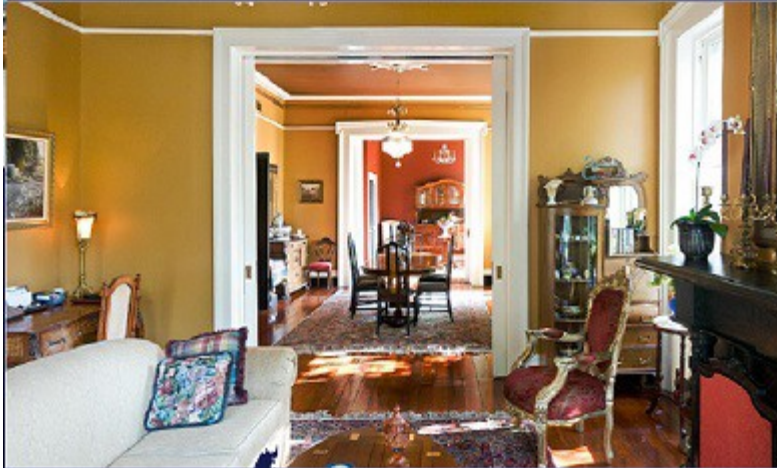


Perfect Fit Decorating
*For a home that fits your style,
personality, lifestyle and budget...*



*cozy, comfortable, easy to maintain,
and fits you like your favorite sweater*

Table of Contents

[Introduction](#)
[How to use this book -](#)
[Function Before Style](#)
[Focal Point](#)
[Traffic Flow -](#)
[Planning](#)
[Mapping your furniture](#)
[Working with Color -](#)
[Just a few style rules you may want to consider](#)
[Living Rooms](#)
[Paint](#)
[Defining Your Seating Area -](#)
[Coffee Table](#)
[Use an Area Rug](#)
[Lighting](#)
[Fill in with Plants](#)
[Clutter Control -](#)
[Wall Groupings](#)
[Living Room Checklist -](#)
[Dining Room](#)
[Kitchens](#)
[Bathrooms](#)
[Master Bedroom](#)
[Kids Rooms - Baby](#)
[Pre-school through elementary -](#)
[Pre-teen – early teen](#)
[Late teen, early 20's – Trend Setters](#)
[Inexpensive Bedroom Finishing Touches](#)
[Add Your Personality -](#)
[Decorative touches you can use in any room -](#)
[How to paint a room next weekend](#)
[To have begun is half the task.](#)
[Give your old wood furniture new life -](#)
[How to Clean a Mattress](#)
[How to buy quality furniture for less](#)

To be happy at home is the ultimate result of all ambition, the end to which every enterprise and labour ends.

-Samuel Johnson

Introduction

Decorating so your home not only looks great, but fits your lifestyle and your budget can be a challenge.

You might end up with a room that looks great, but no one ever sits in. It might be uncomfortable for a number of reasons. The furniture might be uncomfortable. The colors might be too agitating. It may have the feel of a museum, making people uncomfortable - afraid that they will ruin something.

You might end up with a room that just doesn't work for you. The traffic flow may make it hard to move around. The room may be hard to keep clean. Or it just won't work for the things you need to do in that room. Have you had that happen?

You may have seen a room in a magazine that you would love, but you're afraid to try colors and patterns. Or maybe its just out of your budget.

Or maybe you have a small space and can't figure out how to make it work for you.

Or maybe you just don't think you're very creative.

I'm going to help you overcome your decorating challenges and make your home one that fits your style, your life, and your budget.

Sincerely,

Carole

How to use this book -

This book is not intended to be a bunch of pretty pictures for you to try and copy, or a bunch of esoteric theories that don't work in real life.

This book is about ideas and solutions. It is intended to help you look at your individual decorating dilemmas with a fresh set of eyes. Its about looking at things from a new perspective and finding a solution that works for you.

I show you the thought process behind finding the perfect solution for you – not how to copy someone else's rooms.

Every house is different. Every family is different. What works for Martha Stewart isn't going to necessarily work for me. What works for me, may not work for you.

By the end of this book you will be able to come up with ideas and solutions that will be a perfect fit for you and your lifestyle. You'll have rooms that are easy to live in and are filled with your unique personality. A perfect fit!

Let's go in...

Function Before Style

It's tempting to just jump in, buy some paint and get rolling. That's usually a recipe for disaster. The more thought you give to how the room will be used in your real life, the happier you are going to be.

One of the biggest mistakes people make is finding a room in a magazine, copying the style, and then finding out that it doesn't fit their lifestyle at all. Don't forget that these rooms are staged to look pretty in the magazine. Once the photographers leave, the families put their belongings back out. The rooms do not look the same in real life.

It doesn't matter how 'pretty' a room is if you can't be comfortable in it.

The first question you need to ask yourself is – How will this room be used, and by who?

If you have kids and pets, glass tables and things that are hard to keep clean will make you miserable in the long run.

Light carpets or furniture, or very dark carpets or furniture will always look dirty. Light colors will show every stain. Dark colors will show every piece of lint and pet hair.

Black, dark wood, and glass need constant dusting.

Toy management is a whole subject in itself.

If you have collectibles in that room, and you have kids and pets – you'll want to make sure those are displayed where they won't get broken.

Will the room have a TV? Game systems? Computer? Do you care if these things are exposed, or do you want them stashed away when they are not in use?

Will you read in that room? What else will you do in that room?

How many people will use that room?

We will look at the questions to ask for each type of room in later chapters, but this should get you thinking about how your decorating needs to fit your lifestyle.

I want to apologize ahead of time for some of the pictures. I never imagined that I would be writing a book about decorating, so some of the pictures are not that great. I hope they serve to deliver the idea, even if the picture quality is not the greatest.

Ok, let's get started!

Focal Point

Many rooms have an obvious focal point – something that stands out; like a window with a beautiful view or a fireplace.

Select the most important element in a room, say a fireplace, and make this the focal point. Then place furnishings and objects around it to draw a person's eye towards it. You could, if you want, direct the person's eye towards, say, a window, which then directs them to look outside into the garden.

Many people make the TV the focal point. All of the furniture faces the TV. While that's functional, it's pretty boring. Move the TV to a spot where it can reside with the room's natural focal point.

For example – if you have a beautiful view – move the TV to that side of the room where you can enjoy either the TV or the view. Many people are installing flat screen TVs above the fireplace.

For others of us, the TV is a necessary eyesore, and you'd like to hide it when it's not in use. Mine is in an antique armoire.

In the picture below, notice that while the furniture faces the TV, most of the seating will allow for gazing out the window.

That same room probably has something that you'd rather hide – like an ugly thermostat on the wall, or a door leading to the furnace like in this picture-



By turning the furniture so that no one is facing the ugly door, and drawing your attention into the room instead, most people don't even notice the door. I could have put a big plant in front of it too, but functionally, I needed to be able to get into that door to change filters. I could have used a tall vase with some bamboo or fern leaves to cover that up too. Its a matter of thinking about both function and design.

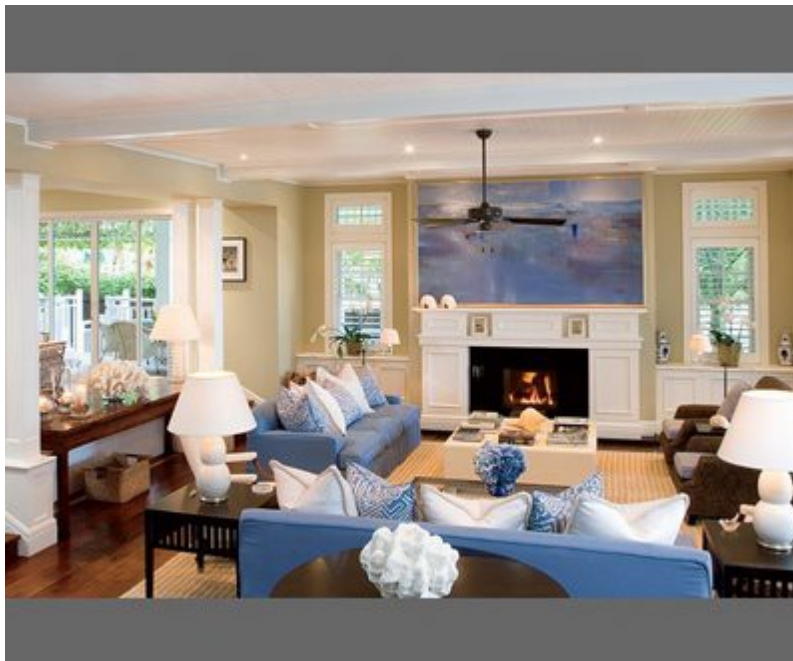
What is your focal point?

What is the sore spot?

Traffic Flow -

The other thing you have to consider when placing your furniture is the traffic flow. While the room pictured above was actually bigger, there was a traffic flow behind the couch that went from the dining room to the bedrooms, kind of cutting the room in half. And the big window was actually a patio door, so it couldn't be totally blocked either.

Here's another example -



The room above uses many elements that we talked about, but it has one critical mistake. Can you tell what it is?

You have to walk all the way around to get into the seating area. Not very inviting when you think about it, is it? Its almost like the message is – 'look but don't sit.'

Can't you just picture your kids jumping over the back of the couch?

Think about how your room is used, and by whom. You will enjoy that room so much more in the long run when it is as functional and as comfortable as possible - When it fits your lifestyle perfectly.

Planning

Now you need to assess what you have, what you can afford to replace, and what you'll have to live with for now.

Anything that needs to be thrown out – throw it out!

