral color such as beige and they are typically quite small. Painting this small room is an option but something that is much faster, cheaper, and more dramatic is a combination of wallpaper trim and artwork. One of the most attractive guest bathrooms I ever encountered had a colorful trim around the top of the wall and three 4x6 frames holding pieces of the wallpaper trim arranged on the wall. Another equally attractive technique is to place the wallpaper trim around the bottom edge of the wall as well.

Making the Main Bathroom a Pretty Place

Bathrooms are the easiest rooms to renovate quickly. Unless you really need a new tank or sink or tub, the cost for working your interior decorating magic on this room can be minimal. Look at your shower curtain. Chances are all it really needs is a simple trip through the laundry. This is the easiest way to get rid of that dull soapy grunge that seems to just appear overnight. If the shower curtain is beyond help, throw it out and replace it with a fresh new curtain.

Do you have enough towel racks? If not, put up one or two more and hang up your prettiest towels. Try to match the towels. It is a mystery of laundry how pairs get separated so you might have to dig through the towel cupboard to find matching towels but the effort is worth it. Do the same thing for facecloths. It's just a peaceful and no-cost decorating thing that you can do and it creates instant balance in your bathroom.

Also, look around at the tub-side clutter. How many of those puffy net bath scrub things do you really use? More than one? Then remove all the unused ones and also pick up all the unused bath bubbles, bath oil, shower gel, and such bottles and tubes and take all off this to the guest room. Pile it in a big wicker basket and set it on a dresser. (If the net scrubbies are grungy, launder them first.)

This has the two-fold interior decorating effect of making your bathroom look more attractive and gives your guestroom an inviting little extra welcome greeting to your guests.

Update your bathroom wall decorations. If you have the common ceramic fish decorations, find bigger fish to add to the wall arrangements. It will make the wall art look more current and as if it is planned, not just something tossed on the wall because the wall was bare. If you have the

room for it, add a magazine basket to the bathroom. It makes for a great place to stash last month's magazines and it gives the room a bit more personality.

Making a Statement with Family Heirlooms

It would be wonderful if you could bring out Aunt Eleanor's hooked rug or Greatgrandmother's hand-stitched quilt and turn them into wall art. They are too good to use for their intended purpose. They are also too good to be stored away sight unseen. The dilemma is how to display them without causing them damage. If the quilt is very old, you might want to consider displaying it in a glassed in unit where it is out of direct sunlight. Speaking of glassed in units, the latest innovation is acrylic display cases. They are more durable and less dangerous if there are children around. Acrylic display cases can be found in many convenient sizes and used for any kind of display, including quilts.

If the quilt is in excellent condition – and this can work well with a new quilt that just looks traditional – you can hang it on a wall. Fold over the fabric along the top of the quilt and stitch it to the quilt's backing with hand stitching. Run a wooden dowel through the hem created by the folded over fabric and attach the ends of the dowel to the wall by resting them on sturdy cup hooks screwed into the wall.

Hooked rugs can also be hung on the wall using doweling attached to the wall the same way. However, you will need curtain rings that have clips. Run the curtain rings over the dowel and put the clips on the rug.

If you decide to decorate with large items like a quilt or a rug, make sure that the room is big enough to showcase the item. Don't crowd it with other items on the wall. Give it center stage.

Some suggestions for things you can use instead of heirlooms: heavy fabric in a colorful design, silky East Indian fabric that can be draped over the dowel, a patchwork hanging created from

clothing that has sentimental meaning to you. In a room that has only one window, you could use matching drapery to create the illusion of another window by installing a dowel on another wall at the same height as the window. Where the window would be, hang a large mirror.

Start Small

As much as you would like to dive into your interior decorating project with both feet, it is better to start small. It can be overwhelming and you do not want to lose your motivation before the project is completed. There is one horror story that lingers in my memory about a kitchen renovation that went horribly wrong. The couple had decided that they would paint their kitchen. It was a big but rather dark kitchen and had only one small window. The plan was to paint the walls a nice bright white and then paint the yellowing cupboards in a primary color.

