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Interior Design on a Budget – Tips and Tricks!

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Lesson #1: Define a Theme: Contemporary, Cottage, Eclectic, Southwest

Different Design Themes on a Budget

Designing a new house can be difficult; especially if it is not your area of expertise. There are several things to consider before finalizing a design layout. In the process of design implementation, there will be many revisions and modifications before the desired outcome is achieved.

Professionals in this area – interior designers and architects – have studied different techniques that can be applied when designing a particular type of structure or area.

Select your architect and designer very carefully. You are intrusting them to act on your behalf. A good designer, for example, will spent time with you to determine your likes and dislikes. Style, colors and textures all play a role in good design, but are meaningless unless they are YOUR style, color and design.

Your professionals can provide good advice concerning a particular theme or layout that you desire for your home.

Some of these design themes are:

1. Contemporary. This particular design theme is characterized by its smooth, curved shapes and lines that were popular during the 20's and 30's. Contemporary styles are usually associated with a touch of sophistication: usually taking classical forms and reworking them to the point of minimalism and nearly absolute reduction. Doors of contemporary style reflect functionalism with the absence of applied ornamentation.

2. Cottage Style. This design theme is known for its vintage look and casual, romantic feel. Technically, cottage style is not really a style because it is actually a type of place in which to live; but cottage furnishings have become popular resulting in the birth of the cottage style.

Cottage style furniture is often recycled, collected from family members or purchased at flea markets. As long as the effect is charming and comfortable, any furniture can fit the style. Cottage decors are usually pieces of furniture adapted from one use to another; for example, a bench may serve as a coffee table etc.

Floors are often wood and usually informal and imperfect. Windows should appear airy and light.

Instead of using heavy drapes, lace would be a good option for a cottage style window. The windows may even be left bare if privacy is not really needed.

3. Modern Eclectic. Eclectic style is a combination of items from a different variety of periods, styles and sources brought together through the use of color, shape, texture and finish. This style has continued to increase its popularity because people maintain their freedom to choose depending on their taste.

In eclectic style, the palette of colors can vary, but staying with the more neutral tones is easier to tie all the elements together. When choosing furniture, take into account the finishes, materials and lines of the pieces being combined and look for ways to make them blend; whether it is with paint, fabric, or finish.

An eclectic look means that a multitude of fabrics that can be patterned or textured, or both. Start by using a neutral background, and then add colored and textured solids to attain your chosen theme.

4. Southwest Style. This style is popular throughout the United States, particularly in Arizona and New Mexico. Straight lines and square shapes define sturdy and primitively crafted elements of the style.

Abstract geometrical patterns are evident, as well as the influence of Native American patterns. Terra cotta decorations, woven motifs, and leather furnishings are common elements of the southwest style. Door styles of this theme commonly use recessed panels with simple edge detail.

If you are looking for that southwestern motif, you might consider installing vigas. These are a typically southwestern design element and consist of open beams mounted on the ceiling. They are split poles with the rounded edge exposed and are usually stained in a dark shade. One step further and you can create latillas. This is the installation of small twigs tightly angled in a zizag pattern between the vigas giving the impression of the antique ceiling materials used in olden times.

Some of these themes may sound a bit expensive; but there are always alternatives that used to minimize the expenses, yet still have

the same effect.

Following the cottage style will not create a budget concern; as most of the elements of a cottage theme are recycled or used items - if not home-made. For the others, you just use your creativity and imagination to create the same sophisticated look without the high price.

Furniture, fabrics and other decorations can be purchased from certain shops that feature less expensive items. Check for ongoing sales and promotions in your neighborhood for good products at a bargain price. There are also flea markets, second hand stores, garage sales and other bargain shops that you can explore to find bargains for your home.

The real key is that you should have a creative mind and wild imagination when trying to stay within your budget.

Lesson #2: Budget Design for Your Living Room, Den or Family Room

Design Your Living Room or Family Room for Less.

Designing or rearranging your living room or family room is not too difficult a task. You need an artistic and stylish eye to be able to create a good design that not only you, but others, will like because the living room is usually the first area seen as you enter the home.

The money involved in redecorating your living room is also a major factor to consider. Furniture and decor of good quality are not cheap, especially if you are considering hiring an interior designer to do the job for you.

What if you are on a tight budget? How can you have the nice stylish living room or family room that you want?

There are actually several ways this can be done. Make use of the existing furniture and/or fixtures if you are thinking of creating a new design for your existing living room. You may just need to clean them a bit to make them look new before placing them in their new location. Older furniture that you've had for quite some time may require repairs to make sure they are still sturdy.

Before you start moving things around, you must visualize how you want your living room to appear. Try browsing through some home improvement magazines for a style that appeals to you; you need not have all the decor and furniture seen in the magazine for your room to look nearly the same. Just let your mind work and your creative instincts do the job.

Some old things that you thought you would never use again might just find their perfect place in your "new" living room. Make sure that it does not look cluttered or too heavy. Try to make everything as light as possible so that your room appears comfortable and relaxing as well as pleasing to the eyes.

By changing the lighting of the room you can create a totally different effect. There are several options available for quality lights and lamps that are not terribly expensive.

If you are designing a living room in your new home from scratch, you may want to do some homework first. Borrow some home improvement or interior design magazines and browse to find decorating ideas that appeal to you. You need not hire an interior designer to do the work for you.

You can do the design yourself by just being imaginative and creative; with the help of a guide, it will be a breeze for you to do. Ask for help from a friend you know who is experienced in decorating for advice and/or help.

The first thing to determine when decorating a living room is how you want the walls to look. Using wallpaper may be stylish but it is costly; and if you think long term, most wallpaper does not last for more than a few years. It can be easily torn or marred especially if there are children or pets in the household around so it might be to your advantage to use paint.

To save money, it is advisable to have similar colors throughout the house, not just in the living room. Besides the money saved, it is pleasing to the eyes to see consistency in color. That does not mean, however, that if you are accustomed to a monochromatic look, go ahead and dare to be different by adding bold colors!

