

Breathing New Life into Tired Spaces

By MARIE CHAN, ASID



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With real estate prices soaring to new heights every month, owners of older homes have the choice of trading up to homes that are more expensive (but not necessarily more spacious), or renovating to enhance the quality and value of their existing property.

Renovating the interiors of the house is a worthwhile consideration if there has been a significant change in the lifestyle of the household. An increase or decrease in the family size also warrants a re-examination of the logic and layout of the house. The end will often result in the expansion or rearrangement of interior spaces.

Families with young children will desire a different living arrangement than ones with teenagers, and choice of furnishings for the former will reflect a much higher concern for easily maintained and safe environments. On the other hand, "empty nesters" can afford to go for comfort and aesthetics over durability in their choice of furnishings, and may opt for more

space in which to entertain or pursue their leisure activities.

There is an increasing demand to include a variety of amenities in the master bedroom to make it a self-contained unit. The "master bedroom" to many no longer conjures up the mental picture of just a place to sleep and dress. For the health conscious, home gyms and spas are part and parcel of the total environment. Home gyms effectively eliminate the need of driving to the health club or looking for baby sitters, giving busy professionals an opportunity to workout according to their own schedules.

The incorporation of reading alcoves into the master bedroom may be regarded by some as their antidote to the day's pressures while busy executives often use them as extensions of their offices. Whatever the purpose for which the space is used, it reflects another expanded function for the master bedroom. The proliferation of media centers in the master bedroom attest to the growing desire of fashioning this retreat into a multifaceted entertainment center. Projection television with simulcast capabilities increasingly finds its place among the other electronic toys like video cassette recorders, video discs and compact disc players in addition to the ubiquitous stereo system and its attending accessories.

Food and wine goes hand in hand with entertainment. Having the convenience of being able to enjoy chilled wine with crackers and cheese, or microwave popcorn with hot chocolate, goes a long way towards making the room a special place. Moreover, while wet bars have been around for years, exhausted parents now look to in-

room kitchenettes, especially in two-story homes, as heaven-sent when their offspring starts crying in the wee hours of the night.

Dressing areas have gained importance with the rise of dual income families. However, their layout and space allocations are often woefully inadequate, especially with regards to storage. Clothes and accessories end up being rotated out of the walk-in closet according to the season. Couples end up sharing the same space for grooming, working around each other while trying to get ready for the day. Small wonder that increasing numbers of people are demanding that this highly personal space be designed to reflect the habits of its occupants.

By answering the challenge of changing the home from a rabbit warren of dark confined spaces connected by uninspired hallways into a more open layout, possibilities arise and beckon the imagination of the inhabitants. Unlike space planners and designers who are trained to deal with space as a "canvas" for creative juxtapositions, most homeowners are so used to their existing environments that they have difficulty visualizing alternative space and furnishing layouts without professional help. Whether working on your own or with a designer, bear in mind that the spaces, when partitioned by walls or furnishings, should be reasonably adaptable to future changes in life style. Flexibility is the key to a successful layout. If the project is to be completed in separate phases over a period of time, be prepared to reconcile the current plan and its furnishings with future requirements.

After the space planning has been

determined, the design work takes over. Often the house will be renovated in phases. While the new and original color schemes may be totally divergent, taxing the ingenuity of those involved, a palette that includes some of the original colors will make the conversion much smoother.

By choosing, as the cornerstone of the new look, a couple of major pieces from existing furnishings such as prized antiques or art, a tired and dated scheme may sometimes be salvaged by "cosmetic surgery". Through careful infusion of updated but complementary colors in the use of fabrics and window, wall and floor coverings, and judicious editing of existing furnishings, a more contemporary look will result.

Many have underestimated the importance of good accessories to the success of a design. Just as in fashion where the appropriate accessories can elevate the total image into the realm of "tres chic", the right pieces of art, antiques or accessories can reinforce a theme or create a focal point for the space. It can add sparkle to the updated structure where none existed and make it something special; a reflection of the unique tastes and life styles of the owners.

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