They moved out the furniture and began the wall painting. It was tedious because of the small wall spaces and the appliances being in the way. The husband was anxious to do the whole project in one big effort. Both of them worked and they were quite tired in the evening. The wife said she would rather plod on through the wall painting and enjoy that and leave the cupboard painting for a vacation project.

She had learned that working on the walls in their spare time was harder than she imagined. The husband who actually did less of the wall painting than the wife did decided to end the argument by making it impossible to not paint the cupboards and he whipped out a can of red spray paint he had bought on last trip to the paint store and like a graffiti artist in the making, he spray painted his name on the cupboards and the message "paint me."

The sudden pressure to carry on the kitchen painting weighed down on the couple and distressed both of them so that even finishing the wall was a challenge. The wife got tired just thinking about doing more painting and the husband felt accused by his own graffiti. The cupboard painting which really had not been a big project in the overall scheme of things took on massive proportions and they ended up hiring someone else to do it.

Have a Trade Party

One of the easiest ways to begin with your interior decorating project is to work only with the things that you love. If you do not have enough things that you love then here is a super idea for changing that without spending a cent. And it's a great way to have some spontaneous fun. Call up (or email) a few friends. Five is a good number. Tell them you want to have a junk trade party.

You've heard that old line about one person's trash being another person's treasure. Here's your chance to prove it. Tell them to gather up five items in their home that they just don't like, that don't fit, that bother them every time they look at them. It can be anything from a candy dish that is awesomely ugly to a dreadful old chair. Invite them to your place for coffee and cookies and tell them to bring their junk -- if the piece is big (like that ugly old chair), they can bring a picture of it, or just a good description.

Everyone has different taste so what was an irritating piece to one person could be a delight to another. One of my favorite pieces is a brass flower pots with bright pink ceramic flowers glazed on it. My friend had it in her laundry room behind the detergent because she cannot bear to throw anything out. It is perfect in my living room and I get compliments on it all the time.

Present your items and let everyone explore the possibilities of the objects. There is likely no need to set up an elaborate system of choosing who gets what but if there is something that more than one person wants, you may have to draw names to make the final decision.

It is possible that some objects just are ugly and cannot be used by anyone. The trick is that everyone ends the coffee session with five different objects. Hopefully at least one object will be useful in your decorating project. If not, it is easier to throw out or donate someone else's junk.

Stitch a Fine Seam

A dramatic difference can be made in the most basic room through the clever use of interesting fabrics. Cottons, silks, and shimmery fabrics have their place. So do heavier materials like jute and canvas. One of the most budget conscious steps you can take is to go to the local fabric outlet and look for the remaindered bolts of material. There are often excellent quality heavy cottons on sale because there are just a few yards of it left. Not enough for drapes, for instance but plenty for a table runner with matching arm protectors. Or a valance for a small window and a matching lampshade. If you are not really handy with a sewing machine, such items are simple enough to have the local seamstress do them for you for a fairly inexpensive fee.

Several twelve-inch fabric squares with neat hems can pull together various elements in a room. Place one under a plant, another under a collection of small china figurines, another one under a vase. You get the picture. Suddenly these items seem related to each other and the room pulls together in a subtle way. One living room that was an uninspired rectangular shape benefited from 6 yards of a heavy cotton drapery material. It was cut into a four-foot square of a table cloth that covered a leggy old-fashioned accent table. A magazine rack was covered with fabric that was stapled to the inside bottom, draped over the sides and stapled underneath it. A long matching runner covered the top of the television set and a piece was cut, hemmed, and laid over the scarred coffee table and then covered with a heavy piece of tempered glass cut to fit the top of the coffee table. I've seen clever touches with circles of fabric with elastic run through a hem that goes around the outside edge making a tasteful slip on cover for anything from a wastepaper basket to a plastic plant pot.

