

Intelligent interior design

Story and photos by Elaine Caplan

After having lived in homes in different countries, I'm convinced there should be a correlation between the way a house is decorated and the personality of the client.

Life at home should not be dull or boring but instead a refuge where homeowners can just relax, read, watch television, do some work and enjoy their surroundings. For interior decorating to be successful, both the homeowner and the decorator need to trust each other and have confidence that it's going to turn out the way the client wants.

How important is the decorator?

An experienced interior designer understands each client is different and each has his or her own personality, lifestyle, likes and dislikes, and objectives.

Remodeling a home involves many choices and it's the interior designer's job to patiently discuss these choices, trying to keep them within the client's budget. In this regard, over designing is just as bad as under designing.

The key to remodeling a master bedroom, living room, kitchen, study or even the whole house is to design the different areas to be consistent with what clients want and how they want the house to look. In the end, one room should flow into another and the homeowner should enjoy each room for its designated purpose.

Choices

There are seemingly endless kinds of wallpaper, tile, rugs, furniture, lamps, window treatments and accessories. You can make large changes to a given area or small changes. They don't have to be dramatic, and they don't have to use up the entire budget.

It's rather like preparing a meal.



▲ Chic and comfortable, this living room depicts what designers call relaxed luxury. ► An elegant dining room with an air of romance fits nicely with this historic house's ambiance.

There's planning, preparation, time element and ingredient choices. The difference is that once you've made your decisions about your home, the ingredients are more permanent. So take your time. Choose a decorator you can talk to and relate with.

Choosing an interior designer

For most people, selecting an interior designer to spruce up their home opens a door for fun, imagination and, when it's over, great satisfaction. Consider hiring a designer recommended by a friend if you like the results you see. Or at local home shows or even model homes, ask about the designer if you like a particular home's décor.

It will make all the difference if you

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Closets

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intact. It has a tendency to trap the chemicals used to clean the clothes and deteriorates the fabric. Clothes, as well as shoes, need to breathe.

When it comes to women's requests, most females want readily accessible shoe storage ... and a lot of it. "They want the shoes off the bottom of the closet and onto shelves where they are displayed and easy to find," says Bruzzesi.

This can take the shape of flat shelves — which is the most versatile choice — to slanted shelves and even individual shoe cubbies. "For a more upscale appearance, I like to recommend a slanted shoe shelf with a chrome fence," Cross says.

If space is limited, Stearns says, a shoe rack can be vertically mounted on a side-wall. It's not as attractive as a laminate storage product, but it will do the trick.

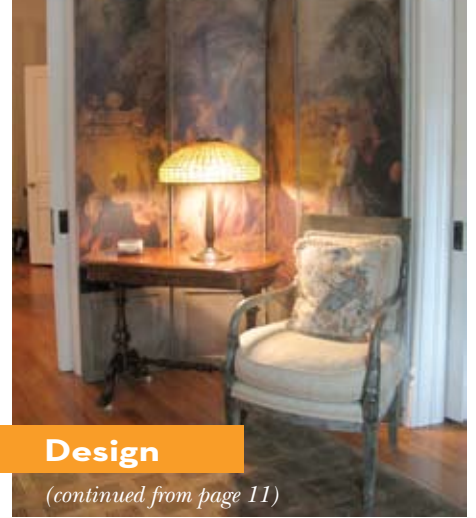
Men are a lot easier to please, Bruzzesi says. Most just want tie storage, belt storage and adequate room to hang their clothes. "Men who are clothes horses are typically very detailed and neat," he says.

"They also want a jewelry tray for things like watches, cufflinks and change and a place for their wallet." Many also request a wall safe that's tucked out of view where they can hide important documents.

Stearns says when it comes to men, you have to address ties. "If you're like me, you don't ever throw away a tie. If you hang onto it long enough, it'll come back in style. So it ends up stored." He says he has a tie storage system where he can get 105 ties in a space that's 8 inches wide and 16 inches deep. "It's a really cool system. It looks nice and we haven't come up with a better way to store ties yet. It's made of wood and each peg gives just enough friction that a nice tie won't slide off, yet the wood's smooth enough that it won't snag a silk tie."

Ties aside, Cross offers this piece of advice: "It's always a good thing to do a seasonal purging," she says. "Go through your things twice a year and decide what you need to throw away, can donate and want to keep. This will help you from being overwhelmed with storage issues."

(Stacey Enesey Klemenc is a free-lance writer and also the editor of Remodeling Magazine.) 🏠



Design

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A corner of this living room is set aside as a sitting area for reading, a viable arrangement for homeowners with a passion for books.

work with an experienced designer who genuinely cares about the finished product. After sharing your preferences for color and style, listen to your designer's opinion just as you would listen to other professionals you employ to keep your home in good repair. Keep in mind furniture and window treatments look different under the changing light of day and night.

If you work with a designer who's proud of his or her work, you in turn will be proud of your home and delighted to show it off to your friends. Remember, most people see results rather than beginnings.

Do this and don't do that

First, you need to decide which areas of your home you would like to focus on. Is it more important for you to start in your bedroom — your sanctuary — or in the living room where you entertain your friends? Once you decide, you need to set a budget.

Your decisions will be dictated by the size of individual rooms, the height of the ceilings, number of windows and so on. Although it's always good to read magazines to get different ideas, don't worry so much about "decorating trends." In the end, you're the one who has to pay for the changes and you're the one who ultimately has to like them.

From understated elegance or European flavor to traditional or contemporary style, pick whatever suits your taste. After all, it's your home, and you should be the one who enjoys it the most.

(Elaine Caplan, whose designing career began in London, has been making homes beautiful for nearly 30 years. For the last eight years, she has been with Ma Maison in Olde Towne, Portsmouth, decorating homes throughout Hampton Roads.) 🏠

Ma Maison, LLC Interior Design

Interior Designer Elaine Caplan has over 29 years of experience both in the United States and Europe. She has designed the interiors of homes all over Hampton Roads. There is no obligation or cost to consult with Elaine at the Ma Maison showroom. Featured in Better Homes and Gardens; HGTV's "Designer's Challenge", and "What You Get for the Money"; Virginian Pilot "Gracious Living".

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