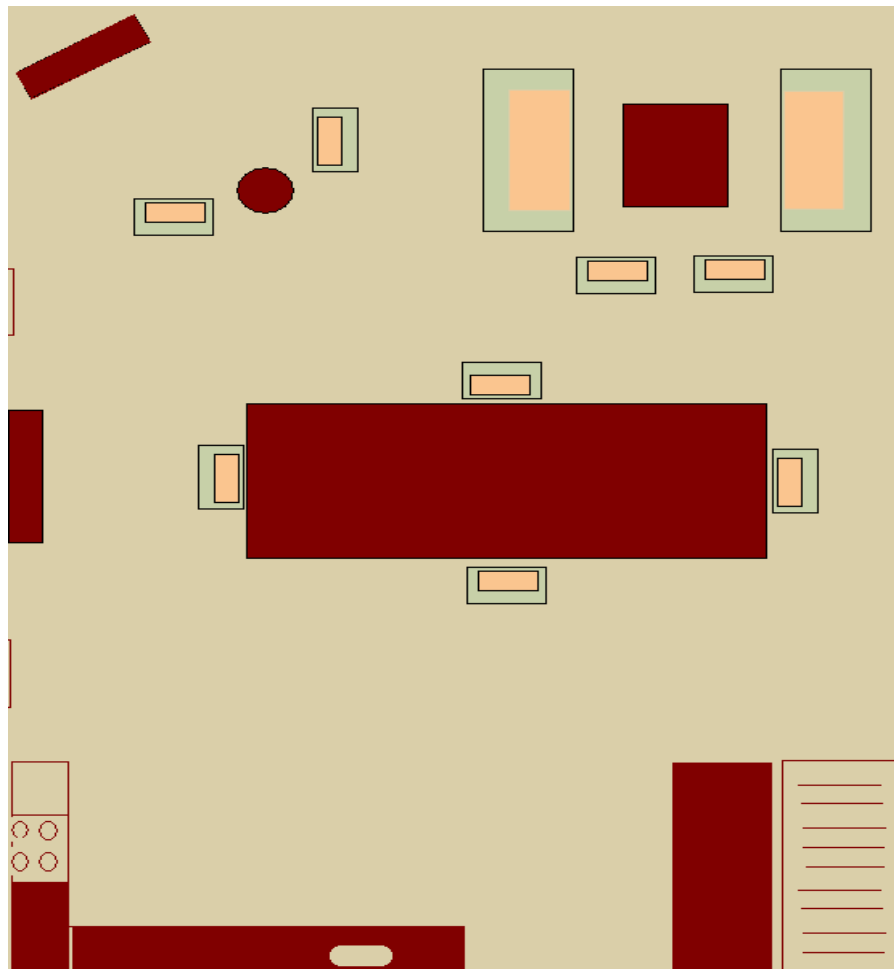
Anything you hate living with – donate it or sell it.

But that's easier said than done in some cases. Say you really hate your couch, but you can't afford a new one right now. That goes in the 'have to live with' category. We'll go into solutions to those kinds of problems later. For now, just make note of it.

You might be looking to start from scratch. Maybe you're looking for a new bedroom set, and you like having all matching pieces. Before you can move forward, you need to pick the set and make sure it is going to work in the space you have.

If you're shopping for new furniture, make sure to take your measurements, and a tape measure with you. Color samples are a good idea too.

Once you have your furnishings weeded out – its time to start figuring out your game plan...



Themes

Provide each room with a theme. You may just decide on a color, or it may be a particular style, say French Country or Italian Tuscany, for say the kitchen. Doing this will give you a starting point, and will help to guide you through the decorating stages.

My current main living area is sort of English country garden. My daughter's room is orange and zebra. My bathroom is a take off on Aristocats. Your theme might be lodge, or princess, or as simple as green and gold, or orange and black. Having a main theme defined will keep you from buying a lot of stuff that just won't go.

Most decorating today is eclectic, or a combination of styles. But how you mix those styles can make or break a room.

I happen to like the richness of dark woods and the warmth and character of antiques. Others like bold and daring modern furniture. These 2 styles will not mix very well.

Modern, trendier rooms tend to be sleek and clutter free. Those who prefer antiques or a country style tend to be collectors who want to show their treasures.

Which are you?

Neither one is wrong. It's just your personality and what you're comfortable living in.

Many people make the mistake of decorating only for function. A big trend today is scaled down and easy to maintain. But a lot of people find this cold and uninviting when they have to actually live in it.

On the other hand, the clutteredness that collectors love will drive other people crazy. They like the open space.

Put cleaning issues aside, and tell me in your heart what makes your house feel like home. That's where you start.

Working with Color -

Your favorite color might be purple, or orange. But if purple or orange do not happen to be in style this year, you are going to end up having a very hard time finding things to go in that room.

My daughter decided she wanted an orange room. By the time I got around to it, orange was last year's news when it came to finding bedding. We had found a nice set that we both liked on sale. When I went back to try to get it a few weeks later *after* I had painted the room, not only was that one gone, but there was nothing orange to be found anywhere. Of course the other moral of the story is – buy it when you see it.

That meant I had to change gears and come up with a new idea that would work with the orange walls. I'll tell you the rest of the story when we get to bedrooms.

The moral of the story – start with your main pieces before you paint. Find the new sofa, or slipcover, or bedspread before setting your heart on a color. You can always match paint.

Start with something to decorate around.

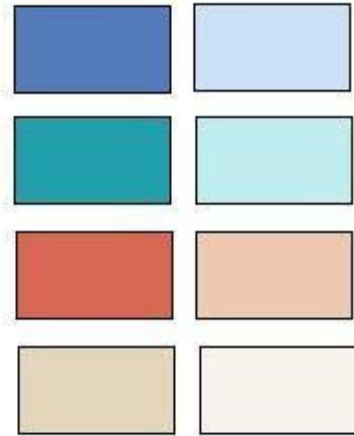
It might be a fabulous new bedspread, or the print in your favorite chair, or a painting, or a flower arrangement. It can be any number of things.

For many years I decorated around a painting of St. Michael's Square. My living rooms were peach for almost 20 years before I got totally sick of it. For awhile they were peach and blue with sort of a french theme.

Then I got new upholstered dining room chairs that I loved. Now my color scheme is green, peach, and rust.

I'll show you how to do this.

Say you have this print that you love –



There are a number of colors that you can pull out to play with.

Professional decorators will tell you to do things in threes. So, you would pick 3 colors. One will be your primary color, or the color you'll paint the walls – and the other two will be accent colors that you would pick up with pillows, throws, vases and such.

So maybe you'll want to paint the walls peach, and get rust and teal accessories.

But how do you match the color?

If your motivation piece is small enough, you can take it with you to the paint store and they can computer match the color.

You can bring home those paint cards and try to match the color that way. That will also give you the opportunity to tape it on the wall and see how you like it.

Behr.com has a cool tool where you can try different colors on a picture of your room. Sherwin Williams has one too - <https://www.sherwin-williams.com/visualizer/>

You upload a picture of the room you want to paint, and try out different colors. Cool, right?

I did the following spread using plain old Microsoft Paint -



Here's a picture of a bedding set – and the possible colors I pulled out for it. Below you'll see some of the possible outcomes -



Here are the rooms 'painted' in different colors. Rudimentary – but it worked. Are you stating to get some ideas yet?

Don't be afraid to play.

When planning your design, work from the largest area of the room to the smallest. For instance, start with furnishings, walls, windows, floors, and then finish with accessories. It is important to remember the larger the decorating surface, the more impact it will have on the finished design.

Walmart has a cool color visualizer tool. Go to [Walmart.com/paint](https://www.walmart.com/paint) and scroll down a little. At the time of this writing it is down a little on the right hand side.

Another site that is fun to explore, but a little more complicated is [PureHome.com](https://www.purehome.com).

Just a few style rules you may want to consider

I have a 4-poster bed and all cherry finished woods. It would look out of place to have a contemporary geometric or flower power print. If you have a sleek black bed, it will look out of place to have a country print or antique bedspread on it.

But, with those few rules in mind - the most important thing of all when decorating is to have fun!

Let's take a look at some of the hurdles you might face in each room – and how to solve these problems.

Living Rooms

Long gone are the days when a living room was a showcase for company. In this chapter, we will look at a number of different ways to make your living room a room you actually love to live in.

It may be that you are just starting out in a new home, or that you would like to revive an old tired space, but decorating any room, and especially the living room, can be a real challenge. It can be even more of a challenge when you only have small budget to work with.

But the biggest hurdle that we face is how to get a look that expresses our unique personality, without spending a fortune. By looking at things in a different way, you should be able to create a cozy family room for almost next to nothing. Here are some tips that will help you turn a drab living room into a warm and friendly place where everybody loves to gather.

First, do your homework from the first couple of chapters. Think about how the room is going to be used, and by who. Figure out how the traffic patterns need to flow in that room to make it easy to live in.

Next, assess your main pieces of furniture. If you like what you have, you can just start picking colors and go for it. If you're buying new pieces, you'll want to wait until you have them picked out – and maybe some fabric swatches to work with.

If you hate what you have, but you have to live with it for now – fear not! There are options.

If your couch has seen better days, but you can't afford a new one right now – there are slipcovers.

Don't give me that look. Have you seen slipcovers lately? A lot of them, you can't even tell that it's a slipcover. Visit SureFit.com and take a look. You'll be surprised.

If you like the shabby chic look – you can use just about anything to cover the couch – bedspreads, quilts, throws.

Buy, or make a bunch of coordinating throw pillows, and you're off to the races!

Sometimes just a good cleaning and some new colorful pillows will make your couch look good again.

Chairs can be slip-covered too. Or you can try reupholstering it yourself. A lot of colleges offer a reupholstery class where you can take your project chair and learn to do it yourself. Or the students might need a project piece for class, or to make a little extra money.

Finally, if you do not need it, or you've gotten tired of it - then remove it. You can either donate it to your local charity, or ask a family member or friend if they could use it. By de-cluttering a space, you will not only be providing yourself with more room, but you'll also be gaining a whole new look.