The trick to decorating with fabric is to be careful not to overdo it with too many patterns and colors. Keep the accent fabric to no more than two coordinating or contrasting choices.

Pulling it Together with Little Things

One of the easiest and cheapest ways to freshen a dull room, make a new sterile room instantly homey, or quickly transform the ambiance of a room is to make a dedicated trip to a thrift store or two. Once, having moved into a new high-rise apartment with a great view but the most dreary off-grey walls I have ever seen, I went to the local thrift store thinking about finding something bright and cheery. I had a large piece of wall art in mind. Thrift stores being what they are, the choice of wall art was limited. What I ended up with instead was a collection of half a dozen red vases in a range of sizes from four inches to eighteen inches high, a box of tall red candles, slightly used, assorted white and clear glass candlestick holders, a garish piece of macramé, two picture frames that I later painted red, and a red throw pillow. I used these items as the basis of the "red" theme that used to brighten the apartment.

Once you have the basis of the theme you are going for, style follows naturally. Try to find a large attractive piece to use as the cornerstone of your overall plan. For instance, an elegant vase can give cohesiveness to a half dozen cheap ceramic bowls and small vases in a similar color. A woven fabric cushion in an outrageous color can create a cozy nest for a group of smaller and less flamboyant pillows. The planning is worth it. Tossing together a lot of expensive items just because they are expensive will not give your interior decorating the same flair as picking a theme and buying only items that fit into that theme.

Make your own Groupings

When you walk through a furniture store, you see those room settings -- the tasteful living room with the matching sofa, love seat, chair, footstool, coffee table, lamp, end tables or the bedroom with the lovely plump pillows. Then you go home and see the reality of your own living room or bedroom and just want to throw it all out and start over again. This is the kind of interior decorating that can cost you a lot of money even if you buy it on one of those whim-driven, buy now pay later plans. (Let's face it, if you do it that way, by the time you get to paying for the furniture, the warm glow of newness will have worn off and you will not be happy about the monthly bill. I'm not saying you should not buy furniture. I am saying, stop and look at what really makes those store displays so appealing. Of course, the lovely new furniture is part of it. However, the arrangement of the sofa, chair, and love seat often have a strong psychological appeal.

Create useful conversational groups in your home. Think about the typical use of your living room. Is this where you and your best friend sit and have coffee or do you do that at the kitchen table? Do you and your spouse sit in the living room and have conversations or do you watch television in this room. When your friends drop over, do you sit in the living room? If so, do you have to drag in a chair from the den or the kitchen?

Go into your living room and rearrange the furniture into the type of conversational arrangement that you would find useful if there were four people chatting in the room. Is there a place for everyone to set down a cup of coffee or a glass of wine? Can all of you see each other comfortably? What do you have to add to the grouping to make this arrangement work?

Use the same grouping and treat the room as if you and your spouse were there alone and wanted to watch television. Is it convenient? What would it take to be convenient?

You see, the groupings in furniture stores are set up with a single purpose in mind. You might want to consider whether you can set up single purpose groupings in your own home. It does create a great oasis and in this busy world, this is a very good thing.

Making it Work with Junque

It is so tempting to try to carry off a special kind of flair in interior decorating using something funky, whacky, or just plain peculiar. In the good old student days, a nonfunctioning toilet might have been a good conversational piece as furniture in your dorm room as well as another place for people to sit in the tiny room. In your home however, it is important to be careful with "junque". There is a fine line between being creative and being tacky. Plastic lawn furniture draped with serapes can be cute when you first move in but long term, you need to have a little more pizzazz.

