



undecorate

a new twist on **HOMEwork!**



David Hugh Bragdon



Photo Courtesy Claudia Simon

Top and middle: A better flow can be created in your home by removing some of the clutter - as demonstrated here by Debbe Daley of Daley Designs. Bottom: Claudia Simon, owner of Room for a Change, educates her clients on how to better use space. She re-designed this landing area using family photos that had been scattered throughout the house.

by **Kathy Shiels Tully**

Regardless of your age or stage of life, time and money are two factors that weigh heavily into any decorating decision. Lurking behind both is a third, often overlooked, influence that can undermine everything — confidence.

Decorating and redesigning — even just one room — can be overwhelming, especially if you're trying to control costs. *Picking the right paint color? Buying new or used furniture? Splurging on art? Reusing "stuff"? Hiring an interior designer?*

Beneath each worry? *What if I make a mistake?*

Like Dorothy lost in Oz, close your eyes, click your heels three times, and wish for an interior designer version of Glinda the Good Witch to magically appear and offer assurances that, yes, you *can* find your way to your perfectly decorated dream home.

Claudia Simon, owner of Room for a Change in Andover, is such a designer.

Simon, in business for more than 15 years, says she's "like one of those detectives on [the TV show] CSI." The holder of a master's degree in art history from Harvard University, she sees "room and space as three-dimensional paintings."

Her action-oriented consultations, typically two to three hours at \$75 an hour, result in immediate change. Simultaneously redesigning as she consults, she educates her clients on how to better use space and "nudges" them in appropriate directions on other decorating decisions.

Be prepared. Simon sleuths around the entire house — attic and closets, too. "Usually," she says, "what people wear indicates how they'd like to decorate," providing clues to both a client's style and inspiration for the redesign.

Simon often finds existing resources that can be reused elsewhere — framed art, mirrors, lamps, rugs and throw pillows — saving her clients the chore of having to repeat shop for that same item.

Simon's advice for choosing a paint color? Buy a small amount of a specific color. Apply the paint to plain white poster boards and then hang them around the room in question.

designer tips & tricks

“Expand” your budget with these money-saving tips from Claudia and Debbe:

1. **Reupholster old, quality furniture** with dramatic fabric, instead of buying new.
2. **Buy unfinished furniture**, paint or stain it yourself, and replace the hardware to create your own “custom” pieces.
3. **Browse high-end stores** and the Boston Design Center for ideas.
4. **Ask if your designer shares her discount with clients.**
5. **Start at the bottom, working your way up from the rug.** So many people paint first, then force everything else to fit.

original art on a budget

Think museum-quality art is outside your budget’s reach? Not in the Merrimack Valley. Find high-quality art for as little as \$5:

SistersWeThree | Newburyport, Mass.
www.SistersWeThree.com

Essex Art Center | Lawrence, Mass.
www.EssexArtCenter.com

The 11th Annual Lowell Open Studios
Oct. 1–2 | Western Avenue Studios | Lowell, Mass.
www.LowellOpenStudios.org

For antiques and secondhand furniture:

Webster-Greene Antiques and Interiors
Methuen, Mass. | www.WGAntiques.com

Canal Street Antique Mall | Lawrence, Mass.
www.CanalStreetAntiqueMall.com

Shopee at the Village | Haverhill, Mass.
www.ShopeeAtTheVillage.com

To contact:

Claudia Simon

Room for a Change | Andover, Mass.
(978) 470-0569

Debbe Daley

Daley Designs | Lowell, Mass.
(978) 697-0288 | www.DaleyDesigns.com

“Most important is to have a lot of visuals to show people, even if they’re wrong,” she says. “It starts the creative juices going.”

Clients quickly “get it” on their own, Simon finds, along with the confidence to move forward. Visuals save time and the cost of painting an entire room. Apply the same principle, Simon recommends, to selecting fabric. A sample yard might cost \$20 to \$40, but “it’s worth it because you can see it and [will] end up making an informed decision.”

Simon knows clients at every age and stage “want to save money, but have [their choices show] value.”

Like a client who “fell in love” with a \$1,500 silver leaf side table at the Boston Design Center, where Simon had taken her shopping for ideas. Though Simon splits her 40 percent designer discount 50-50 with clients, the side table was still outside this client’s budget.

Simon’s solution? She found a similar table on sale at Pottery Barn for \$150. After painting the new table metallic silver, she added some Ultrasuede material, topped it with a glass cover and voilà: a re-creation for substantially less. She also custom-designed a button-tufted headboard with Ultrasuede for the same client. At \$700 to \$800 it wasn’t cheap, but compared with similar headboards for \$1,200 to \$1,500 at popular retail stores, it was a real savings.

Save your marriage, too. Just ask Debbe Daley of Daley Designs School of Interiors in Lowell and Boston, who works with “couples fighting over a room design.”

In addition to providing consultations and complete renovations, Daley offers a five-session design course for \$375, at which clients gain do-it-yourself confidence that can eliminate the need to hire a designer.

During the course, which consists of 90-minute classes on five consecutive Monday nights, students learn to measure a room to scale, including furniture and other details, like windows. The information is then loaded onto her computer and Daley projects each layout on a large screen for all to see, moving pieces around digitally. Clients also learn how to shop frugally for antiques, display wall art, choose paint colors, set up a room and more.

“Now the wife *can* show the husband her ideas,” Daley says. By seeing what works, the couple can usually reach an agreement. Marriage saved. Home redecorated.

Daley’s initial consultation, \$120 the first hour, billed on half-hour increments, includes a computerized furniture floor layout plan. Her clients range from those who just want a one hour consultation –“which means they know what to do”—to a full renovation.

In the near future Daley’s website will include sample videos on common decorating solutions, such as buying or rearranging furniture, so potential clients can see “our daily routine on how we put together a room.”

For Linda Evans of Chelmsford, Daley shopped for antique and secondhand furniture at the Cambridge Antique Market. Her findings: a corner china cabinet for \$200 vs. \$800 new, plus a console table for \$150 vs. \$600 new. Prefer new furniture? Daley carries inexpensive lines of furniture from North Carolina, passing on her savings to clients “because I don’t have a showroom.”

The feeling you’re left with after being “coached” by an interior designer is priceless, according to another Daley client, Ginny Maher of Chelmsford. An empty nester, Maher’s home was “full of good stuff, but it was too much.” She hired Daley five years ago to work on one room and was pleased by the results. They’ve moved forward since then, a room at a time as Maher’s budget has allowed.

“It feels more ‘feng shui,’ more relaxing,” Maher says. “There’s better flow. I feel more comfortable in it.

“I can’t tell you how many people say, ‘I love what you did with the room!’ ”

mvm