There is an old saying that to make room for the good things in life, you have to get rid of the old. This is certainly true when it comes to decorating.

That's always been hard for me. To part with a piece that I really like, but it's not longer functional, or it doesn't fit in anymore. At least if you give it to someone who will use it well, or you sell it and get money for it, that helps relieve the pain a little ;-)

Another helpful hint is to try to have your furniture coordinate from room to room. That will allow you to move furniture around from room to room as life changes, and still have it look great. I move furnishings around during the holidays to make room for bigger dinners and of course the Christmas tree.



When I used to have separate dining and living rooms, it didn't matter so much that the 2 rooms of furnishings didn't match. Now I have a great room. The floral dining room chairs and this really cool double gooseneck rocker with a french scene on it do not match. My cute and comfy little sitting group got banished downstairs to the family room.

The heartbreaker is that it was an expensive piece, and it hasn't been used much. It looks like a piece of art, doesn't it? Sigh... If I were to sell it, I'll never get what its worth. It was an expensive lesson.

Everything in your home should be inviting. Museum pieces may look cool, but they won't give you much real enjoyment.

How much living goes on in your living room?

I actually bought this nice peach sectional sofa when I was still single. So it was a few years old already when this picture was taken. Whenever I buy upholstered furniture, I always have it treated. It held up amazingly well, and we used the pillows for floor pillows for a few years after that. Some were use for pet beds. 2 were recovered an we still have them today. That little girl in the picture? She just got married...



I reuse stuff until it is totally dead. I still have a lot of the furniture from that house over 20 years ago.

What to do with walls

One of the quickest, cheapest ways to dramatically change a room is to paint it. You've already done your homework and come up with colors that will work for you, right?

You may have seen a home where just one wall was painted a vibrant color and the other walls were painted a more subtle complimentary color. I'm not seeing this done as much anymore. People tended to get tired of the brilliant wall easily, and it's hard to paint over. I don't care what the new paint cans say!

To do this, paint one wall using your favorite color, and so make this the focal point of the room. Then hang interesting art on the wall. It could even be something you have made yourself or a rug, or a quilt. Next, place a nice piece of furniture on that side of the room to provide even more accent to the wall. The accent wall is meant to be a focal point. You decorate it to the hilt. You'll find more about pictures and mirrors a little further on.

But most of us prefer a little more balance throughout the room. It just seems to be more comfortable to live with.

If you want to add extra impact to your walls, there are a number of different painting techniques like rag rolling, sponging, and other techniques. You can check a book out from your local library to learn how to achieve different looks.

Some paint lines offer different texturing options. Ralph Lauren is one line that offers paints that look like suede, or a pebble finish, and other such stuff.

I honestly don't have the time or patience to learn how to do new finishes. With my ADHD personality, if a project takes too long – I lose interest and it sits undone for a long time until I can make myself get back to it.

If you've got the time and patience to experiment – go for it! For most of us we need to get the job done and move on...

I like pictures, and collectibles, and playing with different window treatments. Having any sort of print on the walls would just be too busy. Solid color walls are best for me. Solid color walls are also faster and easier to paint. And you won't feel so bad if you change your mind.

Maybe you would like both, pattern and wall hangings. You could wallpaper the bottom half of the wall, and paint the top half a solid color.



Decorating is sort of an ongoing hobby. You'll find new things you love. You'll get tired of some things. There will always be a flow in and out. Go with it!

Defining Your Seating Area -

The main seating area in your living room should look inviting and comfortable. It should be small enough to encourage conversation, yet big enough to be able to get in and out without tripping on people and things.

My living areas have been small in recent years, so I've kept the scale of my furnishings smaller. I do not have a full size couch. I have 3 loveseat size pieces that I place in a horseshoe with a square coffee table in the center. Because its smaller in scale, that seating area has worked in many homes.

But the couch you saw with all the pillows was a 16 foot sectional. It was great in that room, but would not work very well in my current home. You would literally have to climb over the back of it to get in. Not very inviting.

Try to keep things as open and accessible as possible.

If you happen to have a large room, you can break it into groups. You can have your main seating area around the entertainment center, and then another small conversation group, a reading nook, or a game table.

Coffee Table

The coffee table is another major focal point in a living room. It can be decorated with plants, candles, pictures, or books. Just not so much that you can't actually use the table to set down your drink!

If your coffee table is looking tired or scratched, you can –

- cover it with a small decorative throw rug, or
- paint it, or refinish it, or
- tile the top of it with mosaic tiles or colored glass, or
- create a collage of pictures, or mementos, or I've even seen one done with money – then apply layers of shellac to protect it.

At one point, I had a coffee table that was a cable reel that I had painted and topped with a rattan rug that I got at Pier One, and some plants.

It could even be a pair of cinder blocks with a wood shelf on top. Or maybe glass block. I'm looking at all the wood left from the last storm and thinking maybe something with logs might be in order ;-)

You just have to look at things in a new way.

Use an Area Rug

This is a great way to define a conversation area. It can also camouflage a tired carpet. If you have wood or tile floors, a rug can be a comfortable landing place for your feet. Look for one that will complement the décor of your room. You can play around with arrangements. Rather than lying it straight, you can put it at an angle underneath your coffee table (if you have one). Or you can put all of your furniture on an angle and use the area rug to anchor the area. Or if you're not feeling too creative right now, then just place it in a central location where the seating is situated.

When using area rugs, make sure they have a non-slip backing. Slippery rugs can be dangerous.

You might want to add some large floor cushions too. Those worked great when my daughter was small. We placed them around the coffee table. She could eat, draw, or do homework there. They were actually the pillows from that peach couch. I kept them after the couch went on to couch heaven. We used those pillows around the coffee table for many years after that. Then they became pet pillows. Got my money's worth out of those!

Also make sure you have plenty of places to set down drinks, and lots of coasters to protect your finishes.

Lighting

Replace ugly lamps! These are one thing that will make your room look dingy and outdated. If you have your mom's old lamps, you know what I mean. If you really are unable to replace the whole lamp, then just consider replacing the lampshade instead. Or you can find craft ideas for giving the old shade a new personality.

That's another reason why I like antiques, and reproductions. They don't go out of style.

A floor lamp will give a totally different lighting effect. Halogen lights were popular for a while. I don't recommend them. They get dangerously hot and are notorious for starting fires.

Another effect that I don't see used much anymore is spot or back lighting. You take an inexpensive spot light and place it behind an accent piece pointing up. You want the bulb to be no more than 40 watts. It's just an accent light, not a functional light. Oh, and you want it to be a safe light. I've used this treatment behind some large plants.

If you are going to be reading or doing puzzles or craftwork while you watch TV, you'll want to make sure that you have the right kind of light for those activities. The lamp for these types of activities should be placed so the light shines down on what you are going to be working on.

You'll also want to make sure that the lamp you are using is the right scale for the space you're putting it. Just like Goldie Locks - not too big, not too small, but just right!

To get some great ideas, check out lampsplus.com. Even Amazon and Walmart have a large selection online.

Fill in with Plants

The reason I had the big plants that I backlit was because I couldn't afford to furnish the huge living room that I had. I filled a corner with a few 5' - 8' plants and 2 cheap wicker chairs. Those chairs were really uncomfortable, but people sat there anyway just because it was cool.

But big plants the size of indoor trees are really expensive now. You can also get a similar effect using plant stands of different heights. Just make sure they are sturdy enough and won't knock over easily.

So, you can use plants to fill in empty space and make it more interesting, and if placed strategically, they will hide any ugly flaws in a room. Like that ugly thermostat we were talking about earlier.

I think plants and flowers add a natural feel to the room. They say that plants clean the air too. Another good reason to have plants around.

There are so many pretty and interesting pots. Plants can be an inexpensive yet interesting way to fill space and make a statement.

Make sure to protect the surface that the plants are on to avoid damage from watering. I use the plastic lids from coffee cans for many of them. Kind of a plant coaster.

I also use silk arrangements. I've used silk vines on windows as sort of an accent. I know one lady who got a philodendron vine to grow long enough to go around her entire office. I think that was a bit much. Around one window with other plants would be enough. That looks especially nice in a bay window.

When using real plants, be sure to put something under to protect the surface from water damage.

Clutter Control -

Books, magazines, catalogs, newspapers, video games, movies, and all the other stuff you like to do can really get out of control.

I like cabinets where you can just close things up. But you can only have so many cabinets...



See what I mean about antiques and collectors? Many would consider this look cluttered. But antiques and collectors like to fill every available space. Other solutions are wicker or wooden boxes, or a wicker laundry basket works great for keeping magazines and catalogs at bay.



Catalog Stash



Mail Stash

Other solutions are wicker or wooden boxes, or a wicker laundry basket works great for keeping magazines and catalogs at bay. Always keep your eyes open when you are out and about. I find a lot of interesting things for not a lot of money at ROSS if you have one near you.

Wall Groupings

I love hanging stuff on the walls. I have baskets with silk greenery, an antique tray, and some decorative shelves to show off some of my collections. You don't have to be limited to just pictures. Pick things that you love. You have to look at them every single day. Just because some designer is hot doesn't mean that you're going to love living with their style. It's your home. Your sanctuary. It has to be someplace you love coming home to.

Pictures of family always make a house a home. You can use different but coordinating frames.



Mirrors are great for making a space look bigger. Hang mirrors where it will reflect either a nice view, or an interesting architectural element of the room. When you hang a mirror across from a window, it visually expands the room and makes it feel roomier.



I like to use decorative shelves in my wall groupings. Then you can change the look without having to put more holes in the wall. You can completely change the look of a room for the holidays by just switching out the stuff on the shelves.

