

2011

THE BEST OF BERGEN

MAY 2005



THE
DESIGN
ISSUE

(201)

ON DESIGN

Style

with Substance

Bergen interior designers take their work seriously

BY EILEEN WATKINS

Refinish. Remodel. Repaint. Refresh. Turn on your television set most any hour of the day and you are bound to find at least one program where rooms, furnishings, window treatments or accessories are undergoing a metamorphosis. To leaders in Bergen's professional interior designer community, the abundance of home makeover television shows is a mixed blessing. While such programs have spurred public interest in the field of interior design, some imply that designers may override their clients' wishes, or that a room can be redone in two days for less than \$1,000.

"One older gentleman recently asked me to redesign his mother's whole house for \$1,000!" recalls Pat Valentine Ziv of PVZ Design, LLC, Ridgewood. "Some people think we just pick out wallpaper, curtains and upholstery. They don't realize how deeply we go into a project."

Ziv currently serves as president of the New Jersey Chapter of the American Society of Interior Designers (NJASID). Coincidentally, the next two members in line to succeed her – Diane Durocher, president-elect, and Mary Sferra, president elect-elect – also hail from Bergen. Here, Ziv, Durocher and Sferra dispel some common misconceptions about interior design.

THAT PROFESSIONAL TOUCH

"Many people think [hiring] a designer is a luxury and too expensive, when, in fact, we can save them from making costly mistakes," says Sferra of

M.R. Sferra Interior Design, Haworth. "If you've purchased a home where you plan to live for many years, you want your selections to last and you want to love them for a long time."

Sferra recommends getting a designer's input early in the construction stage. "For instance, I may look at an architect's plans and see that the windows or the doors won't accommodate the client's lifestyle. We usually look more closely at things like closet size, or what the kids might need, than the architect does."

Durocher of Diane Durocher Interiors, Ramsey, agrees. "It's best to contact a designer before you start new construction or a renovation. Right now, one of my clients is building a home where she plans to use her present furniture. I'm doing floor plans and conferring with the architect to make sure her existing pieces will not only fit, but look beautiful."

All three designers stress that knowledge and experience matters when working with architects and contractors. Although designers may not be licensed to make structural changes or do plumbing or electrical work, educated designers understand how these systems function. They also consider current health and safety codes when planning a bathroom or a kitchen.

ASID members must meet rigorous industry standards, bringing to the job a combination of credited design education and work experience. They also must have passed a two-day accreditation exam administered by the National Council for Interior Design Qualification (NCIDQ).

SIMPLY RED In this Park Ridge townhouse, Pat Ziv stylishly illustrates that less is more. Ziv incorporated the homeowner's existing furnishings into the design for each room.



"I've heard horror stories about 'decorators' who bought furniture that was too big for the room," says Sferra. "If you know someone belongs to ASID and is NCIDQ certified, at least you're in good hands."

"There are store designers who just put in furniture, but if someone's going to design your home, he or she should understand everything from fabrics to building codes to traffic flow," says Ziv.

For those concerned about the ➤





BEDROOM BLISS

(Inset) Ziv created a comfortable guestroom and sitting room for her clients' grandchildren.

(Bottom) Ziv designed the bed tables and settee for the master bedroom to complement the existing platform bed.



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PAT VALENTINE ZIV, ASID





TRADITIONAL VALUES

Diane Durocher chose traditional furnishings, wall coverings and window treatments for this Mahwah home. Warm golds and rich creamy colors make the room elegant but cozy.



expense of working with a certified professional, ASID has launched "Spruce It Up," a program offering participants to hire an ASID member as a consultant at \$75 an hour for up to two hours. The client can then choose whether to continue the working relationship (sometimes at a different rate) or use the information garnered from the initial consultation.

WATCHING THE BUDGET

A responsible designer works within a determined budget. In fact, most are skilled at achieving a rich look for less. "Right now, I'm doing a lobby space with wood paneling," says Ziv. "Money is tight, so I'm being careful where I

use it. It's going to feel rich, but it won't encompass the whole room or wrap the corners."

To help make the most of a specified budget, Ziv suggests using a combination of expensive and inexpensive pieces. "You can find non-luxurious carpeting and upholstery that look very nice and wear well. I've used IKEA furniture. But some pieces have to be top-quality. In a home office, for example, you need a good chair for proper ergonomics."

