

interior arranging

The
new
face
of



Design

Interior arranger Monica Durante (left) and assistant Marlowe Haga put fresh faces on tired spaces by rearranging a homeowner's furnishings, artwork, plants and other belongings.

By Kelli Rosen

Stacey and William Ellingbaugh were at their wit's end with their seldom-used living room. Although it has spectacular Flatirons views, it lacked the intimacy that encourages people to linger. Having lived in the home nearly four years, the couple had rearranged the room's furnishings countless times in hopes of a "cure," but without success. Then they discovered the miracles of interior arranging.

"Our living room has always been a design challenge," Stacey says. "We've spent many a night trying to figure out how to accomplish the goals we wanted for that particular room." What the Ellingbaughs desired was a room to entertain, complete with conversational zones and lots of seating for friends; an area for Stacey to practice yoga near the windows' breathtaking views; and a cozy area near the fireplace to snuggle on brisk days. But the room they had lacked warmth and discouraged people from spending much time in the space.

The living room's layout presented the biggest challenge: a sliding glass door on one side and a large brick fireplace on the adjacent wall. Couple that with the fact that the living room feeds into the dining room with no real separation, and it's no wonder the two were perplexed. How could they arrange their furniture so that the fireplace and the views were both focal points of the room, while allowing ample walking space between the rooms?

Convinced they needed help, Stacey contacted Monica Durante, an interior arranger in Evergreen, Colo., to see if she could shed some light on their problem.



After: Transformed into a more formal space, the dining room now showcases the family heirlooms passed down from William's grandfather. An antique chair from the guest room now sits in a corner and complements the antique dresser and mirror. The cluttered photos are replaced with a dramatic floral arrangement for a clean, inviting look. Stacey's favorite painting (left), formerly hidden behind stereo equipment in the living room, finds a new home and an ideal spot for guests to admire it. Plants and other artwork have also been rearranged.



Before: From eclectic furniture to randomly displayed artwork, the dining room lacked a cohesive style. White walls made the room seem sterile, while the cluttered photos on the antique dresser discouraged a closer look.

The Art of Arranging

Interior arranging (sometimes referred to as "house fluffing") is the latest trend in room design. Unlike traditional interior design - where a designer usually gets rid of everything in the room, paints, hangs window treatments and purchases new furniture and accessories - interior arranging gives that same room a face-lift using only what the homeowners already possess. "Lots of people are afraid to hire designers because they know they'll come in and get rid of all their stuff and tell them to buy fancy, expensive replacements," Durante says. "We validate what people own by arranging it in the best possible way."

Interior arranging is an easy, economical way to redecorate without all the fuss. Everyone from first-time homeowners to empty nesters can take advantage of this service because it's designed for people who like their furnishings, but don't know how to arrange them for optimum effect. Collectors also benefit from interior arranging because it can help them display collectibles - from porcelain dolls to sports memorabilia - in a way that highlights them without overwhelming a space.

Before: Although there's lots of room for Stacey to practice yoga in front of the sliding glass doors, the room lacks specific focus.





After: *By angling the large furniture in front of the fireplace, the room's focal point is now clearly defined. Plus, the angle draws your eye to the spectacular views outside the south-facing windows. The stereo is moved to a more centrally located position, the speakers are strategically hidden by houseplants and there's still plenty of stretching room.*

Recent economic woes could be a primary reason for this service's rising popularity-interior arranging typically costs a fraction of the amount that could be spent on a complete redesign. For the Ellingbaughs, money was a factor, but they also wanted to be surrounded by things they'd accumulated throughout their years together-photos of their kids, antique family heirlooms and Stacey's feline collectibles. The problem was they didn't know what to do with it all to create a functional living space.

To the Rescue

After setting up an initial consultation in which the Ellingbaughs would discuss their goals for the living room, Durante gave them a questionnaire to fill out prior to her visit. It asked about their likes, dislikes and the expectations for the space. "By knowing how a particular family utilizes a room, it allows me to take their things and redesign the room the way they want it to be done," Durante says, "because it's the client who must live with the new arrangement, not me." During the initial consultation, Stacey conveyed all the design challenges plaguing the couple over the past several years. "When I explained to Monica what we hoped to accomplish - a more intimate space, full use of both the views and the fireplace, and an open area for yoga - it seemed a near impossible task," she says. "But she [Durante] seemed undaunted, and was a good listener."



After: With the fireplace as a focal point, the couch, loveseat and chair are now within comfortable speaking distance. An area rug from the family room is incorporated into the design to define the space. The sofa table is discarded, and a bamboo bookshelf replaces artwork and a plant.



