



Interior design = couples therapy?

Fifteen years ago I made a major career change and encountered something I never could have expected. New to the Seacoast, I left behind my work as a psychotherapist and embraced a lifelong passion for art and interior design. Panache Interior Design was born.

What I didn't anticipate was the fascinating way the two vastly different careers would merge in unexpected ways. I would continue to practice a form of psychotherapy, couple's work, in almost every project I encountered. The "couple's therapy" has sometimes been subtle, and sometimes not, but the many couples I have worked with have always kept my career interesting and inspiring.

I now know that more often than not, the lines of interior design enthusiasm are divided between the two genders. One person in a couple is excited to hire me to make their home look and feel more complete and furnished, or warm and casual, or cool and sophisticated. The other person wants to know what it's going to cost. I don't need to tell you who's generally who, because you probably already know. But what transpires during the time I work with couples in their homes surprises me over and over again.

Before I meet with clients for the first time, I ask each member of a couple (if I am working with a couple) to do a small homework assignment. Each person is to gather six to 10 photos of rooms or interior spaces that appeal to them. The key to this task is to do

it independently. This means no looking over shoulders at each other's choices, or making comments on them, until the task is done. Inevitably, one person in the couple just loves doing this homework. The other grumbles, and procrastinates. But the two packets I receive give me mounds of information.

He likes contemporary, she likes traditional. He likes warm colors; she prefers cool grays and blues. He wants a leather recliner, she hates leather. And recliners. The list goes on and on, and I roll up my sleeves. Couple's therapy has officially begun.

Just as many successful couples know, communication and compromise are required. My job is to help couples find common ground, to make their home unique and special, and reflective of the tastes of each person. The budget-conscious grumbling spouse discovers that doing things right the first time and avoiding costly errors is worth the investment. That same person becomes proud of their home and delighted to know that their preferences have been considered and valued. And that very same person finds him or herself surprised to be saying, "you better call Sharon" before embarking on a new home design project. Music to my ears, on many fronts, and a testimonial that I've done a good job.

Sharon Bottner is founder and proprietor of Panache Interior Design in Rye. She can be reached via e-mail at sharonbottner@comcast.net. Visit online at panacheintdesign.com. You can also find out about her work on Houzz.com.

By Sharon Bottner



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