

Design expert: mirrors are magic, clutter is emotional

Some interior designers from the Topeka area charge upwards of \$75 an hour for a design consultation. Interior designer and certified Feng Shui practitioner Jan Hutt gave advice free of charge at the Silver Lake Public Library on Thursday, March 20.

Hutt has been an interior designer for 35 years and currently has an office for her business located within Carpet One in Topeka. She is also the design coordinator for the 2014 Topeka Designers' Showhouse. Hutt answered questions and provided information about home decorating to a group of 10 women who attended the presentation, which was open to the public.

Regarding the issue of clutter, something that most people have trouble with, Hutt said that the underlying issue is most always emotional attachment.

“Often I'll go into people's homes and I'll have to clean it before I get to work,” she said.

Hutt looks at decorating a home in terms of practicality. She is able to detach herself from her clients' possessions in a way that they cannot. She has her own style preferences, but does not push them onto her clients, telling them upfront, “I have no style. Your style is my style.”

One item that Hutt believes should always be in a living room is a coffee table.

“A room without a coffee table is not a complete room,” she explained.

Her reasoning is based on purpose. Hutt believes that furniture should be used, not stared at. She considers the best homes to be ones where visitors can put their feet up and be comfortable.

Coffee tables do not have to take up a lot of space in a room. Using a unique item in place of a table, such as a vintage trunk, also adds aesthetic interest.

The first rule Hutt ever learned in design school was that a seat should always have a place next to it where an item, such as a glass or book, can be placed. Part two of that rule is that there should always be extra lighting where there is seating.

“I've seen homes where there will be two chairs against a wall and no table or lamp, and I say, 'What do you do over there?' There's nowhere to put your wine,” Hutt said, adding that a room fit for entertaining should always have seating for at least six people.

She assured listeners that if a room is set up right, aesthetics don't necessarily matter. Even though some of Hutt's clients are millionaires, she never uses all new or designer furniture, for fear of being “boring.”

Consignment stores or garage sales are great ways to find unique furniture pieces.

“You don't have to spend a lot of money to get good style,” Hutt said.

Another way to save money is to have carpet cleaned every two years. Clients have come to Hutt, insisting that they need new carpet. The first question she asks them is, “When was the last time you had it cleaned?” More often than not, the answer is never. On many occasions, Hutt's cleaning suggestion has prevented clients from having to buy new carpet.

“Carpet is like your hair,” she said. “You wash it and it's thicker and fuller. If you want it to last, have it cleaned every two years.”

Hutt cautioned that people should be wary of over-using generic items from Hobby Lobby or Pottery Barn. The space will inevitably begin to look like it's out of a consumer catalog. Mixing furniture pieces from various sources and not trying to completely match gives a room a unique look.

The not-so-secret “secret” about trends is that they always go out of style. In Kansas, trends tend to recycle about every 15 years. Hutt stressed that a person does not want to be on the back end of a trend.

A bold color will most likely date itself eventually. When a big room is painted in it, a person will get sick of it faster. This is why small bathrooms are usually a great place to play with color.

Hutt said that whatever color an individual enjoys is always the right decision. She suggests going off of the colors of something already in the room.

As a Feng Shui expert, she believes that energy flow is important in a home. In simplest terms, Feng Shui is just getting something to feel right. Imagine laying on a bed that does not face the doorway. Does it seem uneasy? Hutt would say yes. A Feng Shui rule that she goes off of is that a bed should always be offset from the doorway, facing it.

There are certain aspects of a home that cannot be changed. Hutt said that architects sometimes don't take the time to consider functionality in their design. Small adjustments can make those spaces better.

For instance, in small rooms, height is a good way to break up space. Items such as folding screens or tall lamps bring the eyes up and makes the room seem bigger and more intriguing.

Every room should have a focal point. In the bedroom, this is obviously the bed, so decorating it nicely to your preference is ideal. In living rooms, the focal point could be a fireplace or wall décor.

There is one item that can substantially make a room better.

“Mirrors are magic in design,” Hutt said. “They make it all look better and skinny ones make *you* look better.

Mirrors also double the space in a room. Hutt advised that there should be at least one mirror in every room and standing mirrors go great in dead spaces.

One of the most important rules to remember is that design should be played with. With one of her wealthy clients, Hutt rearranged a bookshelf and came back four years later to see that the items were placed exactly as she had originally set them. She does not mind that some of her clients take pictures of her work to replicate in the future, but advises that every individual can add their own touch to design.

“There's a way you can do that to make it uniquely you,” she said.

Overall, design is an expression of individuality. There is no reason to be discouraged about not having the latest furniture styles. If a room is arranged correctly, furniture that has been in the same room for 20 years can be seen in a new and better light.

“Once you get a room just right you forget that it could ever be different,” Hutt said.

