

places of the heart

Given the slings and arrows of modern life, it's important to have a lovely home, believes this New York designer. Comfortable surroundings nurture our souls and help us heal. *by SHEILA BRIDGES photographs by ANNA WILLIAMS*

THE MOST COMMON EXCUSE I HEAR FROM people about why they can't focus on decorating their homes has to do with money. Although this excuse sounds good, in reality it doesn't fly. I know plenty of people who do not have a lot of money but live stylishly, yet within their specific financial boundaries.

Good design is an ongoing and ever-evolving process. Well-decorated homes are never completely finished, simply because the people living in them are never finished dreaming about the future. As our lives change, so do the spaces we live in. We all know that life is a series of both expected and unanticipated events. We continuously move forward, bringing new experiences and attitudes with us along the way. We need to design and decorate our homes so that they are completely in sync with these life changes, no matter how difficult they may be.

Whether you choose to live in a tepee or a Tuscan villa, you have to *think* a little before you bulldoze into the design and decoration process. As with every other challenge that we face in our lives, we make better decisions when they are reality-based, educated and well-informed. This doesn't mean that there isn't room for fantasy. In fact, fantasy and curiosity should be encouraged.

All of us want to live better and in ways that are more gracious and flattering to us and to our loved ones. The key is in the *balance*. Creating living spaces that are as beautiful as they are comfortable, as stylish as they are functional. Our homes should be as much about celebrating where we came from as they are about where we are going.

We should think about creating personal refuges that shelter us from the harsh realities we sometimes experience. As we get older, most of us come to realize that life is not always easy. On a daily basis, we face personal crises that come in many different colors, shapes and sizes. Our children get sick, our company goes bankrupt, we get divorced,



SHEILA FAVORS an eclectic mix—see the accessories on the mantel above—and things that do double duty. Her dining table, below, becomes a worktable when she wants to spread out. Opposite: Consider objects part of your color scheme, she says. Here, rosy lusterware and flowers to match.



our parents pass away. We discover that none of us, no matter how successful, is immune. While I am hardly suggesting that these things can be avoided or prevented because we have lovely homes, I am suggesting that our homes become places for self-contemplation, reflection and healing, places where we can comfortably shed the armor that is necessary for the daily battle called *life*.

Our homes should be places where we can truly relax and be ourselves. Finding comfort and humor in the physical walls surrounding us might help dismantle some of the emotional ones that we have built over the years. Our homes are where we should feel grounded and most centered. If this is so, then our hearts and souls have a place to retreat when things are truly difficult.



It is not uncommon for people to have love affairs with their furniture. Even the most unromantic of men have been known to fall in love with a recliner now and again. Maybe we think we love our dining-room table. Is it because it is made of beautifully weathered pine and looks great in the space? Yes. But we also love it because of what it symbolizes. What we associate with it is part of what gives it such great significance. Maybe your dining table reminds you of Christmas dinner or your daughter's first birthday



celebration. Whether we serve sushi or salami, getting together with friends and family to break bread is important to our overall well-being. Sitting down together at your dining table is as much about ritual and tradition as it is about eating.

Whatever the memory or recollection attached to the rituals and routines that take place in our homes, we subconsciously keep them in our inner framework, always reaffirming what is most important in our lives.

There is a certain authenticity to our homes that can't be disguised in the same way that we do other aspects of our existence. We can hide that extra five pounds we gained during our vacation with a pair of control tops. We can disguise that prematurely gray hair with the help of a little hair coloring. We can paint the most flattering self-portrait for the rest of the world to see, but no matter how hard we try, we can't hide how we live. Our homes are honest in ways that we can't necessarily be. I find it truly discouraging that people so often become complacent when it comes time to decorate their homes. It's as if the cheesy particleboard table disguised as mahogany simply knocked on your door and invited itself into your living room. We make conscious choices about the way we live and furnish our homes, whether we want to admit it or not.

Home. Dorothy and Toto wanted desperately to go there, and E.T. wanted to phone there. We all have dream about what our homes can and should be. Having a nice home is part of the American Dream. And the last time checked, even Barbie had a dream house. For the three little pigs, home meant safety from the big, bad wolf. For me home is shelter, sanctity and sanity with a roof overhead. Whatever your home is to you, take great care in surrounding yourself with things and people you love.

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