Lesson #3: Budget Ideas for Kitchen Design

Budget Ideas for Your Kitchen

For those people who love to eat or cook, the kitchen is usually the best and most used, room in their house; they love working there and want it to look wonderful all of the time. Remodeling it and upgrading it is one way to enhance your lifestyle as well as adding to the resale value of your home.

In the United States, kitchen improvement and remodeling is one of the top home improvement projects; it is also the most expensive to redesign. So does that mean you cannot have a new look for your kitchen because you don't have the necessary finances available?

Not really! There are different ways and alternatives that will still give you a new and modern look for your kitchen even if you are on a tight budget. What makes kitchen remodeling expensive is that most people buy new appliances and cabinets and use expensive materials for their flooring and countertops. That need not be the case.

Your kitchen can be improved for less by refinishing your existing

cabinets, buying used appliances, and choosing the more economical options for countertops and floorings.

The first thing to do is to refurbish the existing kitchen cabinets. One option is to paint them inside and out with a lighter shade of paint.

White enamel is a good option because of its neutral effect. The cabinet handles can also be painted, or polished (if made of metal) for a shinier look; they (along with the other hardware which was removed before painting) can be placed back on the freshly painted cabinets.

Another option is to remove the cabinet doors and either replace or refinish them. Painting the frames a contrasting color to the walls can produce an entirely new look in the kitchen. Or, rather than paint, sand down to the bare wood and stain with a desired shade. Remount the cabinet doors on the freshly painted cabinets and voila' you have a new kitchen!

Your new kitchen can have new laminate countertops and vinyl floor, professionally installed, for a more reasonable price than using solid synthetic, tile, or granite materials. These too, will brighten the room. Your existing stainless-steel kitchen sink can also be reused. It may

need cleaning to remove the rust and the faucet may be changed to a more stylish yet inexpensive replacement.

If your kitchen appliances are still in good condition, then keep them rather than buy new ones. If not, then you may opt to buy used appliances. Refurbished appliances are not necessarily of low quality. There are second-hand or refurbished items that are still in excellent condition available, but you may have to search to find them – try bargain stores, used appliance stores, or garage sales. Don't think that you need to buy the first ones you see – be patient and you might find better ones elsewhere for an even lower price.

If your kitchen has a fireplace, it may just need some cleaning and a decorative touch to blend in with your new kitchen. You can place some inexpensive, decorative, scented candles for a touch of class, pleasing scent, and warm glow to the area.

Opt to add some fashionable curtains to your kitchen window for a new look, making sure the curtain color and style matches the overall feel and design of your kitchen. You might even consider making the curtains yourself. Just purchase a length of fabric that would match your kitchen design, and sew them yourself. Not only did you save by

making them, you also gave your kitchen a personal touch because of your handmade curtains.

There are many ways that you can design your own kitchen for less. You just need to use your imagination. Seek help from your friends and family for other ideas.

Visit upscale design stores for good ideas. Not only will you get good advice from “professionals,” you most probably will not get charged for it if you are just browsing! If you are capable of doing most of the work yourself, there would be fewer things you would have to hire done and less expense.

Budget need not be a deterrent to having a totally new look for your kitchen. Consider it an adventure, have fun and before you know it, you'll be enjoying your stylish new kitchen!

Lesson #4: Budget Bedroom Makeover

Bedroom Make Over Ideas for People on a Budget

People can always spruce up an old bedroom for less, by using a little

bit of ingenuity, creativity, and some vision. Renovating can make an old bedroom look as good as new, or even better!

You don't have to spend a ton of money to create a new look, there are many ways you can redecorate a bedroom for less! Lots of ideas can be obtained by watching shows on television, talking to friends, reading magazines and visiting showrooms.

Here are some tips to make any bedroom look fabulous:

Splash the walls with color

Repaint the walls. This simply gives your bedroom walls an instant face lift! It will lighten up and completely renew the look of any bedroom! This is a great chance to add some spice to your old, dull, and boring bedroom. Choose your favorite color to add warmth.

But if you want to go crazy, you can pick wild colors and create your very own artwork on your walls. This is a great way to add a personal touch to a bedroom. It also showcases your personality.

Making old furniture look good as new

Re-upholster old furniture. It's amazing the difference this makes in the overall look of a bedroom. You don't have to spend a lot of money on new furniture either. You can just as easily restyle your old furniture using unique fabrics, paints, etc.

Just let your imagination run wild! The best thing is that you totally control the finished appearance of your furniture, since you decide what will be done to refurbish it.

Accessorize the bedroom

Strategically place some decorative scented candles around the bedroom to give the room an elegant look. They exude a sense of tranquility once they are lit.

Another great idea is to replace artwork on the walls. It does not have to be expensive. Inexpensive pieces of good quality are readily available. Select reproductions, photographs or posters! Even better, if you are adept at art, use some of your own creations and make the walls into your very own personal gallery.

Go hunting at a second hand store

Numerous treasures can be found in second hand stores! You can purchase second hand furniture as well as decorative lamps, antique mirrors, etc. for bargain prices at these stores.

Garage sales are also great places to unearth hidden treasures. Just drive around the block or watch the newspaper to see if there is anyone who is hosting a garage sale in your area.

Develop a theme for your bedroom

A great way to give a bedroom a fun and exciting look is to use a totally different theme. If you want to go with a Bohemian look for your bedroom, you just build around this theme by picking up things that will suit this motif. Also, try digging through old chests in the attic for items that would compliment the new style of your bedroom.

Decorate your Bed

Purchase new bedspreads and pillows that will compliment the new

style of your room. Pay a visit to the linen department of any major department or discount store. Browse through their selection of beautiful sheets, bed skirts, comforters, and pillows and you are sure to find some bargains.

The bedroom is a person's sanctuary: that is why it is important that it offers comfort. After a hard day's work, you just want to lie down in bed, relax, and forget about the day that has just passed.

Your bed should offer maximum comfort so that you are rejuvenated and refreshed for the next day. The condition of the bed is of utmost importance - it is the most essential part of any bedroom makeover!

