

HOMESCAPE

Ideas for interior design & decorating



INTERIOR DESIGN BY INTERIOR MAKEOVERS / PHOTO BY DAVID KOUYOUMJIAN

In the Hollenders' family room, below, the sofa blocked the traffic flow, no one could really see the armoire's TV and the décor lacked any focus. Connie Van of Interior Makeovers repositioned the furniture and carpet, added some authentic "country" accessories and used antique trays to create a focal point above the fireplace.

FINISHING TOUCH

Makeover specialists can turn a room into a place greater than its parts, be it for your own enjoyment or to impress buyers | BY ELLEN WATKINS

Linda Hollender of Ramsey had reupholstered the sofa and wing chair, and chosen the perfect Oriental rug and entertainment armoire, but her family room still "felt wrong" to her.

The sofa backed up to the adjoining kitchen, so people had to dodge around it. You couldn't watch TV comfortably from any seat in the room. Hollender had bought some country-style accessories for the room, but didn't know how to arrange them.

"I needed someone to 'finish' the room," she says. She saw an ad for Interior Makeovers, a Bergen County firm operated by Connie Van, and gave her a call.

As the title of her business suggests, Van specializes in transforming a room using mainly furniture and accessories the homeowner already has. She works with clients who've invested in major pieces they want to keep, or who want to "stage" their home to sell.

"I find people are a little frightened of designers, because they think I'll make them get rid of everything they have," says Van, who started her design career with Greenbaum Interiors in Paterson. "I would never do that, because if something is important to them it should remain in the room. My job is to make it look fabulous."

Regarding Hollender's problem, Van decided the entertainment armoire belonged on the opposite wall. The seating and rug needed to be angled, so family members could not only see the television



PHOTO BY CONNIE VAN

but talk easily with anyone in the kitchen. "Linda has a teenaged son and husband who like sports, so the TV was important," said Van.

Before anything was moved, she and Linda discussed the décor and shopped for accessories. Van guided her client toward country antiques, such as unmatched, rustic tables, a rooster planter and vintage fireplace tools. To create a focal point above the mantel, Van grouped several black tole trays

purchased at antique shops in Massachusetts and Pennsylvania.

After helping to shop for the finishing touches, Hollender handed the job over to Van. "The homeowner goes out for the day and I come in with an associate and do it all," Van says. "Only the entertainment center was already in position, because it was too heavy for the two of us to move."

"When I came home, it was a tremendous transformation," says Hollender. "It was a wonderful experience, beyond my expectations."

She adds that she appreciates the time Van took to find out what she liked and what would work for her family. "I have a 16-year-old boy whose friends are always here, and now they love to sit in that room."

Carmela Barone of Fort Lee ran into a similar problem with the furniture in her adjoining living and dining rooms. She was happy with her ivory sofa and matching club chair and her dark, lacquered dining room set. But the living room had an empty, unfocused look, while the dining room was so

crowded she couldn't open her china cabinet. "I'd heard about interior rearrangement on TV," says Barone. For help, she contacted Christa Hughes of the Bergen County firm Interior Arrangements (www.christahughes.com). Hughes solved both problems by suggesting that the china cabinet be moved into the living room. This worked well in both visual and practical terms. See **FINISHING TOUCH** Page H-8



NEW PRODUCTS

Go out and sit a spell

Furnishings for the deck or patio are strong, durable

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PARADISE

It's in the middle of the kitchen

Islands bridge the gap between work and storage

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BEFORE & AFTER

Going the extra yard

Landscape project adds pool, space for entertaining

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COVER STORY

FINISHING TOUCH

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because of the flow between the two rooms. With its glass doors displaying a collection of elegant vases, the cabinet gave the living room a much-needed focal point. Yet Barone now can easily access the serving pieces stored in the drawers.

The sofa now stands beneath the picture window, and a handpainted desk has moved nearer to the front door, guiding people into the house. "That really opened up the entrance," says Barone.

Hughes also changed the chairs and grouped all the seating pieces closer to the round coffee table. "People often will spread out furniture trying to fill a big space," she explains. "That creates an empty feeling, as opposed to when you cluster the seating appropriately." She points out that the new arrangement allows for a flow throughout the living room and dining room, ideal for entertaining.

She praises Barone for the accessories she already had on hand, which included floral rugs, painted wood pieces and statuary with a Tuscan feel. "Sometimes I'll give a client a list of accessories to buy, but Carmela had everything from pillows to mirrors to picture frames," says Hughes. "Most people either don't know what they have, or don't display it to best advantage."

Hughes also will "stage" a home for sale, a process both similar to and different from a "makeover." Each involves using the existing furniture as far as possible, bringing out the home's best features and making it look spacious and inviting. But in a makeover, the designer will encourage the homeowners to display collections and family photos, while a "staged" room eliminates all of these individualistic touches.