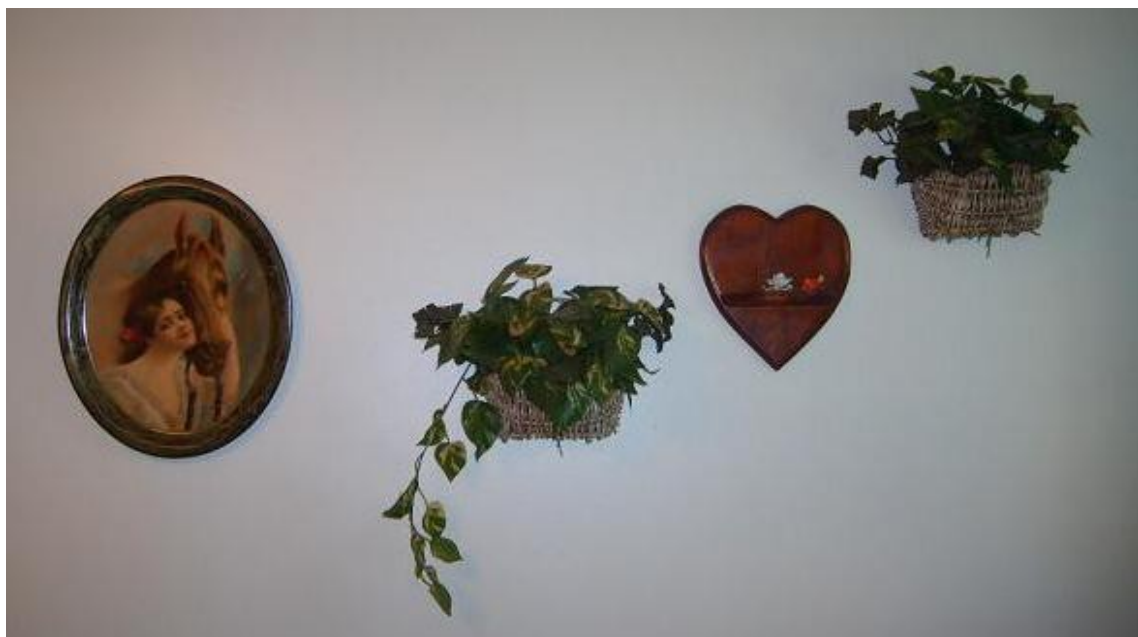
And here's a tip for making great looking wall groupings -

If you can, move the furniture away from the wall where you want to do a wall grouping. Lay the pictures, shelves and whatever else you are using along the floor below that wall and play with the placement until you see that it will look great when you move it up to the wall. Getting it perfect will take a lot of measuring.

Start with the center and work out. I measure the distance between frames, and light pencil markings to help move the placement. Don't forget to allow for the distance between the top of the frame and the hanger when marking your nail holes. I personally find a ruler easier to work with than a tape measure.

Use the smallest nails you can. Unless its a big heavy piece, you don't need a big nail. Smaller nails make it easier to correct if you make a mistake.

With a little time and patience, you can make great wall groupings.



Living Room Checklist -

There's a lot of mental work that goes into good decorating. The better you answer those questions now, the happier you will be living in that room.

Checklist -

How is this room going to be used?

How many people will need to sit comfortably in this room?

Will you need a TV stand? Or a cabinet?

What else does the cabinet need to store? Stereo, DVD, VCR?

Do you have storage for movies and CDs?

Do you need a computer desk in this room?

What will you need to have in this room to make it fit your lifestyle?

Bookcases? Magazine rack? Reading lighting?

Where are the traffic patterns?

Do you have the furnishings you need for this room?

Do the patterns work together?

What color will you paint the walls?

How will you place the furniture?

Where are the sore spots that you need to camouflage?

Dining Room

The dining room is least used room in most houses, and that's a shame.
Reserved only for company.

In my case, I've had pretty small kitchens, so the dining room becomes the hub. We spend a lot of time at the dining table talking and eating. Its been an important room in our lives.

Let's look at some ways to decorate a dining room to give it a whole new lease on life, without breaking the bank.

The first thing you need to do is assess the condition of your dining room set.

Is it in good condition? If so, do you like it?

Is it scratched and worn?

Can you replace it? or

Does it fall into the 'have to live with' category?

If the dining room set is at least sturdy, you can paint or refinish it.

You can cover the table with a tablecloth.

You can replace just the chairs for now.

You can get slipcovers or new cushions for the chairs.

Right now, painted pieces are in. I recently saw a new set where the table and each chair were a different color. If your set is old and scratched, don't feel bad about painting it. You could have a red table and blue chairs if you want.

You could paint your buffet green and the doors and drawers gold if you are into color.

If the set has clean lines, you could paint it red or black, and then shellac or polyurethane to give it a high gloss finish. Well, I guess you could do any color your heart desires...

Don't have a buffet? Pick up some cheap white bookcases and paint them. Place some decorative items on the inside shelves. You could paint the inside a contrasting darker color that will showcase your items. You can use the tops of the bookcases for extra serving space when you need it.

You could build and attach a fold down shelf to one of your dining room walls that can be used as a buffet area also.

Walls -

If your dining room is attached to your living room, you'll be stuck with having at least the connecting walls painted the same color. To provide a little visual separation, you can paint the other walls in another shade of the same color.

If your dining room is a separate room, you have a world of options open to you.

You can paint it a rich darker color.

You can paint the top half one color, and the bottom half another color, separated by a chair rail or a wallpaper border.

You can use wainscoting or some other type of paneling on the bottom half.

You could wallpaper the bottom half.

You could wallpaper the whole thing, but I'm not seeing that done much anymore...

You can provide a little more interest by putting a chair rail around the dining room.

Did you know that chair rails actually have a purpose? They're to keep the tops of the chairs from marring your walls.

In the old days, the chair rails were placed higher on the wall and had long nails so you could hang the chairs up out of the way when they were not being used. Houses then were much smaller and the main living area served many purposes. They needed every inch of space. Hanging the chairs also made it easier to wash the floor.

Another thing that seems to have gone out of style is the plate rail to show off collectible plates. But you could put a narrow shelf around the room about a foot or so down from the ceiling to show off other collectibles. You could also fill the space with small plants, pictures, and candles. Just remember, you'll have to clean it if you do.

You can give the room a classic look with floral pictures, or you can go for more of the bistro look with the artsy food themed pictures that are available all over these days.

Dining rooms tend to be smaller rooms. Again, you can visually open the space with a mirror.

You can create a centerpiece with candles, flowers, and an interesting bowl. One tip; don't have a centerpiece that's too tall to look over. You don't want people to have to strain to see each other when they try to talk.

You may have hear of "the rule of three." Instead of placing items together as even numbered groups, do it in odd numbered groups instead. Where 2 candlesticks together look symmetrical, by adding a bowl or another smaller candlestick holder, it makes it look finished – like a more professional touch.

Mixing colors and textures of your accent pieces will give you an inexpensive way to give the room a whole new look. You can switch tablecloths and accent pieces at will. Many people change their accent pieces on a seasonal basis.

You can put an area rug under the dining room table. This will give the room more interest and depth, and it will protect your floor, especially if your dining room is carpeted.

Your lighting can be anything from a chandelier, to a nice lighting fixture, to a nice ceiling fan. I'm personally a big fan of ceiling fans. They make the room more comfortable when it's hot out, or when the oven has been on all day cooking a turkey. A lot of people seem to get hot easily these days.

You want your dining room to be inviting, and comfortable. One thing that has been important to us is comfortable chairs. I made the investment in some really pretty upholstered parson chairs. If you have wooden chairs, invest in some comfortable cushions. Comfortable chairs encourage more leisurely eating and conversation.

I have an untrendy admission to make. My grandmother always kept vinyl tableclothes on the table, and I swore I never would do that. Guess what? I did.

With the kids doing art projects, homework, spilling things, and cats that you can't keep off your tables no matter how hard you try – I found that the only way to keep the top of my table looking good was to keep it covered. Of course, no one ever sees the beautiful top – but yes, it still is beautiful.

But more important is that we spend a lot of time around that table.

Make your dining room an inviting oasis, instead a deserted stuffy room that no one ever sets foot in.



Changing the look can be as easy as a different tablecloth and centerpieces...



I recently did a dining room makeover for a friend. Since his wife died, his boys have used that room as an extra bedroom, wild party room and storage. Or dumping ground would be more accurate.

The room had been rented out as a bedroom to a couple of the boys friends. Then it was virtually empty and used for parties. Then it became a dumping ground. Then we added a table and chairs to the mix.

The entry to the laundry room is in the dining room, so there was always piles of laundry on the floor in the dining room. I didn't catch that in the photo.

The curtain rod was pulled out of the wall from people hanging on it.

The walls hadn't been painted in many years. Somewhere around 20. The walls were filled with dirt, grime, and nicotine.

People acted like animals in this house. Yelling, swearing, drinking, parties, dead bodies on all the couches every Sunday morning...



Here's what it looked like after -



The burgundy carpet had to stay right now. Plus he likes that color.

An additional problem is that room doesn't get much natural light. We tried taping all kinds of paint swatches on the walls. We couldn't find a color that wouldn't make the room look too dark and cave like.

We settled on Antique White with White trim.

So here is the room currently. Big improvement, wouldn't you say?

So what did this transformation cost?

A bottle of Mr. Clean, which we had.

Joint Compound for patching which we had leftover from the bathroom project.

2 gallons of primer

1 gallon white paint

2 gallons Antique White paint

Roller covers. I lost count how many we used...

The curtains were in the clearance aisle at WalMart for \$15 a pair.

The chair covers were on sale at Bed Bath and Beyond for \$9.95 ea.

So around \$200 and lots of elbow grease.

And people haven't been acting like animals in the house anymore. The nicer the home becomes, the calmer it seems to get.

