

FIRST-TIME HOMEBUYERS' GUIDE

INTERIORS

Finding design advice for fixing up your new home

By **Merlisa Lawrence Corbett**
Special to *The Examiner*

Foreclosures or fixer-uppers can be great deals for first-time homebuyers but they often come with a daunting list of cosmetic repairs. There is help, however, for buyers on a budget who want to turn an “as is” property into their dream home.

“A designer can help you create a proper space plan,” said Dawn Newman, owner of the Designers Network (designersnetworkonline.com). The Designers Network, which offers services in Virginia, Maryland and Washington, matches people with interior designers who best meet their needs and budget.

Many homebuyers have difficulty putting all the design features together in one master plan.

“Sometimes people hire me just as a color consultant,” said Annette Phillips, president of Inspired Design LLC. “Sometimes I help them select cabinetry. Recently a couple buying new construction hired me during the selection process.”

For first-time buyers, who often use their new home as a stepping-stone to a larger or nicer house, it is



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Homeowners should consider creating a space that will have the broadest interest to the people most likely to purchase in their area.

especially important to keep resale in mind when making decisions on how and what to upgrade. Because kitchens and baths can offer the best return on renovation investments, many first-timers start there.

Phillips, who used to work for a company that designed model

home interiors, said builders tried to create a space that would have the broadest interest to the people most likely to purchase in that area. Homebuyers can use a similar approach to interiors in their own homes.

“If you’re in a neighborhood with

a certain education level or \$2 million homes, it doesn’t make sense to include fixtures that will appeal to someone with a \$30,000 income,” she said. The same logic works with adding too many upgrades to a modest home.

Do-it-yourselfers can use design

Where to look

For those who want professional guidance without having to pay a professional, RemodelGuide.com is a great site if you are skilled and disciplined enough to “paint by the numbers.”

software from organizations like HGTV, Chief Architect or Punch to help them flesh out ideas. There are also resources online such as Instant Space, an online interior design service offered by Burnham Design in Los Angeles (burnhamdesign.com). Design Service Online (interiordesignserviceonline.com) has a similar service.

With online services, you take measurements, complete online surveys to establish your design preferences and e-mail photos of your space. A professional designer or a team of designers then creates a personalized master design plan that arrives at your door in four to six weeks, complete with step-by-step guides to finishing your new space. These types of services charge flat fees, usually under \$1,000.



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