

# CHESAPEAKE HOME

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THE MID-ATLANTIC'S HOUSE AND GARDEN MAGAZINE

APRIL 2005

## GREAT RENOVATIONS

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**TOPPING**  
the **TABLE**

TRUE CONFESSIONS OF A  
**"REAL-LIFE"**  
INTERIOR  
DESIGNER

# TRUE CONFESSIONS OF A “REAL-LIFE” INTERIOR DESIGNER



PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARK FINKENSTAEDT

DEBORAH WIENER OF DESIGNING SOLUTIONS REVEALS THAT HER FAMILY TAUGHT HER EVERYTHING SHE KNOWS ABOUT DESIGN!

**M**Y MOM HAD EYES in the back of her head... really. I know every mom says she has eyes in the back of her head, but mine did...or else she had pretty sophisticated mini-cams hidden throughout the house (which would have been some feat in the '60s, when I was just a girl). Like a referee senses when the football, outstretched in the running back's hands, breaks the plane of the goal line, my mom could tell when I had inadvertently broken the plane of the formal rooms in the house with a swinging arm or stray foot. And then there'd be hell to pay. I was not only forbidden from entering the living and dining rooms—filled as they were with silk-covered, down-filled sofas and windows draped in imported Fortuny fabrics—I was forbidden from even stirring dust molecules across the rooms' thresholds. I can barely remember a time when we used these rooms or when I felt relaxed being in them.

When I purchased my own home, I wanted to live







## living in color

Let your favorite collectibles and furnishings inspire your wall color. Picking up on the red tones in the chair fabric, rug, and toss pillows, the back wall color in this living room is repeated in the foyer, adding warmth and vibrancy without overpowering the rooms.

differently, to actually use every room in my house, every day. So I set out to furnish each space as best I could, with gorgeous fabrics on the windows, trimmed and tasseled toss pillows, and fine wood and detailing in every table and chest of drawers.

Being childless, I had the time and the budget to decorate the rooms in my home with the style and quality I wanted. I gave no thought to whether the faux finish on the foyer walls could be easily touched up or how I would clean a spot from the white and terra cotta striped, cotton sofa. My kitchen designs called for open shelving full of delicate, antique pottery and a creme-colored kitchen table with black glass appliances—what could be wrong with that? Everything! It was all too delicate, too difficult to keep clean, and required too much protection from what was becoming my real life.

You see, I married a slob and then had two  
*continued*



# real life design

## THIS IS HOW IT'S DONE

Bookshelves full of collectibles and keepsakes deserve good lighting so that they aren't hidden in shadows created by the shelves themselves. **Adjustable recessed lights with halogen bulbs direct the light beam exactly where it's needed most without causing any unwanted glare** on the tv. The bright white light keeps the room colors crisp and true.

**Window coverings that go up and down rather than stacking on the sides** are better protected from being stepped and pulled on. These white wooden blinds give a clean, crisp look to a contemporary family room while filtering light and providing total privacy. Best of all, they wipe clean with a damp sponge!

**For family-friendly family rooms, you can't beat leather.** Protected leather, or semi-aniline leather, has a finish applied to its surface to protect it from staining and spotting. The color is uniform, less likely to fade from sunlight and easy to clean and care for. Its high-durability is perfect for families, pet-owners or for high traffic spaces.

**A highly scrubbable paint**, like Benjamin Moore's Regal Matte, camouflages drywall flaws with its flat finish but also withstands abuse from messy hands and daily wear. It's easily scrubbed with a scouring sponge.

If you want to display photos and decorative items, keep them in shelving and off of coffee tables and game tables. **Custom built-ins provide flexible storage and display.**

**Consider weight, weave and pattern to choose fabrics that will hold up with heavy use and daily wear and tear.** When choosing upholstery, start with kiln-dried, screwed, glued and corner-blocked hardwood for strength and lasting stability. Upgrade seat and back cushions to extend the wear and improve the feel of your chair over time.

