

# Less rigidity in interior decorating styles

By Ingrid Tomoy  
special writer

Decorating liberation has hit the '80s, according to Margaret McMahon, editorial marketing service director for Better Homes & Gardens.

McMahon conducted the "Decorating with Personal Style" seminar for 90 women and a handful of men at Schwark Furniture in Ulster recently.

The seminar was a dual effort by Better Homes & Gardens and Thomsville Furniture Industries to help consumers identify their individual decorating styles and hone their shopping skills for quality furnishings.

The thrust of the 2½-hour seminar was that we are no longer bound by rules of decorating that have nothing to do with our way of life.

According to McMahon we are "finally letting our homes function for our own peculiar lifestyle, not some a priori criteria dictated to us by society. The results are that our houses reflect a personal style unheard of 20 or 15 or even 12 years ago."

To illustrate the point, she showed slides of Better Homes & Gardens' decorating contest winners from 1983. One after another, the rooms bore the imprint of the '80s formula — pinch-pleated draperies, matching Mr. and Mrs. chairs, matching lamps on matching end tables, wall-to-wall carpeting in the same color as the walls, the sofa, the chairs and the drapes and, finally, the ubiquitous coffee table.

"You could move a family from one house to another, and they would never have known the difference," McMahon observed. "Contemporary had to be very cold. Colonial was cozy and full of ruffles. It was all very regimented."

IN CONTRAST, she said, the decorating rules of the '80s dictate nothing so much as the idea that there are no formulas, because the stereotypical homemaker has all but dis-

appeared. Fewer couples are having children, and they are having them later. There are more single family households, the ranks of the housewife are swelling and, most profoundly, women, whether working or not, no longer see themselves as exclusively housewives.

Out of these changes have come a belief in personal fulfillment, which has led to a consumer who cares more about her own taste and personal style than "whether the chairs in her living room match."

Within what McMahon calls "the three major attitudes" of today's decorating — casual, formal and slick — is enough leeway to accommodate the personal tastes and eclecticism of ever consumer. McMahon showed recent slides of Better Homes & Gardens homes to illustrate the roominess of these trends.

Casual, the decorating attitude that prevails today, is often country. Its hallmarks are unfussy furniture, carefree fabrics and an informal floor plan.

McMahon's slides, however, showed widely divergent interpretations of the casual, with splashy modern art on the walls and striking mixes of patterns in fabric and wall coverings.

Formal is likely to include a melding of several styles from the past, such as period French, 18th-century Chippendale and Oriental. What gives this straightforward, rather symmetrical decor its '80s individuality is the use of color and accessories.

One of the slides showed a formally arranged room with a mixture of French and Chippendale, mahogany and pine. A bright orange canton at one end of the room was balanced by a large English tapestry at the opposite end.

In another slide huge ferns and cacti took on the role of sculpture in their precise arrangement at the sides of a fireplace.

Also turning up occasionally in the formal rooms were ducks and



Margaret McMahon

handstitched quilts, which illustrated the crossover from one attitude to another or, as McMahon expressed it, "A few ducks do not make Country."

Slick, the third decorating attitude, reflects an appreciation of elegant simplicity and an awareness of furniture as design. McMahon's

slides revealed that even color is kept to a minimum with a lot of neutrals, especially black, white and grey.

A NUMBER OF ROOMS were dominated by grand pianos, which gave the suggestion of clean, black sculptures rather than a sing-along with a group of friends.

"Slick is not a style designed to make you feel welcome," McMahon commented.

At one point in the seminar, Schwark decorators led participants through the newly opened, 6,500-square-foot Thomsville Gallery, which features a wide range of groups from such American traditional classics as Collector's Cherry and American Oak to the slick, contemporary appeal of groups like Essence and Prestige.

Participants were advised to look for certain details in selecting quality furnishings, such as triple dovetailing of chair rails, dovetailing of drawers and hand-rubbed multi-step finishing.

Finally, McMahon provided the audience with this five-part guide to

liberated decorating:

- Develop a sense for your own style and attitude. Do you like to put your feet up? Do you hate to vacuum?
- Develop a color/pattern sense. What do you want to come home to — restful grays or lively reds?
- Develop a feel for space. Move

things around. Forget the rules.

• Look at things in a different way. Look at store displays, study magazines.

• Do your homework. Ask lots of questions.

"In the end," McMahon observed, "it's all about surrounding yourself with what's beautiful to you."

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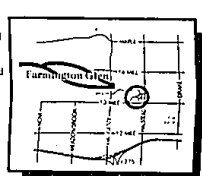
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## Keep your flowers a little longer

This is a good time to begin a scrap book with ideas you have gleaned from publications as well as other people's gardens. Gardening is a growing experience in many ways. Improve your ability to walk down the street and identify trees as friends. You get a lot more benefits from observation if you are "on the look."

Park your car on a street where you can observe many successful ideas in landscaping. Take note. It is a compliment to "borrow" an idea and take it back to your garden. If you are tempted to do this be sure the light factor is correct for your setting. Plant for beauty.

Here is an idea for you to store in your noodle. The ashes from burned twigs will give better nutrition than ashes from mature wood. A layer of ashes on your compost pile will enrich it.

Gypsophila (Baby's breath) is an elegant plant to be sure to grow in your 1987 garden, but the meantime secure these minute delicate flowering plant stems from your florist or farmers' market. Be sure that your bouquet is ready to be placed in an attractive container to complement its beauty. Baby's breath is a lovely filler in a silk flower arrangement.

Dried gypsophila in an interesting container — a large bunch if it — "no water" will provide you with an exotic arrangement and elicit many compliments from your guests.

To dry fresh baby's breath, secure a few stems with a rubber band and hang it upside down in a dry area. A bonus for you when you receive an arrangement containing baby's breath is to dry this flower in the above manner after the other flowers in the arrangement have ceased to be attractive.

Even though we are at the end of the garden season you might be interested in some of the methods of drying flowers — hanging upside down in a bundle (in your garage), soaking the stems in glycerin and gently covering the flowers with the crystals of borax.

Still another method of preserving flowers is by pressing the blossoms, many a lady has tucked away a flower from a past lover in the pages of a volume of poetry or a favorite novel.



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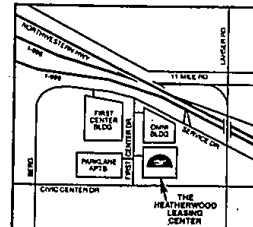
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## For creative gardeners

Two special courses for gardeners who want to be more creative will be given again this fall at Cranbrook Institute of Science. "Short Course on Water Lilies" and "Plant Propagation."

Both will be taught by Sam M. DeFazio and Patrick McKown, owners and operators of Preter Telus Greenhouse. "Plant Propagation" will be held 8-9 p.m. on four Tuesdays beginning Sept. 30 and the water lily class will be held 8-9 p.m. on four Wednesdays beginning Oct. 1.

The water lily display in front of the Institute of Science is proof of what these two experts will be teaching. They have been nurturing the lilies of this pond for several years and De Fazio reports that this fall the colors are the best so far.

But he also says that the water lily hobbyist can enjoy the fruits of his endeavor even with barrels on the patio.

In "Plant Propagation," participants will be introduced to a variety of techniques from cuttings and seeds to air layering, grafting and multiplying bulbs.

To register by phone, call 645-3230.