A friend was given her grandmother's mustard yellow living room set straight from the fifties. The fabric was a nubble polyester or nylon type and the furniture was in near perfect condition. It was not old enough to be antique but it was in too perfect condition to be considered junk. In other words, it was the perfect kind of furniture for pizzazz. This was true junque. There was a four cushion sofa and two chairs, one with arms and one without. This is a rare kind of find and not easy to duplicate. Finding a similar set and having it reupholstered does not give it the same impact. The fact that this was the original stylish fifties color and fabric was what made it so special.

What can work is a special piece that was handed down to you from someone in the family or an unusually constructed smaller accessory such as a coffee table or side table. Highlight this item by giving it place of pride in the room. Look around your home and see if you can find an unusual trunk or odd-shaped bookshelf or some other item that can become a centerpiece for your interior decorating.

One Room at a Time

Any interior decorating project can be overwhelming. The ultimate goal is to have the entire house look like one lovely showcase. The reality is that there will be long periods of chaos as you carry out the renovations. Unless you are doing major renovations that call for a massive amount of carpentry, you are better off carrying out your renovations one room at a time. Your interior decorating efforts are likely aimed at improving your surroundings. It is unfortunate that to get to the calm beauty you seek in your home, you have to upset any tranquility you currently have. Therefore unless there are compelling reasons for tearing up the whole place, limit your redecorating activities to one room at a time. Pick the room that needs the most work done and start there.

There are other reasons for taking this approach to interior decorating. Chances are that you will learn something in your do-it-yourself efforts that will be beneficial in your next project. This can save time and energy when you start the next room. One lesson, for instance, that I learned was that it was easier to paint first and then wall paper because it eliminates the danger of spattering paint on your new wallpaper. It seems self-evident once you think about it but I was all set to paper the first floor and then paint the woodwork. My thinking was it would be more immediately satisfying to have the big job done first. Each time we do something, we can learn how to do it better the next time.

Also, once you finish one room you can look at the adjoining rooms and get a better idea of how the two rooms will affect each other. A friend did her living room and hallway in a lovely light brick color thinking it would make the two rooms both look bigger. While this was a good effect of her choice of the same color through both rooms, she discovered that there was too much of

the brick color for her taste. If she had done the living room, she might have saved herself the trouble of having to redo the hallway.

Five Basic Elements of Interior Design

They are guiding principles to all artistic endeavors. In becoming your own interior decorator, the first principles you need to know are the elements of good interior design. The primary elements are space, line, form, color, and texture. The proper use of these elements involves the principles of design which are balance, emphasis, rhythm, proportion and scale, and harmony and unity.

Space is the one element that you probably don't have to consider because it has already been defined for you by the size of the room where you are going to perform your interior decorating magic. The challenge is to work with the space that you do have.

Line is almost as important as color in creating the look you want in your room. Think of a high-ceilinged room with long narrow windows. Now think of a low-ceilinged room with an arched entrance and windows with arched tops. You can sense the difference in the mood that each room invokes. You can either go with the lines of the room or find techniques to offset the impact of the natural lines in the room. As a guide, lines have moods as follows:

- Vertical lines create a dignified, formal feeling.
- Horizontal lines create a casual, informal feeling.
- Diagonal lines grab attention and can create an unsettling feeling unless there are also vertical lines or diagonal lines going in the opposite direction.
- Curved lines create a soft, feminine effect.

Form refers to the shapes created in the room. The most popular is the rectangle. Think of a dining room with the rectangle formed by the table and chairs around it or a living room with the sofa as the main item in a rectangular form in the room. Triangles and circles are also good.

Color is the most prominent element in a room. If your furniture is a bland color, you can use dramatic wall colors to give the room personality.

Texture is often overlooked in interior decorating done by the home owner. However, by repeating the type of texture found in the main items of furniture in the room, you can create a cohesive planned and comfortably attractive look.

