

Interior Designer's Roundtable: Feather your nest - Create an interior space that resonates with your soul

Q&A, Compiled and edited by Anika Hanisch

Distinctly Montana

April 2011

Final Published Text



Designers from around Montana weigh in on your most frequently asked questions for stylish interior design and remodels

Meet Our Experts

- Patricia Davidson and Tiffany Davidson-Blades
Owners of Davidson Home Furnishings & Design—Billings
- Pamela Guth
Tile and stone designer, owner of Trappings Studio—Missoula
- Kathy Koelzer
Interior Designer at Montana Expressions—Bozeman
- Carol Nelson
Owner and President of Carol Nelson Design, Inc.—Kalispell
- Hunter Dominick
Interior Designer and founder of Hunter & Company—Whitefish
- Rosina Kastelitz
Senior Designer at Kibler & Kirch—Red Lodge
- Jennifer Kuehn
Interior Design Specialist and owner of Hunting & Gathering for the Home—Missoula
- Carina Russell, ASID
Co-owner (with husband John) and Head Designer of Rocky Mountain Design Interiors—Livingston and Bozeman
- Donna Shanahan
Professional Interior Designer and Allied Member ASID, Owner of Donna Shanahan Interior—Big Fork

1. How can you update a space with items you already own?

Hunter Dominick: A space can be easily updated with some vision. Move everything out of your space and start with a clean slate.

Jennifer Kuehn: Bring someone else in—a friend or arrange for an hour of design time. If you've always hung an artwork in the dining room, you think of it as the dining room piece. But someone else might see its dimensions are appropriate for another wall.

Rosina Kastelitz: For re-arranging, we do something called "playhouse house phase." We take everything down and put it all in one room; we call that the "store". After we re-arrange the furniture, we begin going back to the "store" for accessories.

2. What are the most important pieces of furniture to invest in?

Kuehn: I tell young couples to invest in a mattress and box spring and also a sofa sleeper. These are not things that you want to replace often.

Donna Shanahan: Now we are using re-cycled materials for constructing wonderful quality wood pieces such as tables, bedroom furniture, and accent pieces. These can and should become our children and grandchildren's—lasting for generations. The older the re-cycled wood, the more natural the inherent beauty.

Kathy Koelzer: Pieces that you absolutely love and that will travel through life with you. Maybe they make a statement because the old wood has aged with use and is now a beautiful patina. If choosing a new piece, classic pieces stand the test of time. Probably the most used pieces will be upholstered pieces (sofa and chair), which you should spend as much on as you can so that they stand up to many years of use. If you can keep the fabric or leather neutral, you will be able to change the look fairly easily by reaccessorizing.

3. How do you make a space with low ceilings look roomier?

Tiffany Davidson-Blades: The easiest trick is (to incorporate) anything vertical—striped wall-covering, for instance.

Taking drapes all the way up to the ceiling helps elongate the wall. If you have a grouping of pictures, arranging them in a vertical line will help. Keep the ceiling white.

Kastelitz: Eliminate anything that has a horizontal orientation—wainscoting, chair rails, that kind of thing.

4. What are some good rules for lighting?

Kastelitz: In kitchens and offices, you need a lot of light. We recommend dimmer lights. We use indirect light as often as we can.

Davidson-Blades: Don't forget about floor outlets. Say you have a sofa in the middle of the room with a sofa table behind it; floor outlets are really important then. Keep chandeliers low enough that they're still connected to the rest of the décor, about 30 inches above the top of the table.

Pamela Guth: Buy bigger fixtures! When you hang them up high, they diminish in size visually quite a lot and look underscaled.

5. What types of upholstery fabrics are best for homes with pets?

Koelzer: Leather is good to a point; depending on the finish, it may or may not scratch. Microfibers are stain resistant, but attract pet hair. Go with colors and fabrics that are similar to your pet's coloring. If you have a fluffy white angora, don't buy a black sofa!

Patricia Davidson: We are finding that indoor/outdoor fabrics in their many textures, patterns, and colors are excellent for repelling pet hair and are easy to clean. Always use a fabric that has a teflon or scotchgard finish.

Kuehn: Go with medium tones. Very dark tones show dust, lint, and hair, while very light tones show dirt faster. That doesn't mean it can't be a pretty color. It could be a lilac purple. It doesn't have to be brown; it just needs to be a medium tone.

6. What colors are the most challenging to work with?

Davidson-Blades: Neutrals are harder to work with than actual color. Some neutrals will read a little yellow in one room; in another home, with different lighting, it picks up a little pink. Paint is not easy. I love the five-dollar paint samples they do now; it's much better to literally try it out in your room, in your light.

Carina Russell: Our interior and exterior environments need to be cohesive. People move here from Florida and want to bring soft Caribbean colors with them. We have more deep browns, golds, and reds, earthy greens, and crisp blues here. After they live here for a while, people say, "I like different colors here than when I was back home." It's about what you see when you look outside. Incorporate some of that palette into your indoor environment for it to feel right.

Guth: Blue, I love it, need it! The caveat: if it isn't handled correctly and has bad lighting, it can have a wildly unexpected effect and chase you right out of a room!

7. Is there any wall color that works best when displaying art?

Russell: Many people think that white walls are best, but in reality a dark color is best... the artwork becomes the bright part of the wall—that draws your eye to it.

Shanahan: Placing a light framed piece of art with a darker subject matter on a darker wall will pull the viewer directly to the subject matter. Yet, placing a dark framed piece on a lighter colored wall will also do the same thing.

8. How have you adjusted to tight budgets?

Guth: Buy the best things, but not too many of them. Don't give up quality, give up quantity.

Davidson: People are thinking more long-term and planning for their purchases. Impulse purchases of trendy items is a thing of the past. We have always encouraged our clients to "buy once, and buy well."

Carol Nelson: We are continually looking for value products that give a good look and are cost effective. (There are) design tricks that can be very effective and are budget minded, such as doing a café curtain instead of shutters.

9. What should no room be without?

Koelzer: The character and personality of the people who live there. And any heirloom pieces that have traveled with them through the years.

Nelson: A focal point or something that gives a room a "pop" or "wow". This basic design principle applies to all rooms, whether it is an art object, the bedding, the view, a sofa, etc.

Kastelitz: Something that you love—artwork or pictures of family or something that somebody has made.

Kuehn: A comfortable place to sit or lie down. There has to be an element of comfort.

10. What advice do you give to people who want a new look for their homes but don't know where to start?

Russell: Start looking through design magazines, and get a feel for what you like and also for what you don't like.

Nelson: (Write) a list of the areas you have concerns about, then prioritize either by: 1-Ability to make changes; 2-Perceived cost; or 3-Areas of the home. Then call a professional to help continue to sort it out.

Davidson-Blades: When you live with your things for a long time, you tend to not notice them anymore. A fresh set of eyes can help update a room without spending a dime on new things.

Dominick: Start with one key statement piece and build from there.

Kastelitz: We begin with a leading pattern. If it's a home with hard wood floors, and they need area rugs, we start there. If it's a room with neutral carpet, we start with a chair or artwork, something with a number of colors in it. We take that leading pattern and build from it.

Anika Hanisch is a freelance writer and coauthor who lives in Bozeman, Montana. She regards springtime as mud season and therefore a very good excuse to stay indoors re-arranging her furniture. And her bookshelves. Maybe install some modular shelving in the linen closet. On second thought, it would be much more fun to finish that winter reading list that piled up while she was out skiing...