Before: Lacking any intimate conversational zones because the furniture was too far apart, it's no wonder the Ellingbaugh family never spent quality time in their living room. Plus, the sofa table blocked the entrance to the room, making it difficult to navigate the floor plan

Durante asked if she could do the adjoining dining room as well because the two spill into each other in an L-shape with no clear division. She then snapped digital photos and toured the rest of the home because any chatchka, artwork or memento can be moved in or out of the room being arranged. In interior arranging, there are no sacred cows; it's all fair game.

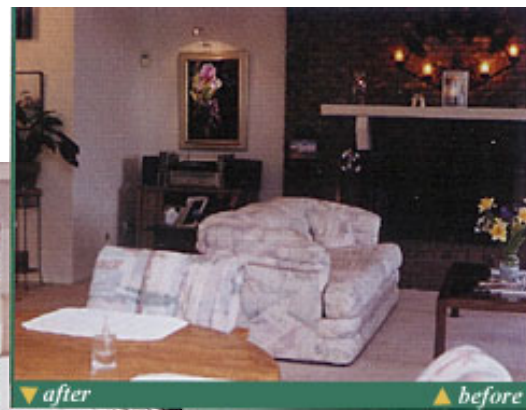
Mission: Accomplished

Durante and her assistant, Marlowe Haga, arrived for the big day at 10 a.m. With the Ellingbaughs out of the house, the first order of business was to completely clear the rooms. "I like to start with clean canvas," Durante says, "plus, I don't really want to be reminded where things were placed before." Durante and Haga began the arranging process by moving the large furniture back in: a sofa, loveseat and chair. This may sound like the easiest part of the process (really, how many places can a sofa go?), but it was, in fact, the most arduous. "A common misconception," Durante says, "is that many people think where there's a wall, there needs to be a piece of furniture pressed up against it [which was true in the Ellingbaugh's living room]. That's simply not the case."

First, they squared the furniture to the fireplace, but, according to Durante, that was too predictable, so they angled the couches instead. About an hour and several configurations later, the two were finally pleased with the results. The living room furniture was still situated in front of the fireplace, which allowed for ample conversational space, but the angle of the pieces directs the eyes to the windows and mountain views beyond. And, there's still plenty of room near the sliding glass doors for Stacey to stretch.

Next, it was time to accessorize. Durante and Haga snagged an area rug from the family room, an upright bamboo-shelving unit from the basement and an antique camera to display on the mantel. Durante added color to the white rooms with fabric swatches, pillows, flowers and candles Stacey had asked her to purchase. (The couple budgeted \$300 for accessories, even though Durante said it was unnecessary and spent only half the allotment.) Artwork was re-hung or replaced with paintings or prints from other rooms, framed photos were displayed in groupings, stereo speakers were camouflaged and an aging iron mantle light was discarded and replaced with two chic lamps.

Before: *The dark red brick mantel and dated iron light fixture make this sunfilled room feel gloomy and weighted down.*



After: *The old fixture and random figurines are replaced with a framed floral print, chic lamps complete with boa feather trims, greenery and fabric to create a cheery look.*

A mere five hours later, the rooms were transformed. Stacey and William arrived home in nervous anticipation. "When my husband and I walked in, it was like, 'Oh my gosh! These are totally new rooms!'" Stacey says. "I was so surprised by the changes; it was like walking into a brand new space. I was thrilled!" Even the couple's 18-year-old son was impressed. "I never, ever thought this room could look this good," he says, calling the metamorphosis "awesome." As for William, he smiled, too, thanks to the bottom line. "Before we contacted Monica, I was almost going to buy new couches because I was sure that was the problem," he says. "It turned out Monica actually saved me a lot of money because it wasn't the couches at all; it was how they were arranged."

Lasting Effects

One appealing aspect of interior arranging is if you don't like what's done to your rooms, you can simply return everything to its original location. "But that rarely happens," Durante says. Like the Ellingbaughs, most clients love what they see at the end of the day; so much so, in fact, that they think they can't move anything afterwards. "I give people a blueprint so they don't have to keep things as they are forever," she says. "If we put a big plant in one corner, it just means you need something that size with color in that particular spot. If you replace it, just do so with a similarly sized piece."

Once the proverbial dust settled and Stacey and William were left alone to adjust to the new layout of their rooms, they appreciated Durante's handiwork even more. As they enjoyed a glass of wine, they shared some laughs over the "treasures" Monica discovered in their home to use in her redesign and reveled in the room's new intimacy. "It was always my favorite room of the house because of the views," Stacey says. "Now it's my favorite because it's so inviting." And although they originally approached the day with apprehension, the couple couldn't be more pleased with the results.

"I was excited to do this project, but as the actual day drew near, a little anxious, too" Stacey says. "It's a bit unnerving to have someone go through your home and switch things around. However, I had faith this would turn out wonderfully and it did. You have to let go of preconceived notions and trust an interior arranger to do his or her job. They're the ones with the knowledge, expertise and design ability. If you do, I'm sure you'll be pleasantly surprised-I certainly was!"