

Daily Herald

Your guide to owning and caring for your home

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Homes Plus

An easy fix to damaged popcorn ceiling

Q. I just bought and moved into a cute little house with only one problem: It has textured ceilings with patches missing here and there. I think they call it popcorn. A painter gave me a huge estimate for removing the texture, as he says that there is no way to patch it. He says that the ceilings will be so badly damaged that he will have to put some new Sheetrock



Henri de Marne
Home repair

over them. I have spent all my resources to buy this house and can't afford to spend several thousand dollars to get my ceilings replaced. I don't mind the textured ceilings, but I wish there was a way to fix them. Do you have any suggestions?

A. There is an easy fix. Zinsser makes a Popcorn Ceiling Patch under its brand Bondex. You should be able to find it in a quality paint store.

Q. I look forward to reading your column every week. I live in Chicago's Northwest suburbs, and our house was built in 1972. It is a two-story frame structure. We are planning on putting a new roof with a ridge vent and adding more insulation to the attic. Before we do the insulation, we were thinking of adding a whole-house fan. Years ago we had one in another house, and it seemed to help cool the house during the night.

I haven't seen anyone ask about whole-house fans in your column. Do you think they are worth the expense, and do you see any issues in the attic a fan would cause? We would also increase the size of the soffit vents to accommodate the increased airflow. Are there any particular brands you would recommend? I noticed online that several have insulated doors that close when the fan is off. I would appreciate any advice you would have on this subject.

A. There have been several questions answered about whole-house fans over the years. I have some reservations about them based on a number of factors. They seldom have enough exhaust air available to them. To provide it would require much more than adding to the soffits; you would need to have large gable vents, which would work against the soffit/ridge-venting combination that is best to cool an attic in the summer and vent out moisture in the winter.

I am not fond of gable vents, as they admit rain and snow under windy conditions and negatively affect the soffit/ridge-vent system. Even though some whole-house fans come with an insulated cover for the winter, it's not equal to the insulation that can be provided without that hole in the ceiling. Cluster flies can also get in the house around their housing when the fan is not in use.

These fans rob the house of heat in the winter and air-conditioning in the summer through convection around their frame, even though it may be insulated, and this convection can take interior moisture into the attic where it can overpower the venting system's ability to dispose of it.

Assuming that you do not have central air-conditioning or window units, a much cheaper way to cool the

Go shopping in your home

Interior designers say the past inspires today's decor trend

By JEAN MURPHY
Daily Herald Correspondent

Homeowners who want to decorate or redecorate a room today are more likely to "go shopping" in their own attic or basement — or possible that of a family member's — before they head off to a store.

Three factors are involved in these decisions.

- The green movement encourages people to keep items out of their local landfills by finding creative ways to reuse them.

- Those worried about the troubled economy are trying not to spend money.

- And the nostalgic among us don't want to part with Grandma's dresser or Grandpa's old cabinet hi-fi.

It is a perfect storm that makes "adaptive reuse" of items all the rage.

American Society of Interior Designers members Linda Navara of LMR Designs in Arlington Heights (lmrdesignsllc.com) and Andrea Vollf of Andrea Vollf Interiors in Schaumburg (andreavollf.com) both said they have recently seen an increased demand from clients for creative ways to reuse items they already own, or which have been in their families for years.

"People don't want to spend lots of money today so they are asking me to think more outside the box," Vollf said. "The economy is forcing designers and homeowners to come up with new ways to use old things."

Navara recently decorated a home in Rosemont by almost entirely using items the family already owned.

"My client bought an older ranch home, gutted it and added a second floor. She loves modern, clean lines," Navara said. "For sentimental reasons, she wanted to use her parents' first sofa that they bought together in the 1970s, which was upholstered in the original lime green fabric.

"We selected an updated chocolate wide-striped fabric to keep it



COURTESY OF JEAN MURPHY
Writer Jean Murphy recently made a headboard for a guest room by reusing a cathedral window that sat in her attic for about 7 years. The small rug in the foreground is from her mother's house, as is the lamp and stacking tables next to the bed.



