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Home Style: The Payless reno your pals will envy

Presented by



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There's no stopping style - not even during a recession.

Homeowners may not be out shopping for expensive high-end furniture and accessories, but they're still bringing the designer look into their abodes by seeking cheap chic.

"People have always wanted to be fabulous on a budget," says Matthew Finlason, a host of HGTV's *The Stagers*. "Being cheap chic makes you the envy of all your friends for not a lot of money. It's like having all your girlfriends hate you for having the best pair of shoes for less than \$20."

Pulling off cheap chic in your home can be as easy as investing in a can of fresh paint. It's still the most inexpensive way to create a transformation.

"Select neutral colours and avoid binks and bellows - beigey pinks and beigey yellows," says Mr. Finlason. "They are paint catastrophes. They make everything look dated."

Instead, Mr. Finlason suggests going with an earthy palette of greys with soft green or brown undertones.

"During the day, your walls will appear clean and soft and in the evening when the light comes down, they will look warm and darker," he says.

Giving kitchens and bathrooms a facelift can also be done on a budget.

Remove the old doors from your kitchen cupboards and buy new ones from inexpensive stores such as Ikea. Couple them with new hardware and turn a drab kitchen into a fab kitchen.

"It's incredible," says Mr. Finlason. "I did it in my kitchen and it went from old to brand new."

Elizabeth Falconer, owner of Vancouver-based Frugal Chic Interior Design, says transforming a blah bathroom into a spa getaway can also be done inexpensively and quickly.

The first step is to remove all clutter and hide it behind closed doors - be it a medicine cabinet on the wall or in a vanity. Donate all your old ratty towels to a local dog shelter and replace them with crisp white ones. Paint the walls a rich chocolate brown, buy a new white shower curtain and add a beautiful bouquet of flowers and the transformation is done.

"You can do that in one weekend," says Ms. Falconer. "It's the greatest look for an inexpensive bathroom redo and it creates a serene spa-like feel."

Making your own artwork is another way to be chic on the cheap. But you don't have to be the next Picasso to pull it off - in fact, you don't even have to paint at all.

Rachel Ashwell, creator of the Shabby Chic style in 1989, founder of Shabby Chic home furnishing stores and author of the best-selling Shabby Chic and Rachel Ashwell's Shabby Chic Treasure Hunting & Decorating Guide, admits she can't draw a straight line - but this doesn't stop her from bringing a personal touch of art into her home.

"Just because you're not an artist in the sense of being able to paint doesn't mean you can't create art from different things," says Ms. Ashwell.

One way she welcomes an artistic flair into her home is through the development of mood or memory boards.

A mood or memory board is basically a cork board. Ms. Ashwell advises homeowners to paint the unsightly board a fresh white and then cover it with things they love - dried flowers, feathers, old photos or love notes from the kids. But it has to be arranged in a neat fashion, so that it doesn't look cluttered.

"If you put it together nicely, it really can become a piece of art in itself," says Ms. Ashwell. "It gives the room personal life. Often when you go into a home, the difference between feeling like someone lives there and it being too sterile is having those kinds of true personal things on display. It gives the room real warmth."

You could also print your favourite digital photos of landscapes or still lifes and pop them into inexpensive black frames.

"It will look fabulous," says Mr. Finlason. "Put them over your bed, put them over your sofas or along your hallways."

He also recommends cutting pages of illustrations out of books and popping them into vintage gold frames that can be purchased at garage sales or consignment shops.

"Feel free to spray-paint the frames white," Mr. Finlason says. "That's really hot right now. It gives you a traditional texture that works in a contemporary home."

Combining tradition with modern-day living is achieved easily through the use of vintage wallpaper. While true vintage wallpaper is usually only available in a roll or two, not enough to cover an entire room, it's a fabulously inexpensive way to give cupboards a chic makeover.

Ms. Ashwell lines the shelves of her linen closets and backs of cupboards with it to give even the most mundane places a designer touch.

"You're in those little places a lot," she says. "It's just a way of making what's usually a mundane domestic duty a little more pleasing."

The art is in the detail. Ms. Ashwell says it's important not to forget areas of the home that aren't usually considered important, such as hallways. Adding sophistication with flowers or candles can beautify even the smallest space.

She also uses small vases and flowers to break up a monolithic piece of furniture such as a bookcase.

"If you have a shelf of books, and nestled within those books is a little vase of roses, to me that's how you give something beauty that might be a little less decorative."

Whether it's done with a candle, flowers or a splash of colour, it doesn't have to take a lot of time or money to add a touch of chic to any space but the impact can be life-altering.

"Throughout any economic time, everybody wants to take pride in their homes," says Ms. Falconer. "People want to come home at the end of the day and step into something peaceful where they feel happy and nurtured. It's very psychological. If people are happy in their home environment, they're much happier with life in general."

Season 2 of The Stagers airs Wednesdays at 8:30 p.m. on HGTV Canada.

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