Renovating a bedroom does not have to cost you a fortune! Just making key changes will make a world of a difference. If you are on a very strict budget, you do not have to redecorate the bedroom all at once. Take one step at a time and make improvements as your finances allow.

Giving a bedroom a much needed makeover can be an exciting and challenging activity. It can give people just the right boost they need to start their day out right.

Let's face it, who wants to wake up to a messy and/or dreadful looking bedroom? By renovating your bedroom you can give yourself that much needed change of environment that will help to brighten your entire outlook!

Lesson #5: Closet Cleanups

How to Make Closet Cleanups Fun and Easy

Summer is just around the corner, and for most people this means it is time to pull out the shorts, tank tops, and of course their favorite flip-flops.

For most people this also means rummaging through their closet, to sort out the right clothes they will wear this time of year. This is when disaster begins! Many people discover that their closets have turned into a storage area resembling an old library: except that instead of books, it contains clothes dating back to the time when their mothers picked out their clothes for them!

So what do you do with this giant mess? There are ways to make closet cleanup easier, and here are some steps that will help:

1. First of all you have to clean your closet! Remove all of the contents from the closet and lay them on your bed so you can sort through them later.

Once all the clothes have been taken out of the closet, clean the inside of your closet before putting any clothes back inside – remembering that it probably has been ages since this was done. Make sure that to do a good job and clean your closet thoroughly.

2. Now comes the hardest part; sorting the clothes. This is when a person has to decide which clothes to keep, and which ones to get rid of. Clothes should be separated into piles and then sorted according to the amount of use.

One of the best things that results from cleaning out the closet is that often it becomes an opportunity to make some money. Clothes that individuals would never wear again can be sold at a garage sale or auctioned on EBay!

Those who are thinking of putting their old clothes on EBay for sale should take a detailed photograph of the items they wish to sell, so it can be displayed along with the description of the item.

People will be amazed at how even old clothes that might not be in top condition will still find buyers on EBay. So when you write a brief description of these items, be honest about their condition. Include the size, brand, condition of the garment, color, and other information that will be useful to the buyer.

Individuals should not expect to get a high price for these used clothes; so list a practical starting price for these items to make them more appealing to a prospective buyer.

3. If you are in a charitable mood forget EBay; donate your used clothes to a charity. This way, the clothes you no longer want or need, can be given to those who really need them!

4. Another great idea is to swap clothes with your friends! Not only will this help clean out the closet; in return you will also items that are new to you and put them in your closet!

5. Once you have disposed of all of your unnecessary (or unused) garments the items that you have saved can now be put back in the closet. Arrange the placement of the clothes you are returning to the closet according to their function and usability.

Sweaters and coats may be tucked away in the corner of the closet; as well as other garments that will not be used in the near future. You may even discover clothes that you have forgotten you own! Clothes that will most frequently be used should be readily accessible. Your closet will now be organized!

When storing seasonal clothing, using those new plastic bags are a huge help. You can stuff and cram them full then use the vacuum cleaner to suck out the excess air. A huge mound of clothing is reduced to just a few inches in no time at all! This is a great way to store stuff if your closet is small or even if it isn't!

When organizing the closet take an inventory and determine what garments are lacking in your wardrobe

One other thing that should go without saying, soiled and dirty clothes should be laundered before they are put back in the closet - even old

clothes in your closet will then be clean.

Closet cleanups are a must! It may not be fun, but it is a chore that must be done even if it might to be painful to dispose of some items.

Just think of how much time you will save in the morning when you do not have to rummage through your closet looking for your favorite sweater – it will be right there in front of you, newly laundered, and neatly folded!

Lesson #6: Need a Home Office?

Find out How to Set up a Home Office that is best for Business

For those people who have decided to start their own business, what they need is a separate work space so they can work in peace, take care of their endeavors and concentrate on taking care of the needs of their business. For many individuals, this means a home office.

With the success of online businesses, more and more people have decided to work at home; which places the fate of their financial future in their own hands. Today, the internet has become an essential part

of people's everyday lives: this new trend of working at home reflects the increasing use of the internet in the business world.

It is important that a home office is treated with the same respect as a regular office since it is where work is done and transactions occur.

Basically it is the place where individuals earn their money: whether on the internet, via phone, or video conference. It is possible you may have clients coming to your home office to conduct business.

It is essential that a person who wants to have a home based business set aside a space in their home that will provide them with comfort and privacy to adequately conduct their business.

Where to set up a home office

Ideally a separate room in the house is the best place for a home office. The best area is away from congestion and noise: such as the children's bedroom or play area, the kitchen, or the entertainment room.

How to furnish your office

A home office should be orderly and give the appearance of a professional workplace. It should contain the equipment that you would find in any office: such as a phone with an answering machine that is capable of transferring calls, making conference calls, etc.

A separate phone line for the home office is necessary so that personal calls meant for the family and business calls do not interfere with each other. Having a separate phone line in the office will also allow for concentration on business without any distractions.

Other equipment you will need is: a computer that has an internet connection, fax machine, copier, organizers, and other office supplies. Things that a person will need in a home office will also depend on the type of business he/she is operating.

Setting up a home office will probably mean acquiring furniture: this includes a desk, lamps, tables, and professional looking chairs. The most important piece of furniture needed will be a comfortable office chair –invest in a really good office chair that provides comfort as well as stability. Since a person working in a home office will spend

numerous hours in his/her chair, it must be one that does not induce backache and/or make your body feel stiff.

Before purchasing any of these items, you should know how you will conduct your home business so that only necessary items are purchased. This way you will not be spending money for things that you do not need or are not necessary.

Choose your colors wisely

The color scheme of a home office should not be distracting to the person(s) working in the office. This means that bright pastel colors, and gaudy colors like shocking pink and neon green would probably not be appropriate.

If you have clients and/or hold business meetings in your home office, a professional atmosphere should be exhibited; so be wise when it comes to choosing your decorating colors. Neutral colors are best; since they are not distracting but consider using a few brighter and contrasting colors for accessories to add accents and interest.