I figure if you don't respect your home enough to take care of it, no one else

will respect it either. I never had problems with kids wrecking my home. I was very unsure coming into this situation. I wasn't sure my theory was going to hold true, but so far it seems to be. They're keeping it a lot cleaner than I thought they would. And to be fair, the boys were never raised in a clean home, so this is an adjustment for them.

Kitchens

The kitchen can be a nightmare to remodel. Especially if everything seems to need replacing. But there are some things you can do to make it look almost new without breaking the bank too badly.

The worst thing about the kitchen is the degreasing. You have to thoroughly clean it before you can do anything else. Everything. Ceiling, walls, cabinets, appliances... Then you can decide what you need to do.

Instead of replacing the cabinets in your kitchen, why not repaint them? There are many techniques that are easy to learn and will provide your cabinets with an expensive designer look. Such techniques as crackling, faux finishing and glazing are not only simple to do, but will save you money. If you need help on looking for ways to up date old and tired kitchen cabinets, then take a look on the internet. YouTube is a great resource! I often go there to find out how to do something.

I helped a friend redo her tired beat up apartment kitchen. It was a rental, so she didn't want to put a lot of money into it, but she was sick of living with it with it the way it was. She picked out some wallpaper she liked. We picked a pale gray color from the wallpaper and painted the cabinets. We put up the wallpaper. Wa-La! It was a totally new room for not a lot of money.

OK, maybe that made it sound a lot easier than it really was. When you take on a job like painting kitchen cabinets, there is a lot of prep work that goes into making the job successful. You have to clean them, sand them, clean them again, prime them, and then 2 coats of a good enamel paint. If you're not willing to do the job right, don't attempt it. They can come out looking worse than when you started.

You can replace just the cabinet doors. Paint or stain the base to match. Or do a more European look and have a contrast.

If your cabinets are in pretty good shape, you can give them a good coat of butchers wax and some new handles. Nice wood cabinets should be cleaned with Murphy's Oil Soap and oiled with lemon oil every month or two to keep them looking good.

You can make your kitchen look like a country kitchen, or a 50's diner.

One kitchen I loved had country blue walls, white cabinets, appliances, and trim, and a red brick look vinyl tile.

Or if you go the 50's diner route, you could have white walls and a black and white checked floor.

If you have a flat enough surface on your cabinet doors, you could even wallpaper them. I would only do this if the doors are in really poor shape to begin with. This treatment won't hold up for a very long time – but it will be interesting as long as it lasts.

A lot of people like the rich warm woods and homey colors.

If you've got wood cabinets that you don't want to replace yet, but you're getting sort of sick of traditional or country - you could add one of the new pub sets and give your kitchen more of a bistro look.

When you really think about it, for the most part your cabinets and appliances, and even the floor are going to stay, right?

So what else can you do to give your kitchen a new look?

Pick a new wall color

Put up a new back splash treatment – like tiles or wallpaper

New towels and potholders

Small appliance covers

Coordinating dishes, pots, pans, etc.

New window treatments

Colorful rugs

New chair cushions or slipcovers

Tablecloths

Accessories – candles, flowers, etc.

Art work



You can change the table cover, the centerpiece, the color of the dishes, the chair covers...

So, let's go back to *Perfect Fit* fundamentals. What will make your kitchen a perfect fit for you?

Apples? Fruits? Roosters? Tuscan? Floral? Stripes? Plaids?

Collections.com is a great place for inexpensive decorating ideas. Bed Bath & Beyond is another fun place ;-)

One kitchen I had was too small to put a table in. I picked up this beautiful buffet that worked perfectly for extra storage.



Redecorating your kitchen on a budget can be as simple as just giving the walls a new coat of paint. In a recent project, I took down horribly old yellowed wallpaper, and replaced the disgusting old acrylic ceiling tiles -



Kitchen Before



Kitchen After

That project cost me about \$120. The ceiling tiles were \$80 of it. Removing the wallpaper and painting didn't cost much other than some time.

Another simple change is replacing the existing hardware on your cabinets. Hanging new artwork or curtains will give your kitchen a whole new look.

One of the biggest hurdles in the kitchen is where to put everything! Here are some tips for expanding your existing storage -

1. Put things you don't use very often in the hardest to reach places, like the cabinet above the fridge, and the very upper shelves.
2. You can keep your good dishes in a hutch or buffet in the dining room.
3. You can pick up an inexpensive build-it-yourself cabinet to keep downstairs that will house things you don't use as often, or extra food and supplies.
4. Use stackers to store more things in less space, and still make things easy to get to.



5. Use lazy susans for spices. You can access them easily, and the spices won't be out getting all dusty and greasy.



6. This suggestion is going to sound a little crazy – get healthy and quit buying packaged foods. You'll be thinner and healthier, and you'll have a lot more space in your cabinets.
7. Use digital cookbooks. 'Real' cookbooks take up space and get dusty. If you're using the book on the counter, you probably will spatter, splash, and drip on it. With a digital cookbook, you can print out the page you're using, splash on it to your heart's content, and throw the page away when you're done. No storage and dusting required. All of my most used recipes are now housed at CommonSenseLiving.com
8. Do you have a bunch of small appliances out that you rarely use? If you actually use a small appliance, like a blender, toaster, juicer, etc – find one cabinet where you can store these items, but get to them easily.



If you rarely use an appliance, like the waffle maker that you use twice a year... put it in a cabinet downstairs, or in the linen closet. Quit letting these things take up valuable counter or cabinet space.

Remember that a perfect fit means making your every day life easier and more enjoyable.

Bathrooms

Before you start thinking about any decorating you would like to do in your bathroom, you need to make sure that it is in good shape. It is important that you make sure there are no leaks, and that all the caulking is tight.

You don't want to complete your bathroom, only to find a leak and have to completely redo everything after the problem has been fixed.

Like you did in the kitchen, you'll have to assess what you have and work around that to a point – unless you're tearing out everything and starting over. Maybe that would be nice, but not realistic for you right now. What can you do?

Again, you'll have to assess any cabinetry. Is it ok? Do you want to paint it?

Is the faucet in good shape? You can pick up a shiny new faucet for not a lot of money.

Replacing old towel bars will make a big difference.

I like to have fun when I decorate a bathroom. It's a small room and it's usually not especially tied to another room. You can be a little more outrageous if you want.

Like one time I had a bathroom that was all blue. The ceramic tile on the floor was blue. Thankfully, the ceramic tile surrounding the tub was white, but the tub, sink, and toilet were blue. Are you sitting down?

I picked up a flamingo shower curtain. It did have some blue in it, so I painted the walls a turquoise blue – which did coordinate with the existing blue ok. I painted the ceiling and the trim hot pink. I accessorized with hot

pink towels and flamingo accessories. That bathroom woke you up in the morning!

Another bathroom had traditional cherry finished cabinets, and basic almond tub, toilet and sink. I found a border I loved that was teal and peach. I had the teal computer matched and painted the walls in the teal, and put the border around the top of the wall just below the ceiling. I did the rest of the accessories in peach – the towels, rugs, soap dish, and even a small floral arrangement.

My last bathroom had an Aristocats theme. Seriously. I picked up this shower curtains that is sort of a French street picture. It has a lot of colors I could work with; peach, gold, blue, green, and pink. I picked the peach for the walls, since I have a peach tub, sink, and toilet. How different is that? It was there already. I already had blue towels and rugs. And we picked up a set of antique pictures of some goofy looking cats that reminded me of the Aristocats. They're comical.

But I'm getting that itch again. Wonder what I'll come up with this time!

The bathroom is one room where you can experiment and have a little fun.

Practicalities...

And since my bathroom was so small that 2 people can't stand in it together, I had to get inventive.

One problem is finding a place for the wet towels. I put two plastic stick on the wall hooks on the wall just outside the shower. The added benefit is that the towels hang over the heat vent. Not only do they dry – but they're nice and warm when you get out of the shower in the cold winter.



I use a little basket next to the toilet to keep extra toilet paper handy - I have an over the door hook for a robe.

Since I have a pedestal sink, there is no storage. I'm using my grandfather's smoking stand. I put a vanity tray on it to keep it from getting damaged, and then a lace covering over that so I don't have to clean that mirror all the time. It works. It holds the hairgels, hairspray, peroxide, dixie cups, and taller things that won't fit in the medicine cabinet.

Most of the department stores sell inexpensive cabinets that are small enough to stash in a corner to store your beauty care items that aren't so beautiful. These little cabinets are usually white – but you certainly could paint them. The beautiful thing about cheap stuff is that you can have fun with it and not worry too much if you ruin it or get tired of it.

Sometimes you just have to get creative.

Back at my friend's house...

Boy, this bathroom was something nightmares are made of.

The walls were primed 10 or so years before and never painted. There was mold and filth galore. The walls had to be washed, treated with bleach, primed, and then painted.

The vanity was an old oak finished one that half the finish was gone. The sink was an off white marble look. I was just going to paint the cabinet...

He had seen a sink that he fell in love with. Then, he wanted a white vanity that was taller than the one he had. Then of course, you had to paint or replace the medicine cabinet. The light bar would need to be replaced. He wanted another cabinet over the toilet with a towel bar.

Unfortunately the sink he saw was a custom sink that had been returned, and someone else bought it. He had his whole color scheme in his head built around *this* sink. (That was \$800 and he never would have bought anyway...)

We got all of the white cabinets, white sink, faucet, light fixture... But then it came time to buy paint. I stood him in front of the paint display and told him to pick a color. I was afraid, but he picked a teal color that he said reminded him of cars in the 50s. OK then...

The next job was to find a shower curtain with the right shade of teal that was not feminine. Ahhh, online shopping is a great thing! I found a teal and brown stripe and he liked it. Cool. Got some matching brown rugs and hand towels.