Sofa and chair **skirts stain quickly from dirty shoes or shedding pets**, so consider having an exposed leg on your upholstery and forgoing a skirt. Most manufacturers offer this option.

**Nothing lasts longer or looks better than a well-finished hardwood floor.** Three coats of hi-gloss water-based finish followed by a final coat in satin finish helps prevent the floor from yellowing over time. Maintenance is easy with a damp mop and a little ammonia.

**A heavily-textured, colorful rug in New Zealand wool holds up in even the highest traffic areas.** The wool's high lanolin content keeps spills, spots and stains from being absorbed into the fibers. Soil remains on the surface until you clean it up.





**BELOW:** Close-up of decorative Murano glass pendants over dining table.



## let there be lots of lighting

This seemingly simple dining area can change its mood with three separate lighting zones. One dimmer controls the three glass pendants that make up the decorative table lighting in the room. Another dimmer controls two, low-voltage down lights, installed in between the glass pendants, to brighten the table for family dining or for working. Yet another set of lights flanking the wall with the display ledge, is controlled separately and serves to showcase work from the budding artists in this family.

boys, and they destroyed our home. Let me explain. When my husband enjoys a late-night snack in front of the TV, he thinks, “Why use a plate?” The sofa arm is a perfect spot to rest re-heated greasy pizza. Need a napkin? “Why get up when there’s a nice, absorbent window curtain nearby, long enough to pull over and use for both hands and face?” And then there are my athletic boys. It doesn’t matter how I lecture

about not throwing a ball in the house or removing baseball cleats full of mud before walking on the carpet. When I’m out of the room, they do as they please. (I could really use those eyes my mother had in the back of her head.)

I realized it was time to redecorate. Given how much new fabric and furniture cost (even for a professional designer), I knew I had to come up with room designs that couldn’t be easily broken, stained, torn, or damaged by the people and guests who live in and frequent my home. After all, peace of mind is worth everything, and I didn’t want to turn into my mother—checking dust patterns and carpet imprints to see if anyone had trespassed into secret, forbidden territory like, say, the dining room. Whatever time and money I was about to put into redecorating had to last.



And because everyone's always busy with work, school, sports, and friends, I had to do so with low-maintenance materials and fuss-free styles that wouldn't require constant primping, cleaning, or special care to look and feel good. Who has the time to fluff pillows, dust tabletops, style draperies or vacuum up clumps of baseball fields on a daily basis? I certainly have no time and little patience for recovering kitchen chair cushions every time they get soiled and stained. I'd rather find the right fabric, have my upholsterer recover the cushions once and for all, and move on to the next task at hand, which is usually laundry.

I hate to admit it, but everything I did to better design my own home the second time around I learned from my husband and kids. The fancy magazines, beautiful showrooms, and designer showhouses are great, but you should also take your decorating cues from the people and pets living around you right now. If you have a Black Labrador Retriever, light beige carpeting and white upholstery won't work. If you have a



## best seat in the house

**ABOVE:** For long-lasting comfort and good looks, seat cushions should "crown"—meaning they should be plump and have a rising slope—rather than look flat. These upgraded seat cushions are covered in a tightly-woven chenille that combines a soft "hand," or feel, with durability and stain resistance. Avoiding skirts at the bottom of seating is another smart choice for a heavy-use family room. Along with attracting dirt and pet hair, skirts can wrinkle and flair outwards. Exposed legs fit any style room and give a neat, tailored look to the sofa. Most manufacturers offer this option—you just need to ask.

## highlight architectural details

**LEFT:** Paint is an inexpensive way to highlight architectural features like double molding at the ceiling. Just adding this rich red stripe between the crown molding and the half-round molding adds style and ties the wall color into the red accents of the room's furnishings. Note the small, low-voltage lights used to illuminate the fireplace mantel.



## spotlight the foyer

**ABOVE:** Inspired by the artwork and stair runner, there was no problem convincing this client to paint her foyer in a rich red. Keeping the white molding clean and free of scuff marks on the stairs is a problem though. That's why a good stock of White-Out is essential in every home.