If necessary, Sferra employs certain techniques to keep within the parameters of a budget. "If I have to save money on the sofa, I'll keep it neutral and use more punch in the draperies,





DIANE DUROCHER, ASID



throw pillows, a skirted table or an area rug. I never push my clients to spend more than they want, but I like to have something in the room that's a bit more upscale and gives it that special something."

Sferra stresses that if you opt for a bargain price, you'll probably regret it later. "There are some imported pieces on the market now that have a lot of 'look,' but are made from soft, green wood that's prone to split. Because they're heavily carved, they looked impressive, but they don't hold up. A custom piece in fine wood will always be more expensive than something made by machine and stamped out in the thousands."

Durocher also recommends that her clients buy good quality with longevity. "Fabrics such as chenille and Ultrasuede are moderately priced but have a long life. One of my clients fell in love with an expensive, fragile brocade fabric, so I used it just on the backs of the chairs, where it will show but won't get too worn."

Always opting for the cheapest can ultimately carry a high cost. "If money is tight, you can choose reproduction furniture over real antiques, and reproduction art over original fine art. But it's not good sense to buy something inexpensive and then have to replace it soon afterward because it's worn out," says Durocher. "I'd rather see my client wait for an item. If you're watching your budget, make up a 'wish list' and design in phases. It just costs more money if you make mistakes."

SHAPES OF THINGS TO COME

Although many Bergen homeowners tend to favor traditional furnishings, Ziv sees tastes evolving to suit new kinds of lifestyles.

"I believe there will be a need for flexible furniture that serves multiple purposes and works with high technology," she says. "All rooms of the house are interactive now." In fact, Ziv will soon launch her own line of furniture, Zivi, to fill this need. The prototype is a living room unit that can be used near a sofa or easy chair to support a laptop. She also has observed a growing attraction to the mid-century contemporary look in furniture and fabrics.

Sferra sees a trend toward retro designs, too, and has incorporated classic Art Deco and Lucite pieces into her rooms. Most of the time, though,

"It's best to contact a designer before you start new construction or a renovation"

DIANE DUROCHER, ASID

DIANE DUROCHER INTERIORS

her clients' tastes, rather than trends, guide her. Rather than suggesting the hottest new color scheme, she tries to use shades that will flatter the homeowner.

Durocher thinks the interest in "green," or environmentally friendly, design translates into a desire for furniture that will stand the test of time. She tries to use woods that are sustainable, not exotic or endangered. She notes that with senior citizens living longer, universal design will become more important, too. "You'll see levers instead of doorknobs, non-slip floor surfaces and brighter, longer-lasting light bulbs. Today's seniors want the amenities, and they don't want to sacrifice style for function."

SPECIAL CHALLENGES

One thing is true for both designers on television and their real-life counterparts: They continually solve unexpected problems, often in the face of looming deadlines.

Sferra's biggest recent challenge was in a breakfast room addition to a client's house. The many windows in the room posed a predicament. "The architecture left me with practically no walls in the kitchen," she recalls. "It was too open and airy!" She solved the problem by completely rotating the kitchen. The result won her a 2004 Silver Award for Design Excellence from NJASID.

Ziv helped a client downsize from a large house to a Park Ridge town home, while incorporating all of her existing furniture. "I re-used the night tables and a desk to create a home office in the new bedroom," says Ziv, "and opened up the basement for a party room."

Durocher has been decorating two identical town homes in Englewood, but using traditional furniture for one and contemporary for the other. In each case, the floor plan for the main



“MARVELOUS MARBLE” Mary Sferra used sparkling marble to add depth to the master bath and kitchen of this home. Sferra believes in using materials with both endearing and enduring charm.

**MARY
SFERRA,
ASID**

room places the furniture in the center, necessitating the addition of electrical outlets for the lighting.

“Often, your biggest challenge involves time constraints, particularly if someone is moving in,” Durocher notes. “I’m lucky. I’m married to my general contractor. He helps by getting the sub-contractors out there.”

Although Durocher says that it’s very satisfying when a project comes together on time and under budget, staying calm in the eye of the design storm isn’t always easy. “Someone recently pointed out to me that moving and renovating are two of the most stressful experiences in life,” she says with a laugh, “and I realized that’s all we do!” ■

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For further information about the New Jersey Chapter of the American Society of Interior Designers, visit www.njasid.org or call (732) 787-5981.