The tub and surround and floor still need to be replaced, but that is not in the budget right now. The shower curtain hides the tub nicely, if I could get people to close it when they're done...

We ended up getting rid of that chrome shelf thing on the sink. It was always in the way.

That project cost right around \$600.

The Mishaps...

The bathroom redo went pretty well, and it got done pretty quickly. We did have a couple of oopses though...

The first oops we initially blamed on buying inexpensive stuff. The old sink actually screwed onto the vanity. The new one doesn't. So it just sort of floats. When someone forcibly knocks into it, it moves. We had a broken drain pipe in just a few days.

Turns out that there is this silicone sealant you're supposed to use to hold the sink in place. Who knew?

Second oops -

We had gotten a taller medicine cabinet. If we had stuck with the light bar with the round bulbs, that would not have mattered. But, we got a nice fixture that had 3 shades that hung down.

When he went to install it, the shades would not fit above the cabinet. Ugh!

So then he went and picked a different one. It goes perfectly with the more masculine look of the room.

Problem is... it won't hang straight.



Now we had seen some that were designed to hang cockeyed, but this was not one of them. We're going to pretend it is ;) Just call it modern design and be done with it, right? The plus is we can adjust the one light to actually shine into the shower, so that actually is a benefit.

Now, all of the stuff we put in was inexpensive. Not very high quality. But it looks a whole lot better. When he decides to redo the tub and surround - we'll see what he wants to do then. It wasn't a lot of money, and it makes a big difference.

One son said he can't remember it ever looking that good. The daughter who never steps foot in the house if she can help it said that the bathroom had

never been that clean her entire life. She practically ran out to get her husband saying, "You've got to see this!"

It may not be perfect, but I'd call the project a success.

You don't have to play by any real rules. That's what Perfect Fit is all about. What works, and expresses your personality?

If you have a normal bathroom, you can do things like change the handles on the cabinets, or change the light fixture covers.

And of course, the focal point for most bathrooms is the shower curtain. The window treatments, the towel colors, and even the shower curtain hooks can all be coordinated to make a distinctive look.

Just a side thought – if your shower curtain doesn't slide very well on the rod, try rubbing the rod with a piece of waxed paper. It's an old retail trick that they use to make hangers slide on the racks.

If you have a metal shower rod and it has rust spots on it, take The Works bathroom cleaner and a green scrubby sponge and work at it.

Bathroom Checklist -

How many wet towels do you have to deal with?

Where are you going to put them?

Do you have places for all of the personal care items?

Is extra toilet paper easily accessible?

Is there a handy place for a hand towel?

I find it really obnoxious when the only thing available to dry your hands on is a used bath towel. Make sure you have a place for a hand towel, and change it daily.

Its also hand if you have the room to have shower spray, window cleaner, and a roll of paper towels in the bathroom. I have to keep mine in the linen closet just outside the bathroom.

If you don't already have a copy, [Secret Confessions of a Clean Freak](#) will help you keep your bathroom (and the rest of the house) clean with no backbreaking effort. Won't that make life a lot easier?

Master Bedroom

It's really easy to change the look of your bedroom without spending a fortune. Just using a little creativity on your part will go a long way to improve the layout, and look, of your haven away from the stresses and strains of modern life.

Seriously. Your bedroom is the place where you have to feel ultimately comfortable. It's the place where you can close the door on the world and drift off to sweet dreams. But, it doesn't have to cost a lot.

The first thing you need to do is deal with the piles of stuff.

Papers don't belong in the bedroom. You shouldn't be doing work in the bedroom. I personally don't think you should have a TV in the bedroom either, but that's just me ;-)

Get the clothes put away. Get the laundry done, folded, and put away.

If you have too many clothes, weed through the clothes you don't wear and get rid of them. Have a garage sale, give them to charity, or if they're really ratty, throw them out, or cut them up for dust rags.

If you don't have enough closet or drawer space, invest in some Rubbermaid bins. You can put the out of season clothes in the bins, and just switch them out when the season changes. You can store the bins under the bed, in the back of the closet, or in the laundry room.

Oddly enough, most of the furniture in the bedroom really doesn't matter much. What really makes the bedroom luxurious is the bed itself, the wall color, and the accessories.

You want to pick a bedspread or quilt that you love. Everything else will fall into place easily. Once you have your bedcovering, you can pick a great color for the walls, great sheets, and accessories – just like you saw in the earlier chapter on picking wall colors.

Little things that are essential are things like comfy sheets and new pillows. You spend one third of your life in this room. It's where you relax and rejuvenate. If any room has to be a *Perfect Fit*, it's this one.

If your bed isn't the most comfortable, but you can't afford a new mattress right now, you can find all sorts of bed toppers that will give your bed a new comfy feel.

You can get complete room in a bag sets, sometimes for under \$50. They will have the comforter, dust ruffle (which is great for hiding those boxes under the bed), shams, sheets, and window dressings.

You can accessorize with plants, flowers, mirrors, pictures, or small collections. I have a collection of perfume bottles. They are on small decorative antique shelves.

I would stay away from candles in the bedroom. The prospect of accidentally falling asleep with lit candles is not good. Use low wattage lighting to get the look without being dangerous.

There are tons of bedroom ideas in catalogs, and online. Spend time looking for a theme that speaks to you, and copy it!

If you want a fake fur bedspread, go for it. It's your room.

If you like a more Victorian feel, settle in to that.

The only thing I would bear in mind is that the room needs to be soothing. I wouldn't go for electric charged colors, or red. Emotionally charged colors are not good for a room where you're supposed to be able to settle in and go to sleep. Unless you're a teen...

This may seem like a contradiction, but I would also suggest a good reading lamp. A lot of people like to read a little before drifting off to sleep, and you don't want to have to get up and turn off the ceiling light when you're just about to doze off!

What about the rest of the furniture? Do you really notice it much of the time? You can apply the same techniques as you did to your cabinets.

- You can clean it up, cover the scratches, and polish it. (there will be a chapter later on how to do this.)
- You can refinish it.
- You can paint it.
- You can use things like dresser scarves to cover the top.
- You can accessorize and make it pretty.

My dresser is the only one I've ever had. I bought in a bruised and reduced room. It had a big scratch across the top that I polished out. I've had this dresser for around 30 years.

My daughter's dresser went through 3 make-overs. It was originally a darker wood finish when I picked it up at a garage sale. Then it was painted white. In her Datamation days, the handles were blue. Somewhere along the way, they were changed to a porcelain pull with a pink flower on it. Now it is painted black and the pulls are brushed nickel.

And yes, I could buy a new cheap black dresser for cheaper than the make-over – but this dresser had a secretary pull out in the second drawer which makes it kind of cool. And the older drawers are deeper than the new dressers. So, we kept it.

The biggest problem in bedrooms? Just getting rid of the clutter will make it look a lot better. Make sure everything has a home. (We'll talk about the special challenges of kids rooms in the next chapter.)

Every bedroom should have a hamper. Make it easy for everyone to keep their space clutter free.

If you read before bed, consider a nightstand that has a shelf for your books and magazines.

I also have over the door hooks on practically every door in the house since we don't have much closet space.

Some other bedroom decorating tips –

One of the best things I ever did was putting ceiling fans in the bedrooms. The fan makes the bedrooms comfortable for most of the summer. Rarely do we have to run the air conditioning at night.

Put some nice fluffy rugs where your feet will land when you hop out of bed. Just make sure to have some sort of non-slid backing.

Make your bed every morning. I used to make my bed right when I got out of it. But then I read about how in Europe they air the rooms out every day. That made a lot of sense. Now I leave the bed until I'm getting dressed so it has a change to air out a little.

In my case, my last 2 bedrooms were the bed is visible from the main living areas. Having an unmade bed just wouldn't be acceptable.

Even if you can't see your bed from another room – wouldn't your bedroom be more inviting if the bed looks good? Do it for yourself and your own peace of mind.

I also change my bed covering with the season. Not for looks, but for my comfort and ease. The winter bedspread is very heavy and hot. I could fold it down every night, or take it off the bed every night – or I can put it away for the summer and use a light covering for the summer and make daily life a lot easier.



Summer Bed



Winter Bed

Its important to remember that the bedroom is a place where we spend much of our downtime. Make it calm and relaxing.

One more example

There is another bedroom I want to show you so I can show you how to go about solving problems.

This little room was originally on the back of the house. When the addition was put on, it now was an interior room with no window. No natural light at all.

The furniture going into this room didn't match. There was a modern black platform bed with drawers. The nightstand and dresser were more antique looking with a cherry finish.

Here's how it looks now -



Here's what I did...

Painted with a brighter green.

I got a stick on window at Amazon.

I put a mirror on the wall directly across from it.

Bought an inexpensive colorful bedspread that covered the bed all the way to the floor.

The little room is surprisingly comfortable and cozy!

Bedroom Checklist -

Is the bed comfy?

Do you need a new bedding set?

Do you need new pillows?

Do all of the clothes have a home?

Other than sleep, dress, and maybe read, is there anything else you do in this room that needs to be accommodated?

Do you love being in this room?

Kids Rooms - Baby

For every new parent, they have a vision of what the perfect nursery should look like. But really, is there any need for you to spend \$2,000 in order to decorate and furnish a space that, in a couple years, they will have outgrown?

When my daughter was born, I decorated her new room to the hilt. The bottom portions of the walls were pink, the top part was lavender. The two colors were separated by a border with teddy bears dressed in antique looking clothing. The furniture was white. I did not invest in a changing table. The crib was one that converted to a toddler bed so the room would be functional for years to come.

I picked up a dresser at a garage sale for about \$30. Expensive for a garage sale, but it was a heavy piece with deep drawers. The second drawer is a pull out secretary. I painted it white and put some pretty porcelain handles on.

Except at the age of 3 or so, she told me she didn't like it and wanted to do something different. Dalmations.