**LEFT:** Even soft, serene colors can speak volumes in the right combinations. Fresh green and creme play off of each other to highlight architectural molding and *crema marfil* marble floor tile. A pale blue ceiling turns up the volume without being too loud for this formal foyer. A simple linen and crystal shade covers the old ceiling fixture.

Golden Lab, forget darker colors. If your husband (or sometimes wife) is cleaning impaired like mine, select only washable, stain-resistant fabrics in the family room and industrial strength countertops in your kitchen. Have active kids or pets? Watch out for delicate collectibles and expensive lamps on crowded

tabletops. Even empty nesters and single professionals with busy social lives and full travel itineraries want a fuss-free, low-maintenance home that looks and feels good with little work or care. So consider how much time and effort you want to put into safeguarding your highly-styled, high-maintenance home. Make your





## pay attention to the windows

The soft-fold Roman shades in linen fold up and out of harm's way as seasons change and the homeowners open the French doors that flank the back wall of their family room. Additionally, this smaller-sized room looks more spacious with tailored blinds instead of full curtains—the exposed window trim and walls that would otherwise be covered by full draperies keep the room looking open and uncluttered.

home work for you! Here's how:

### Let There be Lots of Lighting:

If I've learned anything in my years as a designer, it's this: Nothing effects how you feel in your home more than lighting. Good lighting makes even the most modest rooms look impressive. Without good lighting, however, even the most impressive rooms can look modest. Think about how you use a room or hall space. Where would you like to display art, photographs, and other things that matter to you? Light it up with dramatic, low-voltage, recessed lights that illuminate vertical (wall) and horizontal (tabletop) spaces. Will you sit, read, or

perform other tasks in this space? Use a combination of natural light (place workspaces near windows whenever possible), recessed lights, and ceiling and wall-mounted lights to give yourself ample and flexible task lighting. Limit table and floor lamps—they don't do the job as well and the shades seem to always be crooked. Also, try dimmers to change the mood in the room from full brightness for working to a low glow for watching TV or quiet dining. Wherever possible, replace older floodlights in your recessed fixtures with halogen bulbs for brighter, whiter light without the expense of an electrician.

**Living in Color:** Let the things you love in your home, like treasured pictures, collectibles, textiles, and photos, inspire your wall color. Don't be a slave to white, beige, and pastels. Color adds warmth and personality, and it can be used to "set off" your furnishings and make them pop. Best of all, color can camouflage spots, stains, and abuse. Spills on a chocolate brown sofa blend right in and fingerprints or scuffmarks that are a fact of daily life in builder-white homes virtually disappear on a colorful wall (scrub-able paints make maintenance even easier).

Color can also change the way we perceive architec-



## making the right fabric choices

A small girl's reading and play area is protected with Sunbrella fabrics and trim. Intended for outdoor use, these solution-dyed, acrylic fabrics resist fading, moisture, mildew and staining, meaning they'll hold up to whatever children or pets can throw at them.

tural features in a room, so it's an essential design tool. When I want to highlight room features like double crown moldings or camouflage odd features like a sloped ceiling in a long, rectangular room, color is the easiest way to achieve big, architectural effects without a big expense.

**Best Seat In The House:** Put your money into the things you will sit and stand on. They'll last longer, look better, and still feel comfort-

