



EUREKA!

geologist's duplex goes from mismatched confusion to energized fusion



Before: (Above) David was ready to get rid of his mother's powder-blue sofa, but new upholstery made it work.

After: (Left) Reupholstering existing furniture; adding a textured rug, up-lit palm tree, TV cabinet and geological accessories; and framing a textile brought back from Africa transformed this once-staid living room.



Before: (Above) Mismatched woods, bare walls and empty built-in bookshelves made for an uninviting dining room.

After: (Left) Moving in a Mission-style chest and small end table from a bedroom, we added a large mirror to fill up the dining area. Inserting an existing leaf in the round table helped balance the room.



by joetta moulden
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When I first met geologist David Fontaine, I was struck by his sense of humor and love of international travel, yet his duplex did not reflect these colorful aspects of his personality. In fact, it had a high “grandma factor” and looked timid and boring.

“Art objects I just hauled back from South Africa sat eerily silent next to a prized Venetian mask, artifacts from Florence, a Navajo rug—all reminding me of great adventures,” David recalls. “Surely, I thought, there is a way to enjoy this bounty everyday, to make it come alive.”

FIRST ‘DIGS’

The background for his exotica featured dull gray walls and rooms sparsely furnished with vintage family furniture: a mishmash of Mission, French provincial and Colonial styles. “Nothing matched, nothing worked. It was decorating schizophrenia,” David says.

So desperate was he to pull his home together, he even took a night decorating class. “The best thing was that I was the only male in a room with 26 beautiful women, but that’s another story,” he says, smiling. “Afterwards, at least, I had an idea of what I wanted: a cohesive, upbeat look with fall colors, wood and casual comfort...with a reflection of ‘me’ in the rooms.”

The task seemed overwhelming, Should David buy new or reupholster? Should he toss the wing chair and buy a recliner? Should he find an affordable Persian silk rug?

“Confusion reigned,” he says. “I was stuck.”





Before: (Above) The sunroom's ceiling and floor were dusty rose, which cast a bubble gum-pink glow throughout the room.

After: (Left) Repainting the floor, ceiling and walls brightened the sunroom. The console table and oil painting were moved in from another room. Curtains were raised and restyled, subtracting years from their age.

TRADE | secrets

- Define living and dining spaces with an area rug. Here, textured seagrass deliberately plays down the furniture's formality.
- Instead of hanging multiple paintings over a sofa, think big. Frame one over-scaled memento, like this textile that David brought back from Africa.
- Think outside the box. Just because a chair is stained wood doesn't mean it can't be painted.
- Sometimes the most effective strategy is not to buy more furniture and accessories for your home, but to first rethink the pieces that already are paid for.

TRANSFORMATION TIME

David called me after reading a "DIY Decorating" column in *Houston House & Home*. "In business, I deal with consultants of all types," David explains. "I have a sense about whether the people standing before me can do what they claim, or if they are simply aspirants. You understood that my '50s duplex is a tear-down and that I did not want to spend money on remodeling — rather, just enough to make the place comfortable and attractive."

During our initial meeting, David pointed out his mother's powder-blue sofa and wing chairs he was planning to toss. To his surprise, I delivered my mantra: "If it's paid for, let's try to make it work."

I suggested we restyle his pieces with spring down cushions and extra padding to achieve the more contemporary, comfortable look and feel he was after. A custom ottoman could be constructed, I explained, to emulate the "recliner" he wanted, topped with his Navajo rug.

"I simply could not visualize the result," David says. "Then I asked myself, 'Why did I hire Joetta, if not for this very thing?' So I took a leap of faith."

"When the upholsterers carried in the restructured sofa, now a deep, brick red, and placed it against my new straw-colored wall, it was awesome. Just awesome! The furniture is a 'star' in the room, and my goal was accomplished for well under the retail cost of new furniture," he adds.

The "trust" issue arose again when I suggested David paint his sunroom. "No way," he protested. A few years earlier, he had installed a wood-plank ceiling and had stained the ceiling and concrete floor a dusty rose, which cast a bubble gum-pink glow over the entire room.

"A few days later, I again thought about why I had hired you. I decided to trust... and painted the entire

room straw and even the floor the taupe enamel you suggested (Pratt & Lambert "Ventana" #2271). Guests who liked the original now prefer the new version hands down. Me, too!" says David.