The lessons learned – When they are a baby, they are not in that room except to sleep. When they are old enough to have an opinion – they won't like what you did anyway. That's just the nature of kids. Unless you have a lot of money to burn, and a lot of time on your hands, I personally would not spend a fortune on a nursery.

Plain painted walls, and maybe some wall clings will work just fine. Use colorful sheets, blankets, and window treatments that you can change easily.

Pre-school through elementary -

So, the next phase was Dalmatians. For many girls it's all things princess. Boy have their favorite characters. Some like dinosaurs, or trains, or cars. For my daughter it was all things dog.

We got the red bunk bed. Her 101 stuffed animals lived on the top bunk. That was a god send!



My husband at the time was very artistic. He painted a whole Dalmatian scene on the top of an old desk we had. We had Dalmatian sheets and comforters, and there was a stick on border, separate Dalmatian clings, and

paw prints. The room was definitely Dalmatian decked out. Those stick ons moved with us for years. And the coolest part about that was that the walls stayed white for years with no complaints.

I had those cheap white build it yourself bookcases. I bought a bunch of those plastic bins. She had a bin for cars, one for dogs, etc. To clean her room all she had to do was throw stuff in the right bins.



As you can probably tell, the picture was not staged. I had no idea at the time that I would be writing a book. This is really how clean her room was.

I had a large rubbermaid bin that served as an art bin that held the construction paper, coloring books, crayons, colored pencils, markers, and all that kind of stuff. The crayons, markers and colored pencils each had their own bin that went inside the big bin. She and her friends could do whatever they wanted as long as they cleaned up when they were done. Since no one wanted to lose coming over privileges, they cleaned up.

Find a theme that your child loves, add in some easy storage, and you'll have a room from kid heaven.

Don't be afraid to buy inexpensive or secondhand furniture and paint it. If they get tired of it, or it doesn't last, at least you didn't spend a fortune. And you can have fun with it. So what if its purple and lime green? Its a kid. Their room should be fun.

Pre-teen – early teen

The dark days of decorating.

Remember all that stuff we liked as teens? Dark walls, posters, black lights, and incense... throw in some funky stuff and wa-la. You have an awesome teen room. UGH. I couldn't believe it.

We graduated to the mattress on the floor, floor pillows and posters on the walls. She has wanted the walls black, purple, teal... and as a renter, I had to say no. But the black comforter and colorful pillows worked fine.

Bean bag chairs, game chairs, peace signs and beaded curtains are all cool. Pottery Barn has a teen section on their website.

There's not much to say about this phase other than this too shall pass...

Late teen, early 20's – Trend Setters

Individualism meets style.

Now they want to spread their individual wings and try things. Black and white are still hot, but mixed with neon pink, orange, lime green or purple. But now they have a better sense of style.

Lately my daughter has been into orange. I talked about this earlier when we talked about choosing colors. So the first problem was what was I going to do with this orange room?

The second problem is – I didn't have much money. There is not much left to do an extensive redecorating project.

Second problem – Emma's room is the size of a walk-in closet. It is just short of 7x9 and there is no closet.

We discussed all sorts of bed options – day bed, trundle bed, regular bed. Up to this point she had been using the full sized mattress on the floor. We figured if we used the twin mattress, she would have more room. The twin mattress that was on the top bunk has barely been used. I cleaned it up and it's very comfy. You can read "How to Clean a Mattress" later in this book.

They really aren't doing sleepovers much anymore, and there is plenty of sleeping space downstairs – so we ruled out the trundle in favor of more storage space. But if I buy a regular bed, then I have to buy a box spring. As luck would have it, I found a cool, black, build it yourself captain's platform bed with drawers underneath. Perfect!

At Walmart it was \$129 plus \$19 delivery. The reviews were so-so, and many complained of the bed arriving damaged or with pieces missing.

I found the bed at Amazon for \$149 with free delivery, and no complaints about the bed arriving damaged. Amazon wins. (Actually, I went to look at it today and the price is higher.)

While I was waiting for the bed to arrive, I searched high and low for bedding. Since I wasn't finding anything good with orange in it, I went to black and white. She likes black and white, and she likes zebra. I found a twin comforter and sham for \$29.99 and some orange sheets for 34.99 at Overstock. Perfect!

The bed came early. Which is cool. But they delivered it to my neighbor's house – and no one around...



I had to get the bed down the stairs and into the house. At one point, I dropped the bed on my foot. It immediately formed about a 3 in. blood blister. I left the bed where it was and went into the house to ice it and make sure I could move my toes. Nothing broken. I figured it would be a good idea to put on real shoes. But I finally got the 111 lb. bed into the house.



My Black and Decker cordless screwdriver made putting the bed together easy. Since it was 4th of July weekend, I just puttered with it here and there. In total, it probably took me a couple of hours, but I was taking my sweet time.

Here it is put together -



The next problem was a nightstand. I found a cool little computer desk at Walmart for \$29. This piece will serve as a nightstand, desk, and hopefully make-up table. I even found a zebra desk chair at Walmart online.

If you have girls, you know how hard it is to get into the bathroom sometimes. I was raised in an all girl household too. I would sit at my desk with my makeup mirror and put on my makeup. I still use a vanity table. It's more relaxing, and it frees up the bathroom. I highly recommend investing in a makeup mirror and a place for the girls to put on their makeup.

I wasn't too sure about a bright orange room, but it has grown on me. She loves it. She says the color makes her happy – and that makes me happy.

And you know that dresser I bought when she was a baby? It is now black with polished silver drawer pulls.



It looks good, but it already has nicks. The Rustoleum furniture paint isn't going to hold up very well. Not happy about that!

Window treatment? I picked up some zebra ribbon at WalMart and paper clipped it to the trim piece on the blinds. Seriously! It gives it just the right touch of accent without taking away from the natural light or over filling an already tight space.



And what girl doesn't have a collection of stuff? These wall shelves offer a perfect space saving solution. We considered putting a shelf just below the ceiling around the room, but then you can't get to the stuff.

If you've ever stayed in a lakefront home, you know that there really isn't much in the way of closets. Since the majority of her wardrobe is hoodies, I put this rack behind her door.



The total cost of this project was just under \$500.

The room is cute, comfortable, and functional. And she loves it. What more can you ask for?

Inexpensive Bedroom Finishing Touches

You can get hold of a small table and turn this up into a cool make up vanity by painting it to match your bedroom décor.

Also you could get some colorful bed linens to bring all the elements of the decorating you have done together. You could even purchase extra sheets, which can be made into curtains and lampshades that will match the rest of the décor. My makeup table has had 5 or 6 different covers so far.

If you can not afford to replace a worn out carpet in your bedroom, then opt to have it taken up, and go for low maintenance finished or painted floors with some throw rugs. I'm not big on painting a good floor myself, but it can be a cool new look for a beat up floor.

Its a good idea to put some large cushions in the kids room that they can use when their friends come round. It will give them a much more relaxing and friendly atmosphere and a place where they can get away from it all.

Rather than replacing a perfectly good bed, instead, just get a new headboard for it instead. You can search YouTube for make it yourself ideas.

You can pick up things like some fringe or beading, or lace from a clearance table at the local craft store. You can then glue this around the bottom edge of the lampshade and the hems of curtains to provide a new look. You could even glue it around the edges of shelves.

Add Your Personality -

What really stamps a room with your personality is the accessories. Pillows, figures, pictures, what you collect all give the room your individual stamp.

Whether you collect plates, figurines, dogs, frogs, roosters, books, or whatever it is that you love, you can make the room come alive for you when you are surrounded by your favorite items.

Decorative touches you can use in any room -

Pillows

Throw rugs

Table cloth or place mats

Candles

Plants or flowers

Holiday decorations

Wash the windows

Curtains or valances

New blinds

Paint

Chair rail

Slipcovers

New lampshades

New wall art

Books

Just by adding a few small, but creative and decorative details, you can make any home look warm and inviting. As long as you approach your decorating creatively, it should not only save you money, but will be fun too.

Decorating on a budget can be fun. So instead of looking at the more expensive items that are available, why not instead start looking at their inexpensive counterparts. There are plenty of companies around which offer items that look as good as the more expensive items for the home, at half the price.

I like the treasure hunt. Looking for interesting and different items at resale shop and antique stores. I just picked up a new picture at the new designer consignment shop for \$10. I'm always on the lookout for interesting pieces.

One secret is that you sometimes need to remove things when you bring new things in. Participate in neighborhood garage sales and make money for new stuff ;-)

Decorating is never finished.

This edition has come to an end. I've had so much fun writing this for you. I'm kind of sorry to see this end. But decorating never really ends. I'm currently working on some more advanced projects, and I'm documenting as I go along. Be sure to watch out for the next edition.

Stay in touch in the meantime by visiting my blog at CommonSenseLiving.com.

See you around!

Carole

CommonSenseLiving.com

P.S. Don't miss the bonus articles – keep going....

How to paint a room next weekend

Do you have a room that you would like to fix up before the holidays? Or, do you have a room that is just depressing? One that could really use a face lift?

The last time I did this exercise, it was my bedroom. Dismal, yellowed paint. Just ugly and blah. Now the room is warm and inviting. A couple gallons of paint, a paint brush, a roller and cover, and a little work.

That's all it took. Now it looks like a southern garden get-away. And it feels so much better, everyday. The difference in how it makes you feel when you walk into that room is incredible.

It could be your bedroom, bathroom, living room. Imagine clean walls. Imagine a nice soothing color.

Which room in your home is the most depressing? Let's get rid of it!

Just Kidding, sort of.

"A warm and inviting living space can improve your whole attitude" according to Grace Ong- an architect and instructor at Parsons School of Design in New York City.

You thought I made all this stuff up- didn't you?

