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Redesigning rooms at no cost

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Giving rooms in your house a new look may be as easy – and inexpensive – as moving furniture and accessories around.

Anne West, an interior designer in Wilmette who calls herself the "Redesign Doctor," said this is the perfect way to fix up a room in a troubled economy, when homeowners may be reluctant to spend money on new furnishings or an interior decorator.

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Redesigner Anne West creates symmetry in this redesign by placing a pair of chairs across from the sofa. Out went the big stereo speakers, and in came wall art, pillows, plants and accessories, which provided some color and visual interest.

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In this Winnetka house, Anne West saw an oversized chair (bottom left) blocking the flow into the room. It was also too far from the sofa to have a conversation. A stereo system and huge speakers added to the clutter. There wasn't enough light nor artwork to dress up the room.

West is trained in home staging and redesign, and certified by the Home Staging Resource. She has also studied redesign and color with other decorators.

"People are often pleasantly surprised to learn about the benefits of redesign versus decorating," she said, "not only because of the significantly lower costs involved, but also because the redesign process embraces the things they love and finds new ways to use them."

It's not uncommon for homeowners to feel uncomfortable in a room without knowing why, she said. It's usually because the furniture arrangement is unbalanced, the color scheme isn't right, the arrangement isn't conducive to conversation, or there's not enough light.

West offers the following tips for an easy fix to any of these problems:

Focal point

Every room needs a focal point. It can be a natural focal point, like a fireplace or a window with a view, or it can be an entertainment center with a TV. Once you have identified it, everything else in the room should revolve around and reinforce it.

Conversation area

Set up your seating in a U-shaped or L-shaped configuration facing the focal point. Anchor and unify the conversation area with a rug whose color coordinates with the upholstery of your seating, and place a coffee table within easy reach. Make sure that the seating is placed close enough together that people can easily talk to each other without yelling across the room.

Use pairs

Using pairs of armchairs, end tables and lamps can help create a cohesive and balanced look in the room. If you don't have matching end tables, you can use two of similar height and finish.

Light it up

Make sure the room has sufficient light, in the form of general lighting (recessed cans, chandeliers) and task lighting (table and floor lamps). Accent lighting can be used to highlight a painting or as an up-light on the foliage of a large plant. Put all lighting on dimmers so you can control the overall mood and ambiance of the room.

Hanging art

Avoid the mistake of hanging your wall art too high. Art should be hung at eye level only in rooms where people are usually standing, like foyers and hallways. Otherwise, art should be 6-8 inches above a sofa back or 8-10 inches above a console, buffet or other piece of furniture.

Accessorize

Placing accessories in groupings of three, five or seven is more dynamic and visually interesting than even-numbered groupings. Use tall, medium and shorter items in the same grouping and place them in a triangular pattern, with the tallest on the end or in the center.

Avoid clutter

Don't let accessories dominate. Add only those that will enhance the overall look and feel you want. Store the rest and rotate them in when you are ready for a fresh look.

"To really get it right, you do need to adhere to certain design principles," West added. "For example, if you don't get the furniture placement right, it won't really matter what else you do in terms of color, art or accessories. It just won't look right. So, you start with an empty room and then make sure you have the large pieces of furniture in the right place and go from there."

Learn more about interior redesigns and Anne West at www.redesigndoctor.com.



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