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Section H

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# homestyle

## Refresh your nest

Simple ways to give  
a room a new look. 8H

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## cover story



## Artwork

Neaten a room by gathering mismatched photo frames and replacing with frames that are the same or similar in size, style or color, such as all black, the designers advise.

"Tight groupings of numerous framed prints, botanicals for example, give the impression of one large collage," Chris says.

Also, switch out the old matting in framed photos, awards or degrees and make them a uniform color, perhaps ivory.

Hang art so that its center is at eye-level with the most petite person in the house, Chris says, and even lower in the dining room and kitchen because people are seated when viewing it.

"Because it's lower you can stack another piece of art on top of it," she adds.

Photos courtesy of Michigan Design Center, Troy

Arranging photos or artwork in similar or matching frames creates a neat, clean gallery look as in this room by Century Furniture.

# Refresh your nest

2 decorators offer quick fixes to update your rooms



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**Y**ou don't need Botox to boost the appeal of your home.

Just add fresh paint, accent pillows, new window treatments and updated lighting and you'll take 10 years off, guaranteed.

And, happily in this unhappy economy, refreshing your home needn't cost a fortune, according to Caroline Smith Groeneveld of Caroline Inc. in Royal Oak and Sharon Chris of Single Solution Interiors in Rochester Hills, who shared updating ideas recently at the Michigan Design Center in Troy.

"It's easier than making ourselves look 10 years younger, quite frankly," Chris maintains. Here are their suggestions for injecting fresh life into a tired house:

## Rugs

Area rugs are the starting point for a room's color palette, and also define the space, according to the designers, who say skimping on rug size is a no-no.

"That's the single biggest mistake people make," Groeneveld says. "When a rug is properly sized, it makes the room appear larger and really enhances your space."

Three feet beyond a dining table or chairs is optimal, she says. And it's OK if some legs of the furniture rest on the rug, others off, Chris notes.

"The rug is the busiest thing in the room, sort of like art on the floor," she says. "It ties the room together and creates warmth and sound control. The more fabric in a room, the less echo."



Change the look of a room with a dramatic area rug, accent pillows and mirrors as in this design by Century Furniture.

## Pillows

"A simple thing like accent pillows can bring color into a room and add interest with minimal expense," Groeneveld says. And they're easy to change out seasonally to keep things fresh year-round.

## Painted furniture

Rather than buying new furniture, paint what you have, advises Chris. "We've all got old tables and chairs," she says. "Paint them a color of your decor — it's a great way to change the look."

"If you have an armoire, think of painting the door fronts. Just clean with TSP and prime it, and update with a current paint color or finish. Sometimes we get bogged down thinking everything has to match."

Other ways to recycle an outdated piece, Groeneveld says, include topping a damaged surface with natural stone, marble or tile; updating knobs or other hardware; or simply using a wood pen for touch-ups.

## Wallpaper

Wallpaper has made a comeback, and grasscloth is particularly popular now, the designers say. But if that's too pricey, use faux grasscloth, a more economical choice, Chris says.

Adds Groeneveld: "If you have plaster with nicks and scratches, grasscloth or any of the heavier papers are good to hide imperfections on a wall. Grasscloths are also environmentally friendly and have great acoustical properties."

Don't overlook wallpaper for ceilings, especially in laundry rooms, pantries and rooms with high ceilings. "You'll get rid of that elevator-shaft feeling," Chris says. "Or add molding to fool the eye."

## Lighting

Use lighting to bring out the best in a room, the designers say.

"A lot of people tend to neglect lighting, but it's one of the most important elements to a design," Groeneveld says. "Good lighting can transform and enrich colors and bring out texture. It can be as inexpensive as switching out table lamps or adding table lamps to increase light levels."

She suggests using spotlights to bring attention to a wall or row of bookshelves. "Maybe you've got a great looking wall with wallpaper or art, but you need to highlight it," she says.

Adding a dimmer for softer lighting is another option.

## Kitchens

Taking out some cabinets is one idea to improve a kitchen, Groeneveld says. "Or, if you have a U-shaped kitchen and it's separated from your eating area, maybe removing that peninsula and adding an island would jazz up your space," she says.

Removing soffits is a surefire update, according to Groeneveld, who says it opens up kitchen space. "Years ago, all cabinets were made 36 inches in height," she says. "People were short and couldn't reach them so soffits became the fashion."

"Now you can get 42-inch cabinets and people are decluttering their lives. Anything that used to hide on top of the cabinets can now hide inside."

If you want a wood-floor look and feel without the maintenance (especially if you have dogs), porcelain tiles that look like wood planks are a great new alternative, Groeneveld says.

"The price may be less than a wood floor, and it's much more durable," she says. "You could drop anything on it and break the plate before the tile."

Other kitchen update ideas include adding a new backsplash or changing out cabinet hardware.



Streamline a kitchen by removing soffits and replacing a peninsula with an island like this maple Abbey Hill design.

## Window treatments

Old, tired window treatments can date a room, the designers say, citing traditional drapery that's heavy and swirly.

"Take down just the valances on top and hang them in a different way," Groeneveld suggests. "Add grommets at the top, where the pole goes, and pull the drapery material through. The idea is to create a more fashionable look, something more updated, without starting from scratch."

Or, she adds, simply remove the valance for a tailored look.

In place of old-style fabric tiebacks and tassels, consider innovative new holdbacks and trims. "They look more like accessories now, like a cool leather belt or a nice crystal necklace," Groeneveld observes.

It's possible to transform a space just by changing the hardware, according to Chris, citing drapery finials in an array of metals and faux wood with gilt, detailed or stained finishes.

She also suggests moving drapes a bit off a window to make windows look bigger.

Beyond that, Groeneveld says, if you have vertical blinds, especially peach-colored or metal versions, it's time to take them down. "Sheers are coming back in, nice clean sheers," she says. "Roller shades in a nice fabric are another option for a more contemporary house. Or consider 3-inch wide white wood blinds."



Drapery finials like these from the Versailles Collection can jazz up a window treatment.

## Fireplaces

"Many fireplaces are outdated," Groeneveld says, but gutting isn't always necessary to bring new life to the space.

"Replacing the façade of an old, tired slab of granite or marble on the hearth will give your fireplace a whole new look," she says. "Many of the manufactured stone imitators — stones that look like brick — are reliable and convincing and are a less expensive alternative to natural stone."

Chris suggests layering moldings around the outside of a fireplace and adding decorative tiles to bring color into a room. And mirrors on each side of the fireplace will brighten a room by reflecting light from windows.

## A final tip

"If you have a collection of something, don't scatter it, gather it," Chris says. "Put it in one place and you suddenly have an important collection."

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Upgrade a fireplace with a new facade, such as this one by Walker Zanger tile.