"It's like detailing a car for resale," says Hughes, a member of the Interior Arrangement and Design Association (IADA). "You're de-personalizing the house, so someone new can visualize living there."

Such transformations are good business for Karen Fierstein and Donna Thomas, who operate the Tenafly-based company The Well-Staged Home.



AFTER PHOTOS BY DAVID KOUYOUMJIAN

The seating in this Fort Lee living room hovered too far from the central coffee table, and the room felt empty and unfocused. Christa Hughes of Interior Arrangements shifted the sofa to the window wall, changed the chairs and moved a china cabinet over from the nearby dining room to fill space and add drama.



BEFORE PHOTOS BY CHRISTA HUGHES

With the cramped original arrangement in this Fort Lee dining room, the homeowner couldn't even open the drawers of her china cabinet. Now that the cabinet has moved to the nearby living room, the space feels bigger and the hostess still has easy access to her dishes and silverware.

Fierstein comes from an art background, while Thomas previously worked in real estate.

"Staging is different from decorating," says Thomas. "Decorating is for the home buyer, while staging is for the home seller. The seller wants 'design on a dime.'"

The two worked on a contemporary Ringwood home with spectacular views that had recently gone back on the market. In the living room, a sofa and club chair stood against opposite walls

with no real relationship to one another. In the family room, a side chair and sectional sofa faced each other across a great abyss, with a big-screen TV looming in one corner. Although the sellers owned much original art, most had been stored in the basement.

Fierstein and Thomas brought the living room's upholstered club chair and ottoman upstairs to help fill the master bedroom, and replaced them with two more sophisticated leather chairs

found elsewhere in the house. A matching leather ottoman now holds a tray near the picture window to establish a focal point there.

The family room mainly needed tidying and accessorizing. The design team brought the artworks out of hiding to adorn the walls and mantel. They also added tables, candles, throw pillows and plants from their own stock.

"We minimize flaws and maximize space," Thomas says. "Not many people

in New Jersey do what we do, maybe because you have to buy inventory and store and insure it. But the demand is growing."

"This home initially presented as very plain, because it's newer construction," says Becky Boomsma, Realtor with Coldwell Banker in Franklin Lakes. "When the designers injected some color and texture, it created more of a warm ambience. Brokers who came in after it was staged saw an immense difference and were extremely

complimentary about how great it looked."

Hughes says she enjoys helping homeowners work more effectively with what they already have, and feels the results "give joy to a lot of people — they feel more empowered to learn to live in their house."

"When I'm finished, if the client isn't satisfied, I'll put everything back the way it was," she says. "But I haven't found anyone who's asked me to do that. For most of them, it's a happy change."



AFTER PHOTOS DAVID KOUYOUMJIAN



BEFORE PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE WELL-STAGED HOME



The family room of this Ringwood home offered beautiful views but gave prospective buyers a stark impression. Karen Fierstein and Donna Thomas of The Well-Staged Home used art from the seller's collection, along with their own accessories, to create a more welcoming ambience.



The living room of the Ringwood house held just a few scattered pieces of furniture. The team from The Well-Staged Home "shopped the house" and found two handsome leather chairs that worked better opposite the sofa; holding a tray, the matching ottoman draws attention to the picture window. Additional lighting and plants also help bring the room to life.

ROOMS THAT FEEL RIGHT

TO GIVE YOUR ROOM A "MAKEOVER":

1. Pull furniture away from the walls to create more convenient groupings. Homeowners tend to line up pieces along the walls of a room, and people end up too far apart to talk easily or set their drinks on the coffee table.

2. Keep your furniture to scale, and feel free to break up a set. If your living room is too crowded, bring one chair up to the master bedroom.

3. Re-hang the artworks — most people place them too high. In a room where you sit most of the time, they should hang at your eye level when you're seated; put them a little higher in a hallway, where people will be walking past.

4. Pick one focal point for the room, whether it's an artwork, a fireplace or a great view. Group the furniture around it and play it up with accessories.

5. Let there be lights! Even if you have a ceiling fixture, or track or recessed lighting, you still need a couple of lamps for more focused work and ambience.

6. Bring your treasures out of hiding. Put those special heirlooms, unique collections and wedding gifts on display. Arrange related pieces in odd-numbered groupings for best effect.

TO STAGE YOUR HOUSE FOR SALE:

1. Clear out the clutter. It will make your rooms look crowded, and every buyer wants a spacious feeling.

2. De-personalize. Stash your family photos, cute collections and kids' toys and drawings. The buyers want to picture their things in the house, not yours.

3. Add decorative candles and light them when prospective buyers are walking through. It creates a soothing, romantic atmosphere.

4. Fill in empty spots with plants and even trees, whether real or artificial. It may be worth renting these while your house is on the market.

5. Arrangements of natural wheat or curly willow in tall vases can accent a high ceiling or make a low one look higher.

6. Set out fresh guest towels in the powder room for a welcoming touch.