AVALANCHE OF IDEAS

During the first visit, I found a hand-painted tablecloth lying on a chair from Cape Town in fall colors with a tribal motif that David loves. When I admired it, he said he had another antique cloth he brought back from his trip, and as soon as I saw it, I knew it could be framed in a Plexiglas box and hung horizontally on the wall above the sofa.

"That cloth started the wellspring," he says with a smile, "and our meeting turned into four hours of questions, suggestions, paint color selections, measurements and several pages of written instructions left for me, a veteran do-it-yourselfer."

I gave David a list of homework assignments, including painting the walls (Sherwin-Williams "Straw Doll" #1365), the back wall of the bookcases (Benjamin Moore custom #M02-23-88) and woodwork (Benjamin Moore "Super White" #310-02), changing out cabinet hardware, replacing the chandelier, refinishing the floors, ordering three discount "Seaside" seagrass rugs (from www.homedecorators.com) and buying a palm tree from China Silks.

I also provided David a Web site from which he could order three 11-by-14-inch prints of South African scenes (www.danitadelimont.com) to hang above his mantel, and to preview them, I suggested he tape off the frame outlines right on the wall with blue painter's tape. He bought three 16-by-20-inch frames on sale at Aaron Brothers for \$10 each and had Arden's Picture Framing cut archival, acid-free mats for the photos. A pair of \$49 candlesticks from Home

Source Outlet completed the mantel's transformation.

"Under your direction, I completed a large portion of the plan without your presence, which saved me money," David says.

To divert attention away from the mismatched woods' formality, I suggested we paint his dining chairs a deep, Sherwin-Williams color, "Black Green" #6994, and recover the slip seats in the brick-red sofa fabric. To house his television and hide it away, David and I purchased an antique \$395 painted cabinet from El Paso Imports.

Slowly, my intern, Dorenda Longoria, and I added layers for visual warmth and comfort, including a Pottery Barn basket under the coffee table for magazines, a \$299 Storehouse mirror over the Mission "buffet" we moved from the bedroom into the dining room and a new \$29.99 table lamp from Linens 'N Things. With measurements in hand, David had his cousin construct a Plexiglas box for the African textile over the sofa. A beaded table runner and glass lantern from Home Source Outlet were purchased for the dining table — again diverting attention away from formality. We hung the Venetian mask above a mirror in the dining room, out of harm's way, yet viewable from all angles.

The plan called for the purchase of two candlestick lamps for the buffet, but I improvised and had artist Amy Queen over-paint the lavender and pink flowers on David's mother's Asian lamps with brick red and coral paint. With new lampshades from Alcon Lightcraft, they have a second life atop the dining room buffet. "Mom would be delighted that I kept them," David says with a smile.

To add style and length to the too-short sunroom draperies, I suggested the curtain rod be raised and that we add a contrasting fabric





Before: (Left) The living room desperately needed updated window treatments — and a place to house David's TV.

After: (Above) To soften the stark living room, we painted the walls, placed the television inside an antique painted cabinet and created custom Roman shades. The round occasional table is from Linens 'N Things, floor lamps from M&M Lighting,

panel to the bottom of the curtains — and ditch the uptight pinch pleats. We used the reverse application of the two fabrics on the living room's Roman shades, made by D&H Drapery, which recycled the sunroom's dated French door curtains to use as the shades' "border."

DISCOVERY COMPLETE

"To me, we were finished," David says, "but we weren't. You said we still needed to add 'me' to the design." During a brainstorming session, Dorenda and I talked about putting something meaningful, like geodes, in the coffee table's wood charger.

"Immediately my mind avalanched with possibilities," he says. "Geology is the overwhelming passion of my life, my creative expression. This idea energized me, and I set about assembling a stellar collection of my favorite minerals, rocks and fossils, including a 170 million-year-old Ammonite fossil from Morocco on top of the television cabinet. We had arrived at fusion!

"Nine months ago, I sat in my living room staring at dreary walls," David explains. "Today, I'm stirred each time I enter the house." ■

Joetta Moulden offers home makeovers using your own home furnishings to create the home you've always dreamed of. Joetta believes your pieces that have been collected through the years are a reflection of your personality and can be artfully arranged.

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