Setting up a home office is serious business. The right environment

will be attractive and conducive to a good working atmosphere. Those who are thinking of setting up a home office should pay careful attention to detail when creating their office since they will be spending many hours working in it. Take the time to make your home office a comfortable and pleasant place to work!

Lesson #7: Camouflage with Paint!

Camouflage with Paint!

Paint is a very powerful tool in decorating and design: whether you are decorating a whole building, designing the walls and floors of your house, decorating an object, or coloring your face; paint always comes in handy and ready to help.

Paint can do a lot of things since it has the capability of making things look totally different. A once gloomy room can be brightened up by painting the walls with a light colors and adding some drawings or other decor. An object can look totally different after it is painted.

These examples mentioned are merely illustrations of ways to camouflage with paint. Camouflage can be defined in many ways; but

essentially, it means trying to conceal the identity of something by blending it into the surroundings so that it becomes less noticeable.

Paint comes in different colors and shades - there are more than a thousand available to choose from. It is now easier for designers and their clients to pick the exact shade they desire. If the right color is not found, paint can always be mixed to achieve just the color.

With the right choice of color, designers are able to achieve solutions that create a mood, camouflage flaws, and enhance appearance

- When designers want to set the right mood for an area, the purpose of the area should be determined first. A sleeping room would require a different color choice than a work area.

- It used to be thought that if painting a house, it is preferable that one color is used for the entire structure; that rule no longer applies. The use of bold colors paired with contrasting colors makes for visual interest.

- Flaws are always present; they often cannot be avoided, but we can do something to hide them. This is when camouflage may be used. For

example, if the ceiling of the room is too high, a darker paint will make it appear lower. If you want to create the image of a larger space in a small room, paint the walls with lighter colors. For large cold rooms, painting them with warm colors like orange, red or pink will make it appear warm and cozy.

Here are some more examples where camouflaging with paint can be used:

- If you are painting your bedroom, it is nice to blend the wall color with the linens and sheets that you use. You can also decorative paint patterns that match the prints or color of most of the linens but don't over-do it because it might be distracting.
- If the floor has been damaged, you can paint it with a color that matches or contrasts with the current wall color. Add a faux tile design for a more realistic look.
- If the pieces of a dining set do not match, paint the table and chairs with a single cohesive color to create a unified effect
- Old frames can still be used by painting them with a color that blends

with the color of the wall where they will be hung.

- Classic wood furniture can look new again by applying paint that matches the color of the room or a paint that is close to the shade of the original material.

- Camouflage is not just used when painting structures and their interiors. Some actors and performers use body paint on their faces and bodies to enable them portray a character; it can also be used as a mask itself, in lieu of wearing a mask.

- Some artists or painters use a human body as their canvass to showcase their work. An example of camouflage body painting is when a person is painted to blend with a background so he cannot be recognized at all.

Don't be afraid to try new, innovative ways of using paint. Add visual interest by using geometric patterns or flowing ribbons using bold, contrasting colors. The impact can be striking.

There are many things that can be done with paint. Just be creative and think "out-of-the-box" so you can create fresh ideas every now

and then. Don't be afraid to explore, or even become a bit radical at times. Some of the most creative and beautiful work is accomplished when the artist's willingness to explore is implemented.

Lesson #8: Faux Finishes Are Hot - Bare Walls Are Not!

Faux Finishes are Hot – Bare Walls are Not!

Ever see a wall finish that is so artistic it doesn't look like wallpaper or regular paint? If so, it might just be a faux finish.

Faux finishes are the latest craze in home improvement. Faux finish can be applied to any type of surface including dry wall, metal, glass, ceramic, wood, etc. The preparation for each type of surface varies.

A faux finish lasts longer than wallpaper. Since it is not paper-based, it will never peel off. It can be coated with polyurethane that is available in satin, matte, or semi-gloss finish for a longer lasting appeal.

There are different techniques that can be done with faux finishing.

The condition of the surface to which it will be applied determines the best technique to use to hide any imperfections. With the different

techniques possible with faux finishes, a small room can appear larger and more spacious, or a larger room can become cozier.

Faux Finishing Basics

As with any other paint project, the surface to be painted should be well prepared for the work to obtain a long lasting finish. Almost any paint can be applied to any type of surface and be long lasting by preparing the surface properly.

How do you prepare a surface for painting? Simple, just make sure that the surface is well cleaned. Interior surfaces should be cleaned and washed with soap and water: if there is mold or mildew, use a mild bleach solution to get rid of the spores. For exterior surfaces, some scrubbing with a bristle brush may be required. A mixture of TSP and water makes for excellent surface preparation.

Once the surface preparation is done and the surface dried, you can start with the project. There are no rules to follow in doing faux finishes. You have the freedom to do what you to create the desired appearance. There are different techniques that can be applied and instructions available to help you with your first project.

Before you start, you should have all of the necessary tools. The common tools that you will need are the primer, glaze, coating, brushes, rollers, paint tray, water bucket, gloves, rags, soap, water, and technique-specific materials such as a sponge, feather, and wood-graining tools.

Color is also one major consideration in faux finishes. Since you can be as artistic as you would like to attain the desired effect, you may want to try color blending or other combinations. If decide to try this, make certain that you use colors within the same color group. You can probably use the same base color with different shades. This will be more pleasing to the eye than combining with contrasting colors.

Before you start applying the finish to the surface itself - experiment first by using a small piece of wood or a scrap of the same surface that you will be placing the finish on. By experimenting, you will be able to see how it will look and decide whether to continue with that finish or try a different one.

There are several techniques that may be done when faux finishing.

Here are some examples of the different techniques:

- Color blocking – this is when there are different shades of a base color shaped as big blocks; this technique is ideal for nursery rooms.
- Smooshing – this is a simple marble effect, something like moiré wallpaper.
- Stripe – this uses different variations and shades of one color for a soft effect.
- Shadow Striping – if a striped tone-on-tone technique to make an elegant wall finish.
- Terracotta tile – a durable alternative to terracotta tiles; and only a fraction of the cost of the real thing.
- Fresco – is used for a mottled, parchment look.
- Copper patina – is ideal for kitchen surfaces because it provides a rich texture from the old country.
- Golden glaze – has a soft texture that adds a glimmering touch to a room.

