

Small Design Changes, Big Impact

Five Easy Ways to Freshen Up Your Home for Less

True, we're all living more cost-consciously these days -- we're dining out less, forgoing luxuries like vacations and new wardrobes, and we're spending less on furniture, too. The January 2008 issue of Furniture Today projected a mere 0.4 percent increase in furniture sales over the course of the year. The good news is that it doesn't take much to turn your current decor into something completely fresh and different. There are plenty of easy, cost-effective ways to change your surroundings for the better.

"Sometimes the smallest changes can make a big difference in the look of your home. One of the first things I recommend is visiting a nearby professional custom framer and updating an existing piece of art with new matboards," says Barbara Schmidt, a nationally recognized interior style consultant whose work has appeared in *O at Home*, *This Old House* and *Renovation Style*, and numerous television shows.

"Look for a new color to add focus to your art pieces," says Schmidt. "And when choosing matboard for your artwork, make sure it's made from high quality materials, like Crescent's cotton RagMat matboards. RagMat is guaranteed safe next to any artwork for a lifetime."

Schmidt offers four additional tips for freshening up any room in your home using inexpensive items, as well as preexisting pieces.

- "Choose one new color for your room and pull it into slipcovers, rugs and tablecloths to create newness and cohesiveness," Schmidt suggests. "Try spray-painting a lampshade as an inexpensive way to tie it all together."
- Dress up a wall by adding a tight grouping of your favorite pictures. "Pull your chosen color into the matting and frames, but vary the width and style of the frames to add variety," she says. "This is definitely a growing design trend -- and it's a great way to make use of family photos and



other images you've always wanted to display." Your local professional custom framer can help you create this look.

- "You'd be surprised at how easy it is to make pillow covers on your own," says Schmidt. "Or you can opt to buy them pre-made at fabric stores for a lot less than you'll find at a big-box retailer. It's possible to find beautiful colors and patterns at bargain prices. You just need to do your research."
- "Choose one wall in a room, and repaint it to change the color scheme," says Schmidt. "Painting is one of the most inexpensive things you can do, and I guarantee the entire room will look brand new."

Beyond making unnecessarily large purchases, our shift in financial priorities is having a more lasting impression on the way homes are decorated. Consumers are moving away from the "ready to wear" mentality that became popular with the recent rash of design-centered reality shows in favor of more permanent pieces.

"More than ever before, my clients want pieces and themes that are going to last," says Schmidt. "When it comes to big ticket items like tables and sofas, I advise them to choose timeless looks with clean, sleek shapes. That way, when they do want a change in the look and feel of a particular room, they can just make small tweaks to turn it all around."