

Building Scene

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Computers provide lift for home interior blues

By Gerald Frawley
Staff writer

Interior design and decorating — they're prime causes of domestic violence among new homeowners.

Four taunting blank walls, a daunting bare ceiling, a haunting barren floor. That's at least six controversies per room.

Extremely complex statistical abstractions developed by Belgian interior decorators show the ratio of arguments to possibilities, when multiplied by paint store trips times merchandise returns, plus (and here's the tricky part) fabric swatches observed divided by two equals one big headache.

The aspirin? Computer imaging. With computer imaging, interior designers can graphically depict what a project will look like before work is begun.

Julie Ford, president of the Interior decorating firm Random House Interiors in Novi, said visualizing concepts is not something the average person does well.

"Our basic problem has always been that when we're talking to clients, trying to explain what something is going to look like, they just can't see it," Ford said.

"It's a big problem for us (and others in the profession)," Ford said. "Some clients are able to (visualize the concepts), but others can't and they end up getting angry, frustrated and upset with themselves."

WILL A PARTICULAR color make a room seem darker? Lighter? Bigger? Smaller? Does that color really look good against that one? Is that pattern really right for a contemporary feel?

Ford said Random House Interiors has only just joined the computer age after buying its system several months ago. "We're always looking for ways to show people — what they're buying before they spend a lot of money."

"We have a lot of clients who want to see the new color (of the wall, furniture, window treatment) before they give approval for a project," Ford said.

Even with the conventional interior designer's decorator's tools — paint chips, cloth swatches, catalogues and photographs — it is almost impossible to translate a one-by-two inch strip of wall paper to a 16-square-foot wall.

Artist renderings, perhaps the best option before computer imaging, are costly (sometimes costing hundreds of dollars) and time consuming (taking days instead of hours).

But computer imaging isn't cheap. Ford said, Random House Interiors paid nearly \$30,000 for the system and charges \$50 per hour for its use. Planning times vary depending on a

project's complexity, but the average room, from start to finish, takes approximately three hours.

Design consultant Karin Ankofski said computer imaging has uses in new home decorating, old home remodeling, furniture reupholstery, window treatments and exterior design applications.

COMPUTER IMAGING is useful in the simple projects — wallpaper and paint color changes, furniture reupholstery, carpeting modifications, window treatments — but it is even more useful in the more complex projects.

"Interior design entails not just these simple changes but may include removing or changing walls, adding or altering doorways and windows, and other structural modifications," Ankofski said.

If describing colors and their effects is difficult to convey, trying to explain what moving a wall will do for a room is doubly difficult, she said.

Ankofski said that when Random House contracts for a computer imaging plan, she goes to the project home to photograph the house (either with a video camcorder or 35 millimeter camera).

The designer then returns to the office where the images are scanned into the computer, she said.

The computer imaging system used by Random House Interiors is object-oriented, meaning only one area of an image is defined at a time so it can be moved, tipped, turned, changed in color or perspective — all without affecting the rest of the image.

AFTER FEEDING the images into the computer, the designer modifies the old image, selects items from a computer database and superimposes these images over the old image or creates new images, she said.

For example, if the customer wants a particular pattern for a couch, the pattern is photographed and fed into the computer, Ankofski said. The computer then manipulates the pattern over any of several different style couches (or again, the existing couch if reupholstering is a possibility).

The same is done with paints, wall coverings, furniture and accessories, Ankofski said. More complex design problems like removing and changing walls, windows and doors can also be done.

When completed, the computer can generate photographs, frozen images on video tapes or video "slide shows" of what the finished project will look like that the client can take and review, Ankofski said.

"Then we can make changes if the client doesn't like what she sees,"

Ankofski said. Alterations to an artist rendering may require a completely new drawing, she added.

Although the system sounds relatively simple to use, Ford and Ankofski had several days of training classes. "It was very intimidating at first."

A simple mistake can wipe out hours of work, she said, so being careful is critically important. Even after five days of training and two months of actual work on the computer imaging system, Ankofski said she discovers new ways of doing things every time she sits down to work on a project.

"(Computer imaging) is something you have to play with and make your own discoveries," Ankofski said.

CESSILY THALACKER, design communications director with New Image of Michigan Inc. — located in Warren, with offices in the Design Center in Troy and plans to expand to Royal Oak — said the company is only now addressing the needs of the interior design market even though president Rick Skiba and she both come from interior design backgrounds.