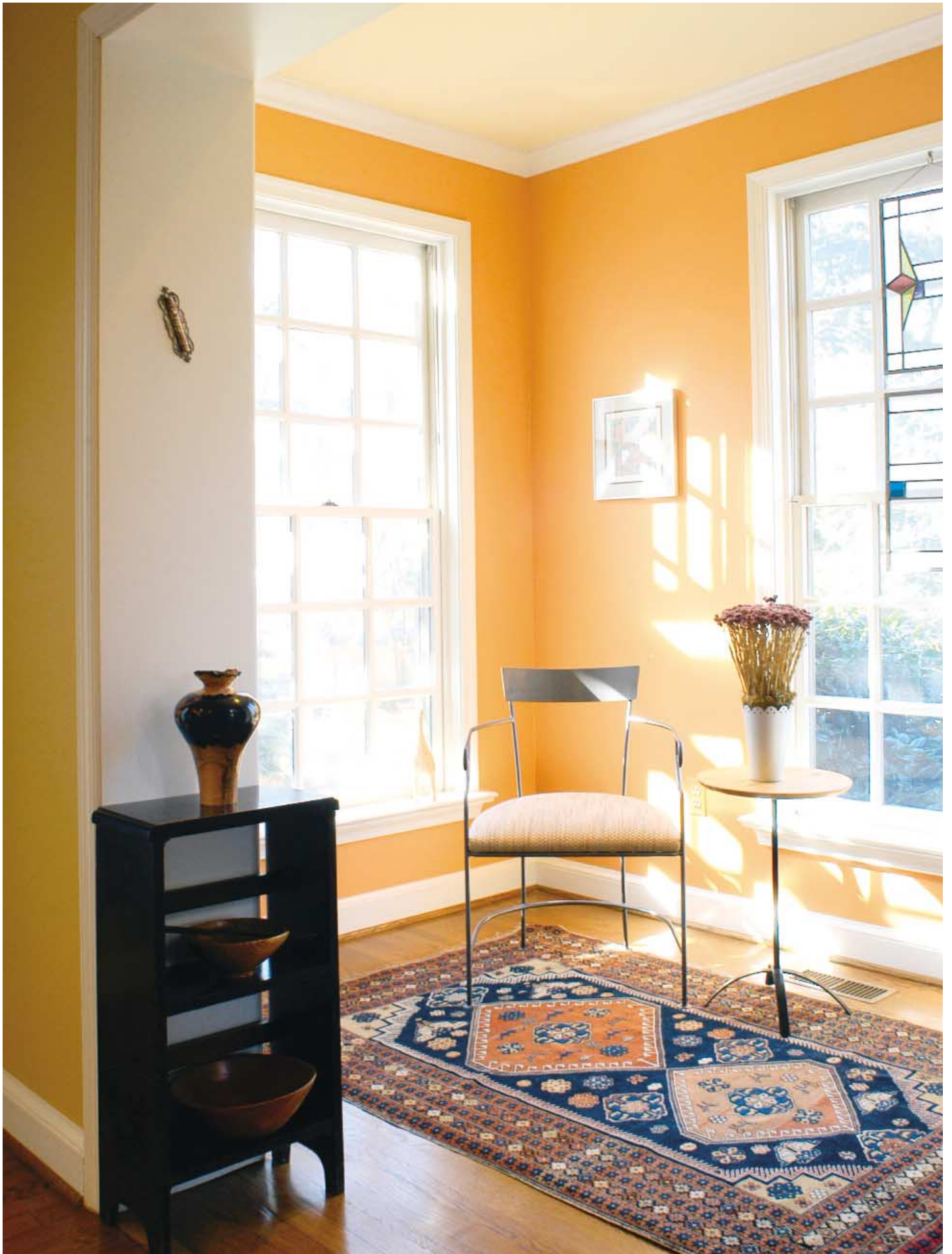
able over time while giving you the best return on your furniture investment. So when you're shopping for sofas and chairs, start with a good quality manufacturer who uses kiln-dried, hardwood frames, screwed and glued and corner blocked at the stress points with eight-way, hand-tied springs for balancing weight and wear. Next, think about styles. Loose, multi-pillow backs require a lot of maintenance. Chairs and sofas with large, oversized arms take away from the actual seating space and because they are often sat on, the fabric on the arms wears out very quickly. Skirts on sofas and chairs collect dust and animal hair and require additional maintenance. Many seating manufacturers give you the "no skirt" option—ask your salesperson. Consider spending more for "blend down" back cushions and "spring down" seat cushions. These upgrades tremendously extend the wear and feel of your sofa. Standard foam cushions will lose their shape and firmness and start to flatten out with heavy use. Spring down wears like a mattress, bouncing back to shape time after time. The same is true for blend down seat backs. They go back to their original shape with little coaxing. Finally, turn your seat and back cushions periodically to prolong the life of the fabric and cushion.