Interior Design Begins with Decluttering

One of the easiest interior decorating moves you can make is to declutter your home. There is a whole school of thought that claims that clutter has negative energy. Before you set off into a potentially expensive redecorating project, declutter your house. Reclaim the dead corners and the stagnant closets. Before you begin, however, take note of the most cluttered areas of your house. These are clues to problems that no amount of interior decorating can cure unless you make some drastic changes. Each pile of clutter represents something stuck, perhaps even unloved, about that area.

An example come to mind. One woman had a corner of her bedroom that was constantly piled high with clothes, unread magazines, stuffed toys, shoes, and even dirty dishes. It was a small bedroom and she had a queen-size bed, two dressers, a wooden arm chairs and a trunk in it. The corner that had this massive mountain of clutter was between the dressers. The chair used to be in this corner but she moved it next to the bed. You can imagine how depressing this room was. Finally in desperation, she took everything out of her bedroom except the bed and as she was thinking about where to move the bed she realized that she hated both dressers. There was a sticking drawer in each dresser and every time she went to pull open a drawer, she felt frustration thinking about the drawers that stuck.

She looked at the two dressers and then at the chair and asked herself why she had this chair in her bedroom. She never sat it in.

When she got rid of both dressers and the chair and replaced them with a new dresser, her clutter problem ended. Plus she had a lot more room in her bedroom.

Take a look at your clutter spots and see if you can figure out the source. Sometimes it is as simple as the wrong piece of furniture or a missing piece of furniture. In general follow this basic rule for ending a major clutter problem: get rid of old magazines and papers. If you really cannot throw out the magazines, donate them to a seniors' center or take them to your doctor's office. Do whatever you have to do but get rid of them.

Making a Statement with Wall Art

A great cheap and fast home decorating change can be created with the careful use of wall art. Pick a room and remove everything from the wall and then look at the room. It is as if the entire room lost its personality. Before you toss the wall art you have removed from the walls, take a good look at it. Make this an opportunity to make the room sparkle with your own personality. Lay it all out on the floor and play a rearranging game with it. Are there any pieces that just do not belong in that room? Perhaps they are the wrong color or the wrong subject for the room. Maybe you just do not like that picture but it filled a gap. Set these aside.

Many time people have the right wall art but all in the wrong place. Nothing makes a picture fail in its job as an interior decorating accent more than being in the wrong place. Perhaps it is the wrong size for the spot. If it is too small, don't leave it alone on the wall, group it with other pictures that are similar in color or content. If it is too big, move it to a more open space.

Another problem that often happens is that the pictures are not hung at the right height. Eye level is the suggested height but the fact is this can be too subjective. What is eye level for a six foot four man might be too high. What is eye level for a five foot woman might be too low. Some guidelines are to have the bottom of a wall painting six to nine inches above the sofa and to hang pictures so that the center of the picture is 67 inches from the floor.

If you decided to group your wall art, here are some suggestions:

In the hallway, hang the first picture, take a single standard step down the hall and hang the next one. Take another step and hang the next one. Use an odd number of pictures and have them all of a similar size, give or take an inch.

If you have small pictures, group them together with a couple of inches between them -- top and bottom as well as sides.

In a large den or living room, get at least one large piece of wall art in a color that will liven up the room. There are some great art reproduction pieces that you can get framed for excellent prices.

Decorating with plants

Aside from the health benefits of plants in your home, they make for wonderful interior decorating companions. Some of the best plants for making a dramatic look in your living room and hallways are ficus, palm, and dracaena. Ivies are wonderful for bringing character to furniture like bookshelves and televisions. If you are new to plants, begin with the dracaena. They come in several varieties. The most common are Janet Craig, marginata, and massangeana or corn plant. These plants grow in most lighting conditions. They can easily grow several feet high. They are low maintenance.

If you really do not have a green thumb or if you do not want to have to deal with taking care of plants, go faux. There are some gorgeous fake plants that will make interior decorating on a budget a snap. Stay away from plastic plants however. They don't look nearly as good as silk plants and they don't have the same charm and personality.

