

## Interior Refiner

**Whom do you call when your room needs a fresh look? How about someone who uses what you have and does it all in one day.**

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The cluttered living room had decor problems, and room refiner Ruth Edmondson had been hired to solve them. Dusty silk-flower arrangements were abundant; light was not. The furniture arrangement was awkward: A couch backed up against a window, facing a row of mismatched chairs. "It doesn't look like a living room," said Wendy Hibberd of Media, the homeowner. "It looks like a sewing circle." But Edmondson had a plan.

"What this room needs is a focal point," she said - the beautiful fieldstone fireplace nearly obscured by furniture. In another room, she had already spied the mate to a tomato-red upholstered armchair in the sewing circle. "We can use the pair to frame the fireplace, and then the sofa will move to face them," Edmondson said. She spent a day shifting furniture, hanging pictures, and adding accessories to create a remarkable room transformation. Even more impressive, she created the new look using things Hibberd already owned. Edmondson's firm, REarrangements, is one of a growing number specializing in "use what you have" decorating, also called "room refining" or simply "redesigning."

Instead of the blank check and blank slate once demanded by interior designers, room refiners rearrange your furniture and, typically, "shop" the house for pieces that might be better-suited to the space. And, for a standard flat fee of \$300, they work their magic in one day.

It's interior design for the masses, and you can thank Lauri Ward for it. The queen of redesign and author of three books on the subject, Ward pioneered the field in 1981 out of frustration with the traditional interior-design industry. Back then, there was just one way to do things: Designers were supposed to sell clients on whole rooms full of new furniture. "I did not like dictating to people," said Ward, who is based in New York. "I also didn't like that the interior-design world was so geared to the very wealthy... What about that other 99 percent of the population that bought the wrong sofa or the wrong paint color?"

Her epiphany gave birth to a movement. Ward has trained hundreds in her methods and founded the Interior Refiners Network, a national organization of one-day redecorators. Many room refiners are not interior designers (no special qualifications are necessary to take Ward's course or the competing training programs that have followed her cue). Yet it's clear more industry pros are turning to redesign. The American Society of Interior Designers, the oldest and largest professional organization for the field, has no data on the phenomenon, but spokeswoman Michelle Snyder said, "We have heard anecdotally that members are offering these services due to rising consumer demand."

"It has helped my business," Philadelphia interior designer Shelley Boe said of the redesign sideline she added two years ago. "People really like that I will do that; a lot of them don't need the whole shebang. They already have a lot of wonderful things. And all kinds of people can afford to have a room redesigned. "The fact that you can help someone in a day's time and give them a whole new room is so exciting."

Voorhees interior decorator Sandra Cook decided to focus exclusively on redesign a year ago, when she launched her Home Stylist business. "I find my clients know what they want," said Cook, who got her room-refining training with Ward. "They just do not know where to begin, or how to pull it all together." Cook, like most room refiners, provides a list at the session's end that details things that can be replaced or added to further enhance a room.

"We are empowering the clients to realize a style of their own, to make it personal, and be involved in the process instead of being told what to do. All we are asking them to do is try something. If they don't like the furniture that way, we will absolutely move it back." (Though, Cook said, she's yet to have a client make that request.)

At the Hibberd house, Edmondson was given free rein - though, in truth, her work on the living room didn't fit strictly into the one-day-redesign mold. She first came to the house in March, to rearrange some furniture in the family room. Next, she shopped with Hibberd for a new living room couch and helped her choose the pale Persian rug that would replace the old dark one. The final tweaking session last week pushed the room from unpolished to elegant. Edmondson found a pair of matching brass lamps to set on the tables. "You really need to have pairs in a room," she said. "That's what brings harmony." Two of the excess chairs were banished to a new seating nook Edmondson created next to the stairs. Above the mantel a colorful, impressionistic landscape replaced a dreary brown painting of a mother and child.

"That's what this room needed," she said. "It needed to come into the millennium." "This room doesn't have a foyer," she said. "Putting the couch this way creates one. ""I just love what she did," Hibberd said. "I don't miss my dark rug, and I liked seeing the painting in a different spot." In fact, she's inspired to do more.