So as you being decorating your own home, ask yourself, are you considering posting security guards at the living room entrance to keep out family members and pets? Are you reluctant to remove the plastic wrap

that covers a newly delivered sofa? Can you really get a motion-activated flashing sign made to automatically remind the kids to wipe their feet when they come into the house? Before you do anything, carefully examine how you really live and make design choices that truly fit your lifestyle. Spills happen, and no one (except my mother) has eyes in the back of their head.

*Deborah Wiener is the owner of Designing Solutions (301-445-6336), a full-service interior design firm dedicated to helping clients design homes that fit the way they really live. Wiener also writes the popular column Designing Dilemmas for several DC newspapers, and her projects and design articles are regularly featured in publications nationwide. To send her your decorating questions, visit [MyDesigningSolutions.com](http://MyDesigningSolutions.com) and click on "Email Us Your Designing Dilemma."*







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***Designing Solutions' Deborah Wiener was quoted in "Dynamic & Sophisticated: Moods and Lifestyles Kick in When it Comes to Color Selections" by Stephanie Cavanaugh***

### **Don't Forget the Ceiling**

Deborah Wiener of Designing Solutions says inspiration should guide every color choice. Look at what's in a room, blend colors—don't match, and think of what effect you're after. "Colors that give off warmth have reds and oranges in them. Apple greens, true soft yellows and creamy white make rooms look fresh and new," Wiener says. Medium blues, taupe and beige are easy to live with, while dark, rich colors including purple, burgundy, navy blue and chocolate brown give off a dramatic, sophisticated look. Gray, blue gray and pure white offer a cool, open feeling.

Try something new and don't forget the ceiling. There's no reason to leave such a large area stark white or matching the wall color when a contrasting color will add a decorative punch instead, Wiener adds. "Ceilings are important to a room's decor—they are what a matching purse and shoes are to a designer dress or what a beautiful tie and pocket square are to a pinstripe suite—the finishing touches that turn average looks into show-stoppers."

With pumpkins, golden yellows and neutral colors including whites and browns, try creamy white trim and very pale blue on the ceiling, Wiener adds. "A little bit of cool color paired with warm walls makes a great contrast. Strong, dark colors including green and navy blue as well as cool tones in gray come to life when paired with whiter trim and warm ceiling color in pale peach and pink." Try rich tones of deep red, purple, medium blue and burgundy with golden yellow on the ceiling and creamy white on the trim.



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***Designing Solutions' Deborah Wiener was quoted in this issue of Washingtonian focusing on bargains!***

### **"Home Sweet Deals – Are there any real bargains in home furnishings?"**

- "For family-friendly sofas, home-theatre seating, ottomans, and chairs, you cannot beat American Leather ([AmericanLeather.com](http://AmericanLeather.com))," says Deborah Wiener. "Is it cheap? No. It is a great value. The quality, styling and fabric—leather and ultrasuede—are unbeatable at this price. You usually receive your purchase in a month. For clients on a shoestring, I use the auFurniture line."
- Wiener shops the Web. For contemporary occasional tables and decorative accents, she likes West Elm ([Westelm.com](http://Westelm.com)). For pillows, accessories, and other pieces, she recommends Room & Board ([roomandboard.com](http://roomandboard.com)): "Room & Board lets you make your own kitchen table—you choose from an assortment of bases and tops."
- Put your money into things you sit and stand on," Wiener says. "Occasional tables from Ikea hold up as well as any other. And nothing makes modest furnishings more impressive than good lighting. Posters from the Phillips Collection or MoMA in simple glass clip frames from Target, look even better with a wall-mounted picture light."