Place a tall plant in the corner of a room. These should reach about a foot or two below the ceiling. The standard ceiling is eight feet high, so a six or seven foot plant would do well in a regular room. If the room is large or has an awkward space in it, consider grouping a tall plant with one or two shorter plants.

If you want to focus on a theme in your interior design, the choice of plants can go a long way toward setting the scene. For a traditional theme, the ficus (or fig tree) is a classic choice. If you are looking for a more tropical look, any of the palm variety of trees would be great. The dracaena in any variety is perfect for the contemporary look.

While a vase or two of fresh flowers provide a wonderful brightener for any room. Here's a neat trick for creating a perpetual arrangement of fresh-looking flowers. Look around your home for a wide mouthed vase. You can choose one short enough to sit on a table or a taller one that can sit on the floor. You can pick up the tools at a craft shop. You will need that green foam that holds flowers, pliers, wire cutters, wire and floral tape.

Buy a range of flowers of various heights and colors that go together. Pick up a few fake ferns or ivies to mix in with the flowers. Put the foam in the vase. You might also need to add in a few bags of decorative marbles to weight down the vase so that it is good and stable.

Start arranging the flowers cutting their wire stems and bending them to make the most pleasing arrangement you can. Make it huge and lively.

All you need to do to keep your silk flowers fresh looking is dust them once in a while.

Cheap Chic

There are so many things you can do to make your home a masterpiece of interior decoration without wrecking your budget. Your home can be uniquely yours, reflecting your own taste, hobbies, and talents. People will look at your decorating techniques and ask, how did you do that? Some people paint and that is such a classic way of decorating. But you do not have to be an artist in watercolor or oils to create those touches that turn a room from pleasant into startling.

Photography has become more and more effective as an art medium. Use your digital camera and take some photographs of scenes that you think would be great in your decor. Use a photo software program to crop them and add special effects and then take your disk to the local copy shop where you can have prints made in a number of different sizes. I have seen some spectacular arrangements of the setting of the sun taken over a five minute period and then arranged as a gallery type show in a front entrance way. Needlework like cross-stitch, needlepoint, bargello, and even quilting can be used to create a series of masterpieces.

If you are in more of a rush to have some interesting and appealing art accents to your interior decoration, here are some fast tricks:

Buy a large art calendar and a dozen frames -- ideally with mats -- and frame each page of calendar art.

Scarves! You can buy these by the fistful at thrift stores. Get a dozen in matching colors.

Sometimes you can even find a several identical ones. Use them to tie together elements in your decorating scheme. Drape large scarves over your end tables like little table clothes. Toss smaller ones over shabby lamp shades. Wrap them around flower pots and safety pin them into place.

Glass bowls can work together to create an interesting focal point in a room. Fill them with colored water and float candles in them. Fill them with colored glass beads or colored sand. Pile them high with dry potpourri.

Creating Balance in your Home

One of the first principles of interior design is balance. One of the traditional ways of creating balance in interior decorating is through the use of pairs. Think of the things that you have often seen sold in pairs -- lamps, end tables, chairs, bedside tables. Often people have pairs of things separated throughout the house. This often happens in the early days of setting up a household and one room has more in it than the others so you spread things around. Look for the separated pairs in your household and bring them back together. Everything from candle holders to wing chairs can be reunited and in their reunion create an instant feeling of balance.

Once this is done, you can work on the next level of balance by looking at the color and size of the objects in a room. Stand in the doorway to the room you want to change and look at it as if you are a stranger who has never seen this room before. Does it look off kilter, as if it is in danger of tipping over? Does one item stand out, making it look as if it is the only item in the room and everything else is in the way? Look at the colors in the room.

Dark colors are heavier than light colors. A large or heavy object also has more decorative weight as well as physical weight. If all your furniture is dark, it will create a heavy look in the area of the room where it is concentrated. To balance this, place light colors around the furniture. This can consist of bright or light-colored cushions, light-colored frames on the wall art, or end tables that are beige or white or some such light color.

