



■ Interior decorator Ruth Condit, right, and homeowner Barbara Riggs of south Fort Myers working together to do a room makeover around a copy of a Da Vinci painting, "The Lady with the Ermine," which Riggs painted herself.

SMALL MAKEOVERS

Hiring a professional could pay off big time — and it doesn't have to be stressful

BY BARBARA BOXLEITNER
Special to The News-Press

For some people, turning their vision of home decor into reality is more difficult than they imagined.

But finding a professional to help with even minor tasks does

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PHOTOS BY TERRY ALLEN WILLIAMS/THE NEWS-PRESS

■ Riggs' newly decorated living room.

TIPS TO FIND AN INTERIOR DECORATOR

- Consult telephone directory
- Visit decorators' online sites
- Seek referrals from friends and family
- Verify qualifications
- Review work samples
- Arrange personal interview
- Describe decorating objectives
- Ask questions about cost, timetable
- Judge ability to listen
- Consider professionalism

SOURCES: INTERIOR DESIGNER KAPPY KING COLE AND INTERIOR DECORATORS RUTH CONDIT AND CHRISTINE ALEXANDER

■ Condit transformed Riggs' living room, allowing Riggs' personal artwork to be showcased.



THE DIFFERENCES

■ **INTERIOR DECORATOR:** An interior decorator is not required to have a college degree but must have training or certification from an approved educational program. The decorator receives certification through the Certified International Decorators International. A decorator can help in tasks such as selecting furnishings and fixtures, applying wallpaper and painting and supplying decorations such as paintings and carpeting, but it not licensed to plan architectural and space changes.

SOURCES: CERTIFIED INTERIOR DECORATORS INTERNATIONAL

■ **INTERIOR DESIGNER:** An interior designer has at least a two-year degree in interior design, with recognition by the Foundation of Interior Design Education Research, and has worked under supervision of a licensed architect or interior designer. A combination of six years experience is required as well as certification after completion of the National Council of Interior Design Qualification exam. People who have years of experience yet lack formal training in interior design have been grandfathered into licensure. The designer can perform major projects, including architectural and space changes.

SOURCES: CERTIFIED INTERIOR DECORATORS INTERNATIONAL AND FLORIDA BOARD OF ARCHITECTURE AND INTERIOR DESIGN

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not have to be a project in itself.

For small makeovers, an interior decorator is the desired match. Interior decorators are qualified to choose furniture and fittings, apply wallpaper and painting and supply decorations such as paintings and carpeting.

That said, homeowners should research candidates. Ruth Condit, interior decorator at Ruth Condit Interiors in Fort Myers, has a web site and said homeowners should look online to review qualifications and work samples. She also recommended personal interviews.

Barbara Riggs and her husband live in a Southwest Florida condo. During recent years, they had Condit redo multiple rooms from traditional to transitional, asking that she start work around a Leonardo Da Vinci painting in the living room.

"I had looked on the Internet, and she sounded good," said Riggs, 72. "I did interview a

"If the person cannot put him or herself together attractively, then they cannot put your room together.

What you see is what you will get.

■ Kappy King Cole

few people, yes. I thought she was well-qualified. I thought she was a very classy lady."

People should use existing resources, too, to get a referral from someone you know," said interior decorator Christine Alexander of Christine Alexander Interiors Inc. in Naples.

Word of mouth worked for Julie Healy and her partner, Bill Barbara. Healy and Barbara, both 51, wanted to redo portions of their Rapallo carriage house.

Healy heard about Condit from a friend who knew the decorator's work in Pennsylva-

nia. Condit and the pair toured the Rapallo community by car so she could get a grasp of what the development was like, then visited the couple's home. "We had a good gut feeling, and it only got better," Healy said about the first meeting.

"What I appreciate is she sat with Bill and I and just talked with us, what are our goals, what are our dislikes and likes," said Healy, a saleswoman. "I was very impressed because that's how I operate. She spent the morning with us. It was complimentary."

Indeed, the first meeting is a chance to see if there is a match. "The designer needs to get to know you. You have to find out how someone lives," said interior designer Kappy King Cole, adding that decorators have to learn the lifestyle details, such as from which chairs the homeowners watch TV.

Decorators must be willing to listen to a client's wishes. "She accepted my ideas," Riggs said of Condit. "She wasn't pushy at all. I knew what I wanted to do. She helped me to pursue what I wanted to do."

Condit said it's more than words, though. "The homeowner should pay attention to how the design professional dresses. If the person cannot put him or herself together attractively, then they cannot put your room together. What you see is what you will get."

And during the makeover itself, decorators need to maintain regular dialogue and provide lots of visuals. Condit assisted Healy and Barbara with furniture placement and color consultation. Condit was conscious of price for the furniture yet still offered a "beautiful selection," Healy said.

"She does a nice color chart," said Healy, whose home now features rich, dark Mediterranean hues. "She's phenomenal with colors. There wasn't one color choice in every room that we didn't like. She's very precise."

From start to finish, then, the more prepared and open-minded the decorator, the more satisfaction guaranteed.

"I can't tell you how much of a godsend Ruth is," Healy said.