Faux finishes are hot! You have the freedom to choose the design you want by applying your creativity and imagination for a desirable effect. So rather than having just a plain painted wall, why not try a artistic faux finish for a long lasting alternative to paint or wallpaper. It's faux, it's practical, and it's nice!

Lesson #9: Window Treatments

Lovely Window Treatments for Much Less!

Windows, by default, create a dramatic architectural impact whether inside or outside the home. However, inside the home, many windows end up as nothing but arbitrary openings in the space, thereby not maximizing their potential to become focal points or contribute to the design for a room. Even though many homeowners recognize the need to maximize their windows, the eternal fear is that an outstanding window treatment will inevitably leave them penniless.

This, however, is false. By allowing for pragmatic skill to sit side-by-side with design ingenuity, creating lovely window treatments does not have to be a distant dream.

Arming Yourself

At the heart of every resource-saving design scheme is a do-it-yourself spirit waiting to blossom. This has been proven time and again by amateur and professional designers alike, and the outcome of do-it-

yourself projects may be comparable to work done by professionals.

When creating window treatments, the willingness to work with fabrics in new and innovative ways is important. You are perfectly able to create window drama just as effectively as a trained professional, by using various patterns, designs and incorporating elements like tassels, tiebacks, valances and even covered shadow boxes.

Sewing is perhaps one of the most vital skills that can save a huge amount of money and effectively reduce the cost of hiring someone to create your custom curtains and window valances. Simple stitches, like the running stitch, the blanket stitch, and even the back stitch, are more than enough to create window coverings: and the aid of a sewing machine allows custom-made curtains and draperies to be created with ease.

However, the sewing challenged need not feel lost. Current innovations make it possible for the sewing challenged person to achieve the same end - making fabric creations with ease! When making curtains, the use of fabric adhesive tapes to join pieces of fabric, hide the raw edges of cloth that have been cut, or hemming makes the work less complicated than sewing. The tape is heat applied

to the fabric via an iron: care must be taken to determine if the heat necessary for its application will damage the fabric before you begin.

Otherwise, a simple glue gun is enough to help anyone work with fabric and integrate creative designs into curtains.

Velcro is another modern element that removes the guesswork from creating beautifully finished draperies.

Add Color to Your World!

Windows may be seen as wall artwork that may be exploited to its full extent. In order to incorporate color, one may use richly colored curtains, window valances, blinds, and even window frames. Mixing and matching complementary colors are also another good idea.

The use of white curtains and blinds works if the intention is to bring lush greeneries into the indoors, because white drapes effectively act as a background to the lush outdoor scenery, making the outdoors stand out and figure in seamlessly to the room's design.

Accentuate!

Simple curtains and colored frames are rudimentary in any window treatment, but what separates the stellar from the ordinary are the extra accents and ornaments effectively used in coordination with these basics.

One option for design to figure in is by making use of creatively designed café rods. Café rods are used to hang curtains, and some of them come in various designs and materials—either in wrought iron with swirls and decorative loops, or in rustic wood or ceramic covering.

If not café rods, one may make use of decorative curtain clips and pins, which hook the curtains to the café rods. Some of these decorative curtain clips and pins available in the department store are ornamented with interesting beads and buttons. If they are not available in your area, a simple glue gun with a regular curtain clip and some beads, buttons, or seashells will definitely do the trick.

For the draperies, accentuate by making use of curtain cuffs, tassels, and ropes, in metallic colors and other designs that stand out, giving the window just a hint of ornate detail to bring interest to the area.

Window valances are also an effective way to accentuate the room. Valances with thick drapes, or simple boards wrapped with cloth in some striped or floral pattern give extra height to the room, or reinforce the room's theme or feel.

With a little ingenuity, creativity, and do-it-yourself know-how, window treatments that make a statement are as easily said as they are done. The design opportunities—through colors, textures, and accents—are simply endless!

Lesson #10: Making the Most of Molding

One of the most versatile items to consider in your interior design effort is wood molding. Not only are there tons of uses for it but there are literally hundreds of different types and styles of molding.

Adding it to your decor also increases the perceived value of the home. Why is this? Molding is something that is added purely for esthetics and not as a necessity. Savvy real estate agents know that when a potential buyer spots molding in the home they usually exhibit positive buy signs.

Wood molding can be used in many different ways. Here are just a few:

Door trim. Set your home apart by deviating from plain old mitered edges. Adding blocks to the corners will give a pleasing, upscale look to an otherwise plain doorway. And, instead of a single door trim, try adding an additional decorative molding for another look.

Baseboards. Baseboards need to be sturdy. The entire reason for having baseboards is to protect the wall. There are different synthetic materials you can get such as vinyl but nothing takes the place of solid wood.

Base shoe: A base shoe molding added to the baseboard provides additional transitioning from the flooring material to the baseboard.

Window casings. Try dressing up your window casings. Just like doors, windows are usually finished off with a single plain trim and mitered edge. Try adding blocks and trim to match the doorways and you're sure to please the eye.

Chair railing. Is your dining room or kitchen eating area a bit on the cramped side? If so, think about installing a chair rail. Just as the name implies, this molding is designed as a rail around an area to prevent damage to the walls. If the room for your table and chairs is somewhat cramped, sliding the chair back to get up from the table can create unsightly nicks, dents, scratches and sometimes even knock out the drywall. Installing a chair rail at the height of the backs of your chairs will provide a "stop" that prevents damage to the wall. Chair rail material is easily spruced up with a new coat of paint and is much easier to maintain than repairing and replacing drywall or other

expensive finishes.

Crown molding. One of the best uses for wood molding is crown molding. Just as the name implies, crown molding gives a "crown" to your room. Placed at the top of the wall as a transition to the ceiling, wood crown molding is one of the best ways to add value and beauty to any room.

Stair railing. Wood molding can also be used as handrails in your stairwell creating beauty and safety to your stairs.

