

Designer shares favorite ways to refresh a room



Shiree
Segerstrom

I love my work.

I love choosing fabrics and paint colors, and designing slipcovers and curtains. I love upgrading a home with new flooring, windows, and woodwork. I love writing about design and inspiring people to live better lives in their homes. I even love design math, the part that deals with measurements, and estimating labor and fabric quantities.

What I really love most about my work is taking an out of fashion, nondescript residence and turning it into something smashing. Not something that's merely "impressive" or "pretty," but something intriguing that tells a story about the people who live there.

My favorite way to design or decorate a home is to first assess what is working and what isn't. This can be subjective sometimes.

In a recent project a returning client downsized to a smaller home. One feature in particular presented an unusual dilemma: a whole wall of bookshelves. My client was less than enthralled with them but rather than tearing it all down we tried looking at them from a different perspective.

Shiree's Cheat Sheet

- Assess what is working and what isn't. This is where an objective eye comes in handy. Husband's are quite often right about these things, so don't be afraid to tap into their genius. Avoid your girlfriend or neighbor's opinion. They are never right in my experience.
- Decide on a design direction and stick to it. Don't keep switching paint colors or repeatedly change things that are obviously OK. Remember the old adage, "If it isn't broke, don't fix it."
- Unless it's absolutely fabulous, don't make impulse purchases that are not on your shopping list.

When filled, the bookcase turned out to be a striking focal point that emphasizes the couple's large book collection, English pottery, framed portraits, and other small knick knacks.

It is now my favorite feature in the house because it represents them so well and looks spectacular.

In another living room project, the biggest detriment turned out to be the window treatments. A department store decorator and an unfortunate client came up with an overly fussy and room-darkening mistake. They put a polyester swag over heavy, pink polyester draperies, over sheers. With other fabrics the look might have worked but, as it turned out, the combination was dreadful.

The solution ended up being to discard the draperies and keep the swags and sheers, letting in tons more light. Keeping the swags and sheers also enabled us to focus the budget on things that were needed most: a new sofa, chaise, lamps, and accessories.

When a client appreciates fine artwork, antiques or handmade furniture, it lends a project a unique direction.

Fabric treatments beautifully enhance design projects that feature such interesting pieces. Antique wood dining chairs take on a warmer feel with custom designed slipcovers or skirted chair cushions. I recently recovered a Victorian wood-framed

- Remove the items that aren't working for you and give them away or find ways to correct the situation such as refinishing, painting or recovering. Sometimes an old lamp looks wonderful with a new shade.
- Add color and pattern to pull together disparate pieces. Paint color can add great ambience but sometimes it will overwhelm your design scheme. Resist the urge to do the "one red wall" thing. It has been overused and wasn't that great to begin with.
- Add lighting and accessories last. This way you'll know where you'll be reading or conversing with visitors.
- Tackle the medium size jobs first. Choosing paint and carpet are big projects. If you can, hold off on them and focus on the medium-size tasks until you have a solid design direction.

settee in a current-day cream colored cotton and coral velvet polka dot.

The fabric was a bit dear, but the piece became much more special with a great textile on it, whereas before it was very dated.

The same project had an antique baby grand player piano in it, and to go with it I designed an armless sofa and covered it in a pale mint green upholstery fabric. The room originally had a heavy brown leather sofa that was all wrong for the 1930's architectural relic. It was way too large spatially and visually. There was no way it would ever look right in the room. In the end we found a place for it in the den. Hubby was happy about it.