Move the furniture around, rebalance the room. Lighten the darks areas and darken the light areas. Without spending a cent you can have a room that is worthy of a magazine layout.

Redecorate your kitchen with a few simple changes

One of the biggest problems with kitchens is that they become a catch-all place. It is the one room that most family members are guaranteed to enter during the day. I know it is almost a requirement that the fridge holds a great deal of information but if there was one piece of decorating advice that you followed, I wish this were it. Get rid of the fridge magnets. Now. If you absolutely must, you can leave one item attached to your fridge. If the fridge bristles with recipes, put them in a big brown envelope and stash them in your recipe drawer or shelf. If it is covered with jokes, look at the jokes and dump the old stale ones. If you absolutely must keep the jokes, find another place for them. I have seen them mounted in a collage and framed.

The next thing to do is to take everything out of the top shelves and off the top of the fridge and put it on the table. Be brutal. If you have not use any of these things for a year, get rid of them. Sell them on eBay. Give them away. Anything but put them back in the cupboards. They are taking up valuable space. Set aside the things you think you need to keep and if any of them do not belong in the kitchen, send them off to the room where they do belong. Put the rest of them back on one of the empty top shelves. Now clean out all the non food items that are under the counters and in the stove drawer and do the same thing. It is almost certain that you will have things that you never use stashed away. Do the same thing with these items. Get rid of the ones that are useless to you, put the non-kitchen items in the proper rooms and put the rest of them away.

Next attack the countertops. Take everything off the countertops and stack it all on the table. Wipe down the counter and then put back the things you use everyday -- coffeemaker, toaster, microwave. If you do not have a utensil jar, find something that you can use -- a vase or a jug

that is rarely used and put your spatulas and mixing spoons and other utensils in it. Then be brutal with the rest of it. Could some of this stuff really be stashed away in one of the newly empty shelves under the counter?

Take down the curtains, round up the decorative towels, oven mitts, potholders -- anything washable and toss it in the laundry.

If you are really enjoying it, you can go through the dishes in your cupboards as well and get rid of the ones you never use. Stash them with the holiday china or give them away.

All it took was a little time and no money. Instant transformation.

Making Your Bedroom a Haven

The bedroom is often considered one of the easier rooms to redecorate. The typical advice is to splash on fresh paint, buy a new comforter, and make curtains that match the comforter from sheets that complement the comforter. All of this is excellent advice but let us take a longer look at the bedroom.

A bedroom is a very personal place. What you have to look for in this room is what you have to work with. If the walls are clean and even, perhaps you don't need to paint them. Unless of course you dislike the color. Your money might be better spent on new pillows and fresh sheets. The important thing about this room is that it has a very specific function. You sleep here and sleep is crucial to your health and well-being. While the room needs to be restful, it really needs to be comfortable. Before even thinking about paint, think about your most basic needs -- good sheets and pillows. Get rid of worn out and pilly sheets and flat, worn-out pillows.

Now that is out of the way, you can look at the placement of furniture. Is the bed easy to get in and out of? Do you have room to move in your bedroom? Is there a good reading light in case you want to read in bed? Is there a place for everything and is everything in its place?

Before doing anything like painting and making new curtains, get someone to help you to take out all the furniture except the bed. Then place the bed so that it is the centerpiece of the room. Place it with the head against the middle of a wall and lie down on it and look around. Will the morning sun shine in your eyes? Look at the wall opposite you. What do you see? If it is a hodge-podge of pictures, rearrange them on another wall and place a large, pleasing picture here. If it is a blank wall, find something to decorate it.

Once you are happy with the placement of the bed and the decorations on the wall opposite the bed, bring back the rest of the furniture one item at a time with the most important pieces first.

You may find that the bedroom is looking wonderful before all the pieces are returned.

Congratulations, you have just redecorated your bedroom.