Wainscot cap. Another use for wood molding is as a top to wainscoting giving a "finished" look to any wall where you have opted to use wainscoting as a design option.

Framing. Another decorating tip is to use plain molding as a "frame" on a wall. The frame can act as a design element by adding a contrasting paint, wallpaper or finish to the area inside of the molding frame. This is a great way to display your favorite art or other personal items such as a collection of sorts mounted to a backboard of simple, finished wood.

With just a little imagination you can definitely make the most of molding in your home!

Lesson #11: Fabulous Furniture Finds

Going Over and Under—Fabulous Furniture Finds!

Trying to re-decorate the home is in itself an interesting challenge, because everyone wants to spend as little as they can while creating a unique design that really works for their lifestyle. This is the reason people from all over the world go out of their way to find inexpensive and unique furniture to accentuate their homes.

How does one know if it truly is a fabulous furniture find? Read on.

Cheap and Great Potential

Furniture that is inexpensive is usually found at rummage sales, furniture fairs, discount stores, salvage yards, and flea markets. This is why designers use the phrase “flea market finds”, and why there is great truth to the saying, “One man’s trash is another man’s treasure!”

When visiting these flea markets, sales, and discount stores, haggling and asking for a lower price is a common occurrence. Look for cheap furniture that is still in good shape and will not require major structural repair. Pay attention to ornate details, architectural designs, and interesting structures. Many of the unique period designs of the 1950s, for example, have found their way to these thrift stores and bargain areas. For a relatively small cost, they be repaired, updated, and re-upholstered to bring them back to life.

More importantly, remain open-minded when picking out various items

that may be used for entirely other purposes than those for which they were originally intended.

For example, sturdy wood in a rich color that was used formerly for a door or a window pane will work well as a coffee table or desk in your home.

Don't be afraid to go to salvage yards and look for wood, excess metal, and other rejected portions of furniture. These may be used as materials for projects like tables, stools, window treatments, and other purposes and many of these things may be free or purchased for a very minimal price.

Antiques in Excellent Condition

In flea markets and furniture fairs, some antique furniture and ornaments may be found among the ordinary knick-knacks. Keep your eyes open for these antiques and don't be afraid to pay a little more for a unique and authentic antique piece: it's a fabulous find if these antiques are less expensive than they might be, especially if they need very little restoration and/or repair.

Multi-purpose and Nifty

It's absolutely fabulous when a piece of furniture fulfills more than one purpose around the home or the office. Savings abound when one piece of furniture may be used for multi- purposes at the cost of a single piece.

Most of these multi-purpose pieces of furniture are executed by many designers in very ingenious pieces in order to mix functionality with the design. Watch for these smart designs that are found in the most unexpected places, like all-around home stores and department stores.

Find the Genius Furniture Designer

Many furniture expos feature first-time designers offering the public their products for the first time. Because this is their debut offering, many of these designers offer their avant-garde and noteworthy designs at a much lower price than they would in the more sophisticated home and furniture stores.

An expo arranged by furniture associations and furniture maker guilds, where visitors who pay an entry fee, often offer various discounts and bargain. The discounts and bargains offered the public are made possible by the sponsors of the event; making it a haven for new designs from up-and-coming designers.

When at these furniture expos, don't be afraid to talk to the designers themselves, and don't be afraid to try to bargain when you intend to purchase more than one piece.

After hunting for fabulous finds, the final measure of a fabulous furniture find is the use you gain from that piece of furniture. Make sure that the purchase you make will end up as a useful part of your home, so that the fabulous furniture will give you the stylish design as well as your money's worth.

Lesson #12: Decorate With Wallpaper

Bringing Life to the Walls with Wallpaper

One of the biggest problem areas in a room is a large blank wall that stares back at you as you enter. These walls create a feeling of emptiness within a room, and sometimes act to disrupt the flow of color and design that's already in place: or they do not fulfill their potential of creating visual impact in a room.

Wallpaper is an inexpensive and popular way to decorate walls and bring them to life. Depending on the size of the wall, its coverage, and what image it wants to portray, wallpapers lend versatility to a room and allow for your creativity.

Working with wallpaper is easy when you know how to do it, and here are some tips.

Preparing a Room for Wallpapering

Wallpaper disasters occur because proper preparation of the wall is not taken seriously. When painting a wall or upholstering a couch, a significant amount of time must be dedicated to the preparation. This extra time spent will save you time and trouble in the long-run.

Measure your wall and purchase wallpaper that will cover the entire surface of the wall (allowing for error and pattern matching). Cut your wallpaper into manageable sized strips when you are ready to use them.

To prepare the wall for wallpapering, remove any switch plates, wall fixtures, and socket covers. Clean the wall thoroughly to remove any dirt and/or mildew, and let it dry completely. Search the wall surface for any holes, depressions, or bumps: these may be repaired using a drywall compound or spackling compound. Apply the compound, smooth it as much as possible, and let it dry thoroughly. Sanding is then required to smooth the surface to make it as easy as possible for the wallpaper to adhere to the wall. Then prime your wall with an acrylic adhesive which is recommended by a wallpaper expert.

The Act of Wallpapering

Once you've primed your wall with the adhesive, decide how you want to hang the wallpaper. Go in the direction (right to left or vice versa) that is easiest for you. Cut your wallpaper strips allowing for pattern matching and a small amount of waste at the bottom. Starting from top, apply the wallpaper to the wall. You may want to precut the holes for the switches, other openings, etc. (being very exact with the measurements to avoid error) or cut them as you proceed to hang the wallpaper (the easiest way). Either way you must be precise!

Amateurs often end up with the problem of small air bubbles under the wallpaper, or uneven attachment to the wall. Resist the temptation to use a plastic smoother as it may tear the wallpaper or leave marks if used with improper pressure. Instead, use clean soft cloth and apply gentle pressure with the hand, or a light flexible rubber flap - much like the one used to clean windows.

Designing with wallpaper

Wallpaper provides an opportunity for colors and patterns to be incorporated into a design. The appearance of a large wall may benefit from wallpaper with patterns or stripes to break their overwhelming size.

