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SUSAN BARKER  
INTERIOR DESIGNER

## FRESH IDEAS

A SIMPLE MAKEOVER CAN  
CHANGE A HOME'S LOOK

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# home makeover

Simple inexpensive changes can change the look and feel of your house

So you've decided it's time for a change. To your home's decor, that is. If those pillows that matched your couch perfectly a decade ago now bore you and the hodge-podge of trinkets and pictures that dot every room make you cringe, it's time for a makeover. Not something along the lines of "Extreme Makeover Home Edition," mind you – just something that ramps up your living space and gives it a fresh look.

Doing so is not only fun and exciting, it can even make you more relaxed, says Susan Barker of Interiors by Susan in Appleton.

"I think what happens to a lot of people is they live in a place or work in a place so long that they get used to it, and they don't realize there could be another way of doing it, or a way that could be more comfortable," Barker said, "They'd be more relaxed and would feel better."

Barker has made a profession out of helping people see their homes in a new way without major renovations. Greenery, accent lighting, accessories – even the placement of furniture – can give a room a whole new look.

## What not to do

Hanging pictures too high is a common mistake, according to Barker. She advises that the height of a picture be determined by the primary use



Clustering items together makes for a complete look; According to Susan Barker, an interior designer.

of the room. In a dining room, for example, pictures should be hung lower since people are usually seated. In contrast, pictures in an entryway need to be at standing level.

"You have to consider how the room is used," Barker said. In the living room, there should be no more than 10 inches from the bottom of a picture to the top of the sofa.

Furniture placement and determining the focal point are the first things Barker considers when looking at a room. If there is a fireplace, that's automatically the focal point. If not, the longest wall where you put the sofa usually becomes the focal point.

"When you choose the focal point, you really want to play that up," she said. "Choose the

right accessories and set the room off, even if you're not doing anything else, pay attention to that. It's the first thing you see when you walk into the room and eye goes there first."

Faced with a room in need of a makeover, Barker likes to remove everything from the walls and start fresh. "It's much easier to visualize when the walls are empty," she says.

Barker sees plenty of people who don't leave enough open space on their walls. A cluttered look overwhelms the eye, she said. "Over your sofa, you definitely want something, or if it's a long wall. That's not a space you want empty," she said. "But if it's a little narrow wall maybe 2 feet ... maybe it should be empty."

Placing too many items and items that are too small on a fireplace mantel takes away from the fireplace, which is typically the focal point of a room. Better to use larger and fewer items to really set it off, Barker advises.

Save those smaller items for the coffee table or accent side tables, where a grouping of one large accessory flanked by a couple of smaller ones works well.

The rule of thumb in decorating whether it's on a wall or atop a table is to always use odd numbers – a group of three or more items have more visual impact than using two or four. Even numbers of things have a tendency to keep things too symmetrical.

"There are exceptions where it does work well, but generally you want odd numbers," Barker said.

### Going green

Greenery has a place in nearly every décor, so it's difficult to go wrong with silk or live plants. "You just can't have too much greenery," Barker said. "It really softens a room and keeps the eyes moving around the room."

Barker is partial to silk greens, especially ferns. "I'm kind of a silk snob," she said. "I like silk that looks nice, looks like it has some quality to it. Some can be kind of chintzy. Then it's better not to have it."



Susan Barker of Appleton suggests making the fireplace stand out.

Most houses have a spot where a tree or other large plant works well, even if that means putting it on top of a stack of books or small stool to gain height. Greenery can even work well under a end table is it's the right height.

### Seeing the light

Candles can serve as a very versatile accessory due to the variety of sizes, styles and colors.

"You can be creative with them," Barker said. "If you have a grouping on a table, for the most part you want to keep it in the same color scheme – maybe one different color – but if you have five colors, it kind of loses its effect. It's too busy."

Accent lighting doesn't always get the attention it deserves, especially considering the dramatic effects it can have. Picture an entry way with a small

accent light on a table under a mirror, or up-lights on silk trees. Accent or rope lighting can even be a nice touch to a bookshelf.

"If you take it away, you realize what's missing," Barker said. "A lot of different things can be done with lighting. It's one of the most overlooked things in a room."

A mirror in an entryway works well because "there's something about a mirror that is very welcoming," Barker said.

Another décor blunder people make is having lamps that are too short or not enough lamps in the room.

### Adding some color

Of course, choosing a wall color is important to the finished look of a room, but many of us go about it backwards. Instead of choosing a paint color and then running around from store-to-store to find bedspreads, pillows and fabrics that match, Barker suggests buying those items first, then checking out paint.

"You can take any fabric and find the shade of paint to match," she said. "If you're re-doing a room, it's much easier."

Buying the bedspread and shower curtain first was welcome advice to Karen Schnese of Appleton, who recently re-did her bathroom and bedroom décor.

"I just wouldn't have thought to do that, but it was so simple," Schnese said. "I matched up the colors with the paint from the starting point of the

the starting point of the shower curtain and the bedspread. Talk about simplifying things. It turned out beautiful."

Schnese also stayed within her limited budget by picking up an inexpensive lamp that matched her pillows and finding a large candle holder that matched the paint perfectly. A wicker stand with a plant "just made the difference," in her bedroom she said.

While choosing paint color can be overwhelming, "Sometimes with paint color we often think there's a rule we have to follow, but that's not necessarily true," Barker said. "It's important for the person living in it to remember that they have to like it. A lot of it is personal preference."

"Generally if you have a big living room, you usually want to keep with medium to light shades. For the really dark (shades), pick a room you don't use all the time like the dining room or guest room or entranceway that is small and you want to accent a wall there. Those would be the places to use those colors," she said.

Throw pillows and blankets that coordinate with the color scheme give any room a finished look. Pillows on a sofa can be stacked unevenly – two at one end and one at the other – or they can be put together at one end – or they can be put together at one end. Blankets should be folded neatly and draped over one corner of a chair or sofa.

“It really finishes off a spot, and it’s such a simple thing,” said Barker.

### **Changing the look**

Kathy Birkholz of Neenah took advantage of Barker’s eye for decor to help give a new look to her combination living room/dining room area that contains a fireplace.

“I was just a little confused with what I wanted with my living room,” Birkholz said. “I wanted a more mature look and that’s what I got.”

By combining a few pieces that Birkholz wanted to save, including wrought iron candle holder that were a gift from her sons, with new items suggested by Barker, the Birkholz’s home took on a whole new look. Simple steps – new greenery on top of an existing china hutch, table runner and new a centerpiece on the dining table, removing wallpaper from the around the fireplace made the difference.

“Some of the things they brought in I would have never picked out,” Birkholz said. “I was surprised with how well they looked; I used to be a real country person. I don’t know what I’ve got now, but it’s not country anymore.”

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