COURTESY OF ANDREA VOLLF INTERIORS
In her own home, Vollf displays a lovely silver candleholder which began life as the base of a fruit platter in one of her ancestors' homes.



Old photographs and frames, like this one in the Lombardi family's Rosemont home, can be mixed with modern decor, interior designer Linda Navara says.

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Homeowner Nicole Lombardi, left, and interior designer Linda Navara sit on the repurposed sofa in Nicole's living room.

BOB CHWEDYK/bchwydk@dailyherald.com

"Older furniture is usually constructed better than it is today, so why send it to the landfill ..."

Andrea Vollf of Andrea Vollf Interiors

contemporary. Also, we found an old stereo at her parents' home that we refinished in a more modern, darker espresso finish and now it makes a nice buffet piece," she said.

"In addition, my client's aunt passed away and everyone in the family was invited to go look through the house and take what they wanted," Navara related. "We found her grandparents' old cedar chest that is at least 50 years old in a corner of the basement and she also took some antique oval-framed photos of her grandfather and great-grandparents.

"We refinished the cedar chest in a darker color to go with her modern furniture and now she uses it as a storage piece placed behind a sofa in her great room. We kept the photos in their antique convex frames because they are in good shape and mixed them with her modern décor," Navara continued.

Another client had her install mirrors in an old window salvaged from her father's house and they then used the mirrored window as an accent piece on a wall inside her home. At yet another home Navara transformed a wooden nail keg left behind by construction workers into an outdoor planter.

"I have always done a lot of reupholstering of furniture with my clients because people often have a piece of furniture that they really like



COURTESY OF LMR DESIGNS
This lime green couch that Lombardi's parents bought in the 1970s was reupholstered and now sits in her living room.

Take out your attic treasures and make them shine again

When my grown son recently moved to the city, taking all of his furniture with him, I was left with an empty bedroom. I went through my attic and basement, searching for stored items that would make the room a comfortable place for guests.

In the end, I only purchased a large silk tree for the corner. Everything else had been tucked away in storage: my grandmother's chest of drawers, chair and Oriental rug; my husband's grandmother's mirror;

my mother's lamps and nesting tables; and the bed my son slept in when he was growing up.

The adaptive reuse idea of which I am most proud, however, is the cathedral window with a painting behind it that graced the wall of my living room for many years. For the past decade or so it had been hiding in my attic.

Now it is the headboard of the bed in my new guest room.

And I love it all over again.

— Jean Murphy

and which is really comfortable, but it is just looking worn," she said.

With reupholstering, Navara said, homeowners get to pick the exact fabric they want from an almost infinite number of choices. But it can be very expensive, she cautioned, so only invest the money in a well-made, high-end piece.

Vollf has seen a big change in her clients' wishes over the past few years.

"In the early 2000s everyone wanted everything new," she said. "But when the economy started to do poorly in 2008, they stopped going out as much. They are entertaining more at home and now they want to show off their family things more."

And they are more interested in saving the earth and not wasting things, Vollf added.

"I have taken old quilts and turned them into accent pillows and smaller throws and for one client I took a set of curtains that were good in only some places and used the good parts as an accent border for new curtains,"

she said.

Ninety percent of the clients who ask Vollf to decorate using vintage pieces have gotten them from family members, she said. Only 10 percent have purchased the items from thrift stores and garage sales.

In her own home Vollf displays a lovely silver candleholder that began life as a fruit platter in one of her ancestors' homes.

The upper platter broke, so rather than throwing it away, Vollf purchased a glass cup and transformed the base into a truly striking candleholder.

She has also used the fabric from old curtains and bedspreads to recover dining room chair seats and has refinished old oak furniture, transforming it into a modern popular antique white.

"Older furniture is usually constructed better than it is today," Vollf said, "so why send it to the landfill when you can just refinish or reupholster it and at the same time preserve your memories?"