Use vertical stripes to add height to the room, and horizontal ones to create the illusion of a wider space. Another option is to incorporate a dual design - using a striped pattern on the upper half of the wall and a solid or floral print on the lower portion to create interest.

Use borders near the ceiling to create visual interest and give the illusion of height to the room, as it calls attention to the ceiling.

When using wallpaper in more than one room of the house, you have the option of creating fluidity between two rooms without having to use the same wallpaper. The fluidity may be achieved by using different tones of the same colors, contrasting colors, or similar patterns.

Building the Room from the Wallpaper

When designing an entire room, wallpaper creates a nice visual palette with which to work. Wallpapers, because they provide various color and pattern in their designs, may create a central mood in the room (formal, informal, etc.); the source of a color scheme (from the colors in the wallpaper); and even a pattern that will flow throughout the room (floral patterns, stripes, or dots).

Wallpaper provides a great opportunity for design ingenuity. Don't be afraid to use the wall to its full potential - either to enhance the design of the room or build an entire room around it.

Lesson #13: Freehand or Stencil A Mural Makes the Wall!

Create a Mural on Your Wall!

Many design solutions are made available to consumers in department stores as ready-made answers to design dilemmas. These design solutions though made to make life easier and simpler, at times do not fulfill even the least of our expectations. Sometimes, the greatest fulfillment comes in exploring our own creative tendencies in order to arrive at the answers ourselves.

Walls are one of the biggest challenges - both figuratively and literally - that everyone has to face when designing a room. A huge blank wall may seem daunting, but many brave souls have achieved and conquered, and they aren't all professionals, they are do-it-yourselfers!

This article will help you create a work of art on your wall that is both beautiful and reflective of who you are.

Murals - both done in freehand or by using stencils - are an ingenious way to solve wall dilemmas. These are great ways to add personality to the wall and at the same time satisfy all of the color requirements or designs you wish to achieve.

Let's Begin with an Idea

Murals whether done in freehand or stencils must begin with an end in mind. This means finding the design you want to incorporate, the theme you want to portray, and the colors you want to use to create a working roadmap.

Take into consideration the room you are going to put the mural in, as well as the person or persons who will be the primary users of the room. This will help you visualize the saturation of colors that can be used, the kind of colors, as well as the freedom of design.

A theme is a good way to create this roadmap. For children's rooms, for example, you may use a jungle theme, which will allow the use of varying shades of greens, browns, as well as the tropical hues of the jungle animals; or a beach theme, which will entail the use of blues and light browns reflective of the sand and the sun.

Looking for Designs to Make the Ideas Real

To portray life, you can opt to go to bookstores and look for pieces on stencils and stencil works. Many books have been written on stencils to assist people who want to use stencils when decorating a room. Some of them even include stencil samples per se, which makes life much simpler. If you intend to use stencils that are available in the store or free found in free books, make sure that these are appropriate for the size of the room and the wall where you will use them.

Should the design(s) you want to work with not be available as stencil plates in the art shops or in books, all you need to create your own stencil is a thin plastic strip or acetate film. Draw the design you want on this plastic film in the scale you need, and carefully cut the design out. The pieces you cut out, you may discard; the plate from which you cut the design becomes the stencil you'd create your design.

Making the Design Your Own

At times, you may find no design or scale that fits your purpose. When this happens draw your design on a piece of paper: include the various shades of color you want to incorporate. This will later serve as your guide as you work on your wall

Make a copy of your original design in black and white making sure that the detail is quite clear. Take this to a photocopy center where they can print the copy on a transparency. Again make sure the detail and nuances are evident.

Once you get home, return to your wall with an overhead projector and flash the transparency onto your wall. You now have a template of the design you want on your wall. Position the projector nearer the wall to make the design appear smaller, and farther away to achieve the opposite effect.

You may opt to trace the projected image on the wall with a pencil, or just flash the image on the wall when painting.

Getting Ready to Paint and Stencil

Make sure you have the right materials for stenciling and painting your walls. Acquire a stencil brush that is used specifically for stenciling, or a paint brush that is in the same width as the stripes, lines, or designs you want to incorporate in your design.

Purchase a water-resistant adhesive tape, which you can use to attach and secure the stencil plate to the wall while painting. Water-resistant adhesive tape may also be used to protect areas you don't want to paint, as well as woodwork, glass, etc.

The grand visual impact of a mural on the wall, especially in a design that's truly your own, is a reward in itself. Include your family or friends as you work to bring more personality to the work, as well as to avoid getting over tired when working by yourself. Don't be afraid to use the mistakes made when painting and stenciling as a basis for better designs; some mistakes may be repaired or enhanced to create beautiful designs.

Lesson #14: Accessorize - Funky Can Be Fun!

Boost Your Confidence with Accessories that say "Funky Can Be Fun!"

As the old adage goes, "Simplicity is beauty," one cannot simply surmise that being simple could also mean boredom.

When it comes to visual image, the human eye would rather see things differently than what the mind has established. This means that to

create a contrasting look on the outside world, deviate from the ordinary and enhance the plain and simple to a “funkier” outlook.

Basically, to be funky is to be chic, trendy, and up to date in an exceptional mode: you try to make something unique and fashionable out of an ordinary concept. When you are able to enhance the look of a typical fashion and create a contemporary interpretation, you have created a funky look.

One of the best things about being funky is that there are no tenets to follow, your creativity and fashion-sense is unbounded and infinite. This shows that you can do whatever you want to do with your style as long as you are able to express your true personality.

Achieving a funky look is as easy as 1-2-3. All you have to keep in mind is to use different brilliant and vivid colors, various patterns, and cool accessories to create an appearance that is 100% unique and creative.

On Home Decorations

1. Stylish seating

Most stools, especially plastic stools are sturdy and useful but they look absolutely plain and most people leave them in the background. The best way to transform them into fantastic pieces that you can admire, incorporate trendy designs that give a funky look.

Try painting your stool with bright colors like pink or yellow and

decorate it with artistic designs. Or you can cover them with seat covers for a more comfortable look. To do this, measure and cut a piece of foam to fit the seat and then cover the foam with a piece of fabric large enough to tie the ends together below the seat.