But painting a room can be a really overwhelming task. One that we usually put off for as long as possible. Well, like most everything else in my life, I've broken this job down into little steps that will make it a whole lot easier.

So here's how you can get that room painted this week. The entire week will be spent planning and organizing, leading up to the main event. By the time you get to the actual rolling, it'll be a snap.

Monday -

Today, when you are picking up, spend a few extra minutes getting rid of any clutter in this room.

Have you seen a room design, or color schemes that kept catching your eye? What color would look good in this room? Pick a color that will blend or make a nice contrast with your existing furniture. Do you own a pillow or picture that has the color you want in it?

I would advise going for something soothing and tranquil. I've had fun doing some outlandish rooms, but they weren't comfortable to actually be in everyday. Like the shocking pink and turquoise flamingo bathroom I did once. A real eye opener, let me tell you. It was cute, but.....way too much color.

Or the black and white and red living room I did once. It was great to look at, but I never actually sat down to relax in that room. I spent most of my time in the yellow and white kitchen.

Good mood enhancing colors would be sunny beiges, pale yellows, peach, light green. Anything that has a yellow or orange hue that give it the feeling of sunshine. That puts us in a better mood.

Pale blue is also very calming. Back in the 70's we would call the blue, yellow and white

combination Florida colors. It seemed that all the people who had winter homes in Florida had them decorated in that combination. I see it's coming back in style!

When you go for an outlandish color on the walls, just be prepared that you will tire of it, and have to repaint it. You'll probably have to prime it too. I would have more fun with the accessories and bring in color that way.

I'm going to let you think about that today. This part can take a lot of thought. What color is right for you? Go back to the picking colors section and think about a color that's perfect for that room.

Tuesday -

Today you need to look around the room and see what needs to be done.

- Do the walls need to be washed before you can paint?
- Are there holes that will need to be patched?
- Will the ceiling need to be painted too?
- Will you be able to move the furniture to the middle of the room, or will some have to be moved out to make enough room to move around?
- Have you settled on a color? Do you have anything with that color in it that you can take to the store to match the paint to?

Stop by the store and pick up a few paint color samples. Tape them to the walls in the room so you can see what they look like in the different lights of the day.

Another helpful hint- If your wall color is lighter, it won't be as obvious if your trim work is not perfect.

Have fun picking your color.

Wednesday -

Make a list of all of the supplies you will need for this project.

Ladder

Drop Cloth

Paint brush

Roller handle

Roller cover (2 if you have to paint the ceiling)

Roller tray

Spackle or Red Devil for patching holes.

Scraper for filling and smoothing holes. (If you do this right, you won't need to sand)

Paint(s) probably 2 gallons of wall color, and if needed- 1 gallon of ceiling paint. I find I always need the 2 gallons of wall color. It's good to have some left over for touch ups.

See what items you already have on hand, or can borrow. Find them and put them where you can get to them.

Make a separate list of the things you need to buy.

Thursday -

Today you will move another step closer to a new room.

- Make a final decision on your color choice.
- Buy the items you need, including the paint(s).
- If you have a pillow or picture, or something with the color in it, you can take it to the store and have it computer matched.
- **When you get home with the stuff, put it right in the room to be painted.**

- Do some stretches, and get a good night's sleep!

Friday -

Time to get to work!

Today you will start the prep work.

Why not just order a pizza tonight?

Do any washing that needs to be done.

Move as much furniture into the center of the room as you can tonight. Cover it with a drop cloth or plastic. Then you can move around the room easily tomorrow.

Of course, if you are painting your bedroom, that step will just have to wait until tomorrow.

Take pictures down. Patch holes.

If it's not too late, you can start doing some of the trim work. I like to get 2 coats on the trim work first. Then all I have to do is roll and clean up.

But don't stay up too late, or kill yourself doing it. Do what you can comfortably get done, and get a good night's sleep.

To have begun is half the task.

-Horace

Saturday -

This is the big day.

If you followed directions, all you have left to do is finish the trim work, and roll the walls.

Plan on 2 coats. Very rare that I have been able to do a room in only one. Make sure to let the first coat dry completely before applying the second coat. I rushed this recently and gott bubbles in the paint. :-)

You can cover the paint pan and roller with plastic wrap to keep it from drying out while you wait for the first coat to dry.

Not much else I can say. Get to work.

Tonight you will be admiring your handiwork.

Sunday -

Today, just putter.

- Clean things.
- Arrange things in the room.
- Hang pictures. All the little touches.

Put your signature on the project.

This is your new room.

Enjoy it!

How to make your furniture last longer

Give your old wood furniture new life -

Is your wood furniture looking less than stellar? Tempted to cover it all? You can make it look great again.

Spend an afternoon when the weather is crummy and get your wood furniture looking practically new.

You will need -

Weiman's Furniture Soap

Weiman's Furniture Cream

Rubbing Compound (yes, automotive)

Pledge

Soft rags

You might also need some stain and wood filler for bad scratches.

Dust off furniture.

Wash with furniture soap using a slightly damp, soft rag.

You don't want to over-wet your wood furniture.

Take your time and make sure to rinse well, frequently rinsing out and wringing your rag.

If you have fine scratches, or the finish is looking dull - put some rubbing compound on your damp rag and gently rub in the direction of the grain. Rubbing compound is a fine sanding, so be very gentle- and do not swirl.

Thoroughly rinse by gently wiping with a clean damp rag until all of the residue is gone, remembering to wring your rag out very well.

If needed, fill in with stain (or wood filler and stain for bigger gouges), and let dry before proceeding. Be sure to wipe stain evenly, and wipe off any excess right away.

With another clean slightly damp rag, apply furniture cream.

With a clean, dry, soft rag, dry and buff the furniture.

Now, leave it alone for at least an hour.

To finish up, apply a good coat of pledge and shine it up.

I know, the last step may be controversial. I have really old furniture that still looks great.

If you do this routine at least once a year (twice at most), your wood furniture will look great for many years to come. Take it from someone who keeps her furniture forever! Seriously - I bought my dresser in the 70's. I have a few pieces from my grandparents house that date back to the 30s and 40s.

PackRatitis runs in my family...

How to Clean a Mattress

The question of how to clean a mattress comes up fairly often, especially when you're expecting out of town visitors.

Remember that a mattress is a piece of upholstery - except that it catches and holds unpleasant things like dust mites, dead skin, and odors.



Image via [Wikipedia](#)

If you've never had a Kirby demonstration in your home, have one. It's a real eye-opener! When they do the mattress with the attachment that allows you to see how much stuff they are pulling out. It is *horrifying!*

So the first step in cleaning your mattress will be to vacuum, and vacuum, and vacuum some more. Flip the mattress and repeat. Do your pillows while you're at it.

If the mattress truly needs cleaning, use an upholstery cleaner, and be careful not to soak it. A foam cleaner, or a dry cleaner would be best. You don't need mold on top of it!

To eliminate odors and allergens, spray the mattress and pillows down with FeBreeze allergy formula. You can do this every time you change the sheets.

Make sure you're changing your sheets and washing them in hot water once a week. Wash or clean your blankets or comforters as needed. It's nice to have washable ones so you can do them once a month. If you have dry clean

bedding, I would suggest removing it at night when you're going to sleep. But I guess that's a personal choice. I'm all about avoiding extra housework!

If you have stains, Pet stain remover works great. Honest! I use Oxy Solution by Simple Solution.

If you can, sunlight is great for a mattress. Letting the mattress air out for an hour or so outdoors is great. Impractical for most of us though.

I think I'll go visit my mattress now....

[Find all the secrets and shortcuts- how to clean your house fast and keep it that way- the easy way-](#)

How to buy quality furniture for less

Is the hot furniture sale really a good deal? Good quality does not necessarily mean expensive if you know what to look for.

You've probably noticed that I keep my furniture a long, long time. I still have some furniture that I bought in the 1970s and 80s. I still have a few pieces that belonged to my grandparents.

How can you have the best chance of buying furniture that is going to last?

I've been looking for a piece to fit upstairs in the great room. There is yet another small furniture store going out of business, so I thought I'd head over and see if they had anything good.

Most of it was the same old, same old... But there was this cool little twin sized sleeper sofa. It was sort of a buttercream gold color. There is a little of that color in the print on the dining chairs, so with the right pillows I could make it work. The bed part came out and went back in easily. I put the cushion on and sat down. So-so. But the real deal breaker? I could feel the wood frame in the arms. There was hardly any padding. The fabric on the arms will wear out in no time. And it was kind of expensive, even at the closeout prices.

Heck, my sleeper sofa downstairs was \$400. Granted, it was in the late 70s – but I still have it and it doesn't look too bad. Needs a new mattress though...

So here are some things to look out for when you buy furniture -

- The piece should not wobble. I know, that should be obvious, but you'd be surprised...
- You should not be able to feel the wood frame in an upholstered piece.
- Seams should be nice and tight, and straight.

- Doors and drawers should open and close easily, and line up correctly.
- The piece should be comfortable. If you won't sit on it, it's not a deal no matter what the price.

Surface scratches on a wood piece are not too big a deal, especially if you can get a good price. Those scratches can be buffed and polished out. On a glass, laquer, or chrome piece, it is a big deal.

A lot of times you can get a good deal on appliances that are scratched or dented. If the damaged area is going in between cabinets and no one will ever see it – and it doesn't affect the working parts of the appliance – why not get the deal?

You don't have to spend a fortune to get good quality. You just need to be a smart shopper.

This really is the end. Thanks for reading- Now go put this stuff to work!

Find Carole on the Web -

[Main Blog - CommonSenseLiving.com](http://CommonSenseLiving.com)

[HowtoCleanHouseFast.com- how to keep the castle clean!](http://HowtoCleanHouseFast.com)

[WholeLifeOverhaul.com- affordable option to life coaching](http://WholeLifeOverhaul.com)