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House Beautiful

Quick Changes

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Interior design by
ANN WOLF

Interview by LISA CREGAN

Photographs by
REED DAVIS

PAINT IT

GO FOR
GLOSSY
IN BRIGHT,
BOLD
COLORS

Bright green walls in a custom color by Fine Paints of Europe give a formal Houston dining room a fresh, young feeling with major impact. Designer Ann Wolf covered chairs in a rich blue, Malabar's Pasha, because "green and blue is my favorite color combination—one complements the other." A mahogany table inherited from the owner's grandmother was stripped and bleached for a new look. A Tibetan jute rug from Creative Flooring echoes the cool feel of the natural ash ceiling. Light Drizzle chandelier from Ochre. Painting by Claudia Zemborain.









LISA CREGAN: As soon as you enter the front hall here—pow! A big, bold hit of wall color.

ANN WOLF: I love strong, clear color, and I love it in high-gloss enamel. It feels so young. I'm always looking for places to use it. But I think it's usually best to use it in a dining room. You probably aren't in there every day, so there's no chance you'll get sick of it. This grassy green gives you a strong splash of color right when you walk in the house. It says to you immediately that a very vibrant family lives here. It's hot in Houston three seasons out of four, and the green just really feels cool.

Is that why you used bleached furniture? For the coolness?

It's more about lending a freshness and an updated look to the room. I mean, that was Granny's mahogany table. My client thought she'd have to buy a new table, but because it wasn't super-fine, we stripped and bleached it. I've done this kind of thing before. I have a carpenter who's good at stripping furniture, that's the key. You have to be careful because sometimes the tops of these old tables are made of different wood than the base, so you have to match them. It's better if you have something to match it to—we used the antique pine sideboard.

Any other suggestions for transforming brown furniture?

Paint it. But not white—that's been done too much. Use the glossiest enamel paint you can find, and go for taxicab yellow or bright blue. Sometimes you need a shot of color that's unrelated to anything else in the house, for a surprise. And here's a quicker, easier thing you can do: just change the hardware. I've done that and it transforms an old piece. A modern, squared-off handle on a traditional chest of drawers, or clear Lucite pulls on a Victorian piece, could be really, really cool.

So little details can make a big change.

Absolutely. A new lampshade will give a lamp a whole new look. My client wanted to get rid of those glass lamps in the dining room—she'd had them for a long time. But I convinced her that we should just change the shades. This fabric is by my friend Lisa Fine. It brings femininity into the room where everything was so solid. It's a small-scale, small-repeat pattern, which I think you need on a lampshade. The trend now is toward fabrics with blown-up patterns—people think they feel more modern—but that doesn't work on a shade.

What are three other quick detail changes that make a big difference?

1. Put grosgrain ribbon around the top and bottom of a lampshade. You just glue it on—use clothespins to hold it in place as you go around. Or paint the lampshade! People don't often think of it, but you can paint a flat linen or silk shade. I like stripes, but you could use stencils, too. I think it makes a room look very designer-y and kind of European.
2. My mother stenciled walls, furniture, tabletops. A stenciled border around a door frame or under a molding really changes a room.
3. Paint the back of a bookshelf. But learn from my mistake: I just had to redo one because I chose a color that was too pale. It's dark back there, so you need a strong color, one with some punch. You can also line the back of the shelves with wallpaper, as we did here. And while I'm on the subject: sometimes I do wallpaper on a ceiling, too. It's easy. But you have to be careful not to pick a pattern that's directional. No patterns where you have to stand one way to see it, like a toile. You want a graphic pattern with a small repeat.

You also painted the ceiling of the breakfast area. Why blue?

It differentiates the room from the kitchen, defines it, and warms it up.

Why did you add the Greek key border to the curtains in the dining room?

To crisp up the edges. The Greek key gives the curtains graphic punch. You know, people are always stunned to find out how much fabric it takes to make curtain panels. So if a client has an expensive fabric they love, I sometimes buy just enough to do a two- to four-inch-wide border. You'll get the look of the fabric without the expense.

And you've used an interior curtain to create that nest-y nook.

That's the children's library—it's their own little reading room. It's a cozy space carved out of a hallway. We used grommets on the curtain so that it could be totally closed off. If you do rings, you're going to get space at the top, but with grommets, the fabric goes all the way up to the ceiling. It's filled with little surprises when you go in there. The other side of the curtain is a different fabric, the same as on the square pillows. There's a mattress inside the bottom drawer so they can have sleepovers there with their friends. It's a very private, magical world, like being in a tent. That room is every kid's fantasy—mine, too.

PRODUCED BY DORETTA SPERDUTO

LEFT: Wolf pulled her blue-and-cream living room color palette from the rug by Beauvais Carpets. The velvet on the love seats, Nancy Corzine's Corsica, "is great because it feels already worn-in," she says. Slipper chairs are covered in Hinson's Connelly Chenille. Curtains are Holland & Sherry's Shetland. Room & Board stool.



1. Green accents are used throughout the house. 2. The entry is “classic yet informal.” 3. Crystal teardrops on the dining room chandelier. 4. A seating area in the master bedroom. 5. Lisa Fine’s Rambagh fabric covers lampshades. 6. Dark blues in the family room are “sippy-cup-proof,” Wolf says. The print is Schumacher’s Samarkand Ikat. 7. A Greek key border, Clarence House Grand Galon Athenee, “crisps up the edges” of curtains. 8. The house’s main staircase isn’t off the entry—it’s off the breakfast area. “It leads to the private rooms, so why should it make a public statement?” Wolf says. OPPOSITE: “The homeowners wanted a cozy place to read in every room,” she says. “It’s the ultimate luxury to have a sofa and chairs in the kitchen!” The blue ceiling adds even more coziness. Wolf chose a Saarinen table for the French bistro chairs: “It’s a modern classic that’s great for a traditional house.”





“The children’s reading room is a niche carved out of a hallway. It’s a private, magical little space at the heart of the house, where your imagination can run wild.” ANN WOLF





A huge fieldstone fireplace makes the screened porch an inviting outdoor room even on the coldest days. Cushions on the Janus et Cie Marrakesh chairs are in durable Sunbrella; throw pillows in Flores II by China Seas. OPPOSITE: The children's library doubles as a guest room for sleepovers. Shelves are designed to display book covers. "So many covers have great graphic images," Wolf says. "This way you can have a changing art gallery on your shelves." Curtains are Pierre Frey's Alpage.