2. Shock of color

Whatever you want to express with your personality; whether you want to go bohemian or western, the rule of the thumb is to use colors that will put more detail into your home.

For instance, you could paint the wall in your living room or sitting area bright red and adorn it with an artistic window frame of brass and wood.

If you have a super plain sofa, perhaps gray or tan, give it a funkier look by using pink and orange throw pillows. Adding some palm fronds brings a whiff of nature into a cozy area.

3. Turn plain pillow covers into little works of art

For a good night's sleep, use pillows that cradle the head and please the eyes too. After all, they are the last things you see before you drift away to dreamland.

You can start by creating designs with color stitches on the fabric. You can do this by using two threads in different, complementary colors to make a running stitch following any pattern that you like.

On Looks

Ready for a change?

Here is a list of things you can use to color your career look and get pumped about going to work.

1. Shades of 8 to 5 jobs

Aim for the skies when dressing in the morning! Mix up those prints for fun, but keep them in soothing blues and browns that blend together. This will create an impression that will bring out the uniqueness in you.

2. Toot your own horn

Trade your serious stripes for candy stripes, then top it off with your favorite white polo and belted jacket for a winning funky office look.

3. Pick power colors

Wake up basic black pants with a comfortable red pullover and pinstriped jacket. For a strong fashion statement, finish the look with red step-in shoes, but keep them comfortable with "kitten" heels.

4. Go beyond black

Listen to your inner fashion voice and break the monotony of black with a simple-but-stylish yellow tee and bold white belt.

Keep in mind that the main idea of being funky is to create a fashion statement by transforming the plain and simple into an innovative look.

The bottom line is that creating a funky look, whether at home or through your appearance can be really fun. It gives you a sense of freedom from the limitations set by the norm of society. Deviating from the conventional is a good way of revealing the real you.

Make your own decisions and buck the stereotype! Being funky can be fun!

Lesson #15: Have Some Fun with Fabric

From Fabric to Fabulous Design: Fabric and Decorating on a Budget

Many people are often faced with the design dilemma of changing the look of an entire room without blowing the budget. This means that in effect, major changes in furniture, structural renovations to the home, and any other major overhaul, are out of the question.

However, if there's one thing that do-it-yourselfers and professional designers agree on, it's the capacity of fabric in various textures and colors to bring life to a room. Fabric, when incorporated properly, can define the theme for the season or the mood of the room, and can bring life to even the dullest spaces.

Here are some fabulous ideas to incorporate fabric in different places in the home—

Window Treatments

A window positioned anywhere in a room provides a dramatic statement, a focal point, or may even provide an opportunity to bring the outdoors inside the room. With window treatments, fabrics may be used in curtains and window valances.

In order to provide a dramatic statement in a room via the window treatment, you can make use of two extreme types of fabrics—either heavy, rich-colored fabrics, or sheer draperies: or possibly a combination of both. Heavy, rich-colored fabrics make a dramatic statement with their strong colors and eye-catching patterns (like damasks, flower prints, stripes, etc.). Sheer draperies, on the other hand, bring a light, sunny feeling to the room by letting in just enough sunlight, yet allowing for a light and flirty curtain solution.

Used together, putting sheers behind the heavy fabric draperies, provides texture and color contrast. The heavy fabric draperies may be opened in the morning with the use of trimmings and tassels, allowing for sunlight to come through the sheer draperies. To create a more formal feeling, some of the heavy fabric draperies may be incorporated into a window valance.

The Sitting Area

In rooms like the living room and the dining area, the sitting area comprises much of the space. This means that most of the design that can be incorporated into the room must come from the sitting area, if

it is to make a visual impact.

For the living room, fabrics are the best solutions to provide either temporary or permanent overhauls for the sofa or couch. Sofas that are badly stained or worn may be taken to a shop for re-upholstery. When re-upholstering the furniture, the extent of damage equates to the amount of repair that the sofa will undergo—some may only need a small amount of repair while others need major repair: such as the foam completely changed or complete over-haul. Re-upholstery entails the permanent change of the outer skin or covering of the sofa using new fabric or a covering material such as faux leather. When choosing the fabric for re-upholstering, choose one that will blend in with various color schemes, as re-upholstery is permanent in nature.

For temporary punches of life, color, or even design themes, slipcovers are the better choice. Slipcovers are available ready-made in department stores, or you may have them custom-made especially for your sofa to assure a snug-fit. Slipcovers will allow for seasonal color changes of the room, and even for mixing and matching the sofa with other furniture or accessories to better suit the décor of the room.

For the dining area, the dining chairs or stools may be fitted with covers and skirts for a more decorative effect or to better continue a color scheme in the room.

Tables Around the House

Fabric table covers serve two important purposes – they bring colors, patterns, and excitement to a room's design, and protect the table

from water or other corrosive materials that come in contact with it. When using fabrics on tables, you may experiment with various lengths - using long fabrics to cover the entire table for a formal effect, shorter fabric to fit the table top exactly to allow for storage under the table, or as a long, thin, table runner to bring drama to a table and emphasis to the table décor.

Fabric is used in these various scenarios primarily, to bring color or color themes into the room. The use of fabrics by themselves or in color and pattern combinations allows you to mix and match as you wish. The same colors used over and over again in a room poses no threat when working with fabric, because with fabric, you may use the same color in various shades, patterns, and fabric textures to avoid monotony.

Depending on its use, fabrics can bring unique moods to a room. Heavy, rich-colored and textured fabrics usually bring a more formal, ornate feel to a room, while sheer fabrics used in windows, made to hang over bare walls, or even just thrown over the back of a couch or an ottoman bring a fun, flirty feel to a room.

Used properly, fabrics achieve design changes at a cheaper price and with less effort. Fabrics take the place of added accessories and furniture, create as much impact as a new coat of paint or wallpaper, and allow for versatility of design by mixing and matching, and temporary solutions such as slipcovers at a fraction of the cost of permanent changes.