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## An East Lyme Living Room Gets A Redesign

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When decorator and redesigner Janice Weinstein, owner of West Hartford's the Spirited Design, enlisted herself to redesign the living room or family room for a Courant reader, we put out a call for volunteers, and the response was terrific.

More than 50 people sent photos, most accompanied by notes explaining why a redesign would be welcome. We saw rooms with too little furniture, rooms with too much, rooms taken over by kids' toys, and rooms of couples who had just merged belongings. We saw rooms that hardly needed a redesign and others that cried out for something more drastic.

To clarify, redesign is not redecorating. A redesign uses existing furniture and accessories to make over a room.

Furnishings might be from the room itself or "shopped" from other spaces in the home. An average redesign takes Weinstein three to four hours, and, while the purchase of new items and repainting of walls can be incorporated into a redesign, they were not included as part of this make-over.

Weinstein's redesign job for The Courant began with a review of all pictures submitted. A brief process of elimination followed, and she made her choice: Marian Pixley, a shoreline real estate agent whose East Lyme condo reflects a love of artwork, flowering plants and playing piano.

Critical to Weinstein's decision to redesign Pixley's living room was a home visit, which showed she had plenty to work with — interesting furniture pieces, paintings and home accessories. Equally critical were Pixley's answers to a series of questions, a friendly quiz that Weinstein uses to determine a client's attitudes about their space and the things in it.

"What do you like most about the room?" Weinstein asks her clients. "What do you dislike?" "Is there anything that can't leave this room?" "Are there any fragile or sentimental items in this room?" "What things do you and your family members do in this room?" "Is there anything in any other room of the house that needs to stay where it is?" And in Pixley's case, "Does the piano have to stay on an inside wall?"

Pixley's living room, which is open to the kitchen on one end and an outdoor deck on the other, functions as



a combination living room, dining room, guest room (the couch folds out), office space and music hall. She likes the room's openness, but she's never been crazy about the pink tile, which covers the hallway floor and surrounds the fireplace, a decorative choice that was made by a previous owner.

Pixley's answers revealed an enthusiasm that gave Weinstein carte blanche to change anything — including the location of the piano.

In the two weeks between the time Pixley was chosen and the day of the redesign, Weinstein found herself dreaming about the space and repositioning things in her mind. Finally, it was time to do it for real.

Weinstein arrived for the job toting a tool kit, energy bars and all-important furniture movers — disk-shaped plastic and/or foam rectangles designed to slide under furniture legs to facilitate the moving of heavy pieces.

Pixley was asked to leave her home for three to four hours while the redesign took place. After serving us coffee, she dutifully departed, and Weinstein got to work (with a little manual labor help from yours truly).

Step one in her redesign process is to empty the room of everything. "You have to completely empty a room to get the perspective," she says.

Weinstein has a system: We started with the small objects, emptying Pixley's display cupboard of glasses and plates. Next we took down paintings and prints and removed wall hooks. Small furniture pieces followed, leaving the large pieces for last. Things went swimmingly until we got to the piano, which was on wheels but seemed, on first, second and third tries, to be cemented to the floor. After a few attempts to lift the thing, I was for giving up, but Weinstein wasn't. Moving the piano was key to her plans for the room.

We tried again, and by some combination of will power, brute force and energy-bar magic, we got it onto the furniture movers and pushed and pulled it into Pixley's back room, where it found a new home.

What a difference!

The room now empty — except for the glass-fronted cupboard, which Weinstein had already determined would stay where it was — the redesigner worked the process backward, starting with the large pieces and putting things back into the room.

"You have to play with things," Weinstein said, warning me we might move the same piece several times. "I may try it one way and then try something else. It's all part of the redesign process."

From the back room that now houses the piano, we moved an antique desk to the living room, a showpiece that Pixley "had hidden," Weinstein said.

Other changes quickly followed. Weinstein knew she wanted to reposition the couch, setting it on an angle facing the fireplace to create a focal point for that area of the room. She positioned a burgundy-patterned upholstered chair facing the couch to create a conversation area, then went looking for an area rug to further define that space. No rug was to be found, but a basket in the basement was pressed into service as a coffee table.

The next big piece to consider was the dining room table — too big for the space. Weinstein checked to see if a leaf could be removed to make it smaller. When that wasn't possible, she considered removing it from the room altogether and substituting Pixley's round patio table.

"I want a round shape there," said Weinstein, who often conceives of redesign ideas in terms of shape and color.

Ultimately, the table stayed, but Weinstein positioned it nearer the wall to prevent it from protruding too far into the living space.

Weinstein "shopped" Pixley's console table from its spot in the foyer, setting it along the back of the couch "to create more of a barrier" between the dining area of the room and the sitting area.

Dining room chairs upholstered in apricot-patterned fabric were reincorporated into the space with many finding new perches — four surrounding the table, two flanking the antique desk, and two others in the foyer beside a smaller console table Weinstein fished out of the back room.

From there, it was time to reintroduce accessories — paintings, prints and decorative items. Weinstein chose from among Pixley's artworks first, carefully considering shapes, sizes and colors. A Degas print in blues and pinks took the place of a lithograph of cows. Two boldly colored same-size original works of art took up positions on opposite sides of the room — one adding a burst of yellow near the dining room table, the other splashing cobalt blue on the wall above the antique desk. A long narrow Asian print of dragonflies found a spot above the sliding glass doors to the terrace, its silvery hues repeated in another work hung nearby and chosen for its wide silver frame.

Weinstein put back fewer paintings and prints than Pixley had originally had on display, and, with the exception of the dragonflies, none were positioned too high on the wall.

"With cathedral ceilings, you don't want to draw the eye upward," Weinstein said.

The smallest accessories — chosen to "move color around the room" — completed the redesign.

"I hate filling a glass cabinet with glass," she said, because it is colorless. By grouping a collection of cobalt blue glass pieces in the mirrored cabinet, she created an echo effect with the blue painting on the far wall and added an element of contrast to the bright yellow and orange appearing elsewhere in the room. Three artificial green pears were given a home in a turquoise serving piece. Bright yellow artificial lemons were taken from a bowl and scattered onto a tray for the dining room table. A small lamp with yellow glass shades was "shopped" from the back room to have a starring spot atop the antique desk. Playing up the intense colors in the space had the overall effect of diminishing the impact of the pink tile.

"You hardly notice it now," Weinstein said.

Accessorizing the mantel came last.

"I need more star pieces for the mantel," Weinstein said, before finding a few more treasures among Pixley's things and arranging them by like color or form to create impact.

"I group by color and collection," she said.

Before Pixley returned, Weinstein had essentially redone three rooms. The living room had a whole new look, but so did the foyer, which suddenly became a seating area thanks to the two dining room chairs and the lower console table, and the back TV room, which had lost a desk but acquired a piano, and had a couch repositioned.

Not bad for a four-hour makeover.

Pixley was led, eyes covered, through the door to see her "new" living room for the first time. "You used things that I never would have thought to use!" Pixley said, delighted as she took in the changes.

"We don't notice our own things," Weinstein said.

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