Instead, New Image Systems has focused its market on architects, hair salons, municipal planners and cosmetic and dental surgeons, which have been tremendously successful.

Computer Imaging Systems range from \$9,000 to \$33,000, depending on the end-use, but average systems sold by New Image Systems range from \$15,000 to \$20,000.

"(But) the bottom line is this is a creative tool," Thalacker said.

Computer imaging has two basic uses in interior design, the most common being design vignettes — basically, two-dimensional pictures of one quarter of a room featuring furniture, walls, window treatments and other treatments.

Two-dimensional vignettes show better details in wall covering and fabric patterns because the pictures — since it shows only one wall — are larger.

The other use, she said, would show an entire room — three walls, a ceiling and a floor. Fine details and patterns may be lost, but the three-dimensional images can be used to highlight certain aspects of the room.

"You'll see more of this at the high end, where people are building a showcase around a piece of art work," she said.

If a \$150,000 painting is the focal point of a room, for example, a person isn't going to be as interested in how many flowers per square foot there are in the wallpaper — they're going to want to see the artwork and how it relates to the rest of a room, Thalacker said.

It's back to the 1960s for interior design of the '90s

By By R.J. King
Special writer

Remember Andy Warhol prints and glass-top dinette tables? Vinyl tiles and metal-frame chairs? If the answer is yes, chances are you lived through the 1960s. In which case you may not be too crazy about the current revival of the 1960s fads.

True, little is being revived to look exactly as it did then, and no one is trying to bring back shag carpeting and string beads, but interior designers are using plenty of pop colors, psychedelic prints and everywhere ecology.

"What we're seeing in design today is a revival of the '60s, yes, but only those styles and modes that are applicable to the '90s," said David Mark Weiss, an interior designer, during a recent seminar he conducted in Farmington Hills.

While design revivals are meant to be fun, Weiss, who owns Interior Corp. Ltd., an interior design firm in Oak Park, said they can be trying for anyone who was there the first time around.

Homeowners in their 40s and 50s may be asking themselves if they are capable of living through a rerun. Many of them are sure to recall with horror even the concept of shag carpeting, let alone contemplate it in the living room.

"Actually, with carpeting today we're seeing a spin-off of the shag

into what I call reggae," Weiss said, to a chorus of light-hearted groans from a handful of the 17 people who attended the seminar.

"No, no, wait," said Weiss in his defense, holding up a sample of a rug crafted from thick, one-inch strands, similar in appearance to dreadlocks. "This is a yarn interwoven between the strands so that it stands up to traffic."

WITH THE ADVANCE of computer graphics, Weiss said, the reggae look, plus other rug styles, can be individually designed to accommodate everything from a family crest to a border of flowers and leaves.

While not all designs are being revived, certainly there is hope for the reggae carpet. It is attractive, soft to the feet and wears well.

The incorporation of '60s fashion also shows on palettes. Black and white, either alone or together, along with primary colors, are back, but with a few additions — The browns and greens (read as earth tones) are also making a splash.

Further still, drapery, either pinch pleat or ruffle fold, now complements the venetian blind craze of the '80s, and in some cases, replaces it all together. Some drapery pins even include Campbell's soup cans, an homage to Andy Warhol.

"We have a few clients who go for

the hot colors, and primarily in the kids' rooms. But what people really seem to like is the contrast between black and ivory," said Linda Shears, an interior designer for Modern Studio of Interiors in Birmingham.

"For color, beige is dead. In the last year though we've seen more jewel tones, bright yellows and coral. For windows, people still like the horizontal and vertical blinds, but now they're looking for a top treatment to accent it."

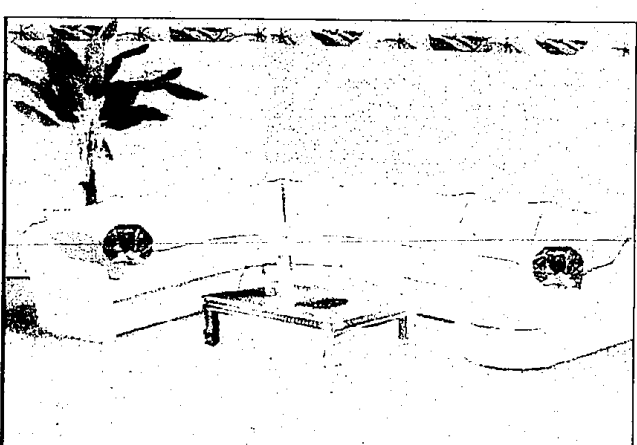
