

Showcasing home style



Shiree Hanson
Segerstrom

Charity events are learning experiences for new designers

Once a year, usually in the spring, various charity fundraisers procure a home or homes for the purpose of opening up the home to the paying public for tours.

What makes the home of interest to the public is the fact that it's been remodeled and redecorated by interior designers, architects, carpenters and artisans. Many of the rooms are over-the-top creations, some livable, and some not. But "visual appeal" is clearly what showcase "tourists" are after.

I've participated in five showcases, three as a student and two as a designer, and all of them were successful experiences.

The first showcase I did was a dilapidated, vacant Victorian mansion in Modesto out on Carver Road. I worked with a group of fellow students on the tablecloths and centerpieces for the outdoor luncheon area, a small room off the kitchen, and the main stairwell. The challenges were lack of budget, terrible working conditions, and a remote location. The benefits were working with others in a design-related project and forging relationships with professional designers. The highlight of the showcase for me was attending the evening gala with my late husband and walking into the living room designed by talented Modesto designer, Chris Reed. She had created a magical place with beautiful, quilted, maize-colored floor-length curtains, large-scale furnishings and a black baby grand piano. I'll never forget how I felt that night. I realized that in a few years, I'd be doing the same thing and it felt validating somehow.

The second showcase was equally magical. This time the home was inhabited by a Modesto surgeon who generously allowed us to use it for the fundraiser. It remained open to us for six months in preparation. It was large and contemporary, and we students again did the outdoor luncheon area and a small room off the kitchen. Attending the evening gala and entering Modesto designer Michelle Lacey's living room also had a profound effect. It had a custom iron, cat tail motif screen installed just inside the front door, creating a little entry area which led you to the main part of the room. Chocolate brown mohair sofas flanked a redesigned fireplace. Stained concrete floors were quite popular at that time and, as I recall, Michelle had commissioned such a floor design and topped it with an antique rug.

Being allowed to participate as a student was a great experience. The students developed camaraderie and a comfort level that enabled us to participate as professionals in subsequent showcases.

A few years later I was awarded my own room. It was my first as a professional, and it was most definitely not the best space in the house. Newbies get the less desirable spaces, while returning participants get the best ones like the living room, the kitchen,



Courtesy photos / Shiree Segerstrom

A small, windowless room in a Modesto-area home is made warm and inviting with paint treatment and homey touches.

DESIGN

Continued from Page 1

the dining room and the master bedroom. The house was significant architecturally speaking. Designed by famed architect William Turnbull of Sea Ranch, it was a clean and spare, sprawling wood structure. Turnbull liked to design buildings that were in sync with nature. This home was comprised of three structures linked by a large outdoor area with lots of windows and angles. The basic design was comfortable and functional but needed some updates like a new front door, flooring, window coverings, and a new kitchen and baths.

My "room" was unfinished. There were no walls or windows or flooring. To be truthful it was probably a utility space rather than a real room. I'm not sure how many tour guests were brave enough to venture up the stairs, but if they did it was a nice surprise.

I created "Mary Jo's Retreat," named after a favorite client. When it was finished it was two small yet distinct spaces divided by a staircase. We installed walls, wool "sisal look" carpeting and padding, custom iron stairwell guards, and several light-dispensing solar tubes, since the owners wouldn't allow us to install windows. I designed a built-in counter and custom-fitted mirror under the eaves of the roof and a custom-designed counter "skirt" that coordinated with all the other fabrics in the room. There was a pair of gorgeous, French antique mirrors loaned by Ruthie Merritt at Modesto's wonderful design shop Fleur de Lys to greet you at the top of the stairs: a kind of reward for making the trek. There were black vintage iron sconces; a French an-

tique sideboard; a parquet-topped walnut desk; and an overstuffed, linen leaf print covered armchair with a tufted velvet ottoman. I had my seamstress sew up a slipcover to cover up a nondescript wooden bookcase that matched the counter's "skirt."

Original oils hung on the walls by Tuolumne County artists Chuck Waldman and Jack Cassinetto courtesy of Chris Kessley, formerly of The Vault art gallery. Many of the furnishings were on loan from various showrooms at the San Francisco Design Center, with whom I've developed a relationship over the years: Kravet, Lee Jofa, Sheers and Window; and Wroolie and Company. Two of my favorite pieces were the smashing, armless olive-green velvet chairs from Kravet.

Decorative painters extraordinaire, Rhonda McDonald and Sue Oller, did the most beautiful, buttery faux finish on the walls, another technique that is now outdated, but when I look at the pictures, the overall room still looks fresh to the eye. One pair of naysayers asked why I was given such an awful room, and I understand their response. But everyone else talked about its coziness and imagination. One pair of participating designers sweetly proclaimed it "their favorite room."

The showcase concept is meant, first, to raise funds for good causes like Hospice, children's hospitals and schools. Second, it's meant to showcase design talent. It gives us the opportunity to think outside the box without the restrictions of client preferences. Third, it's a great treat for the public. We all enjoy the chance to contribute to a good cause and peruse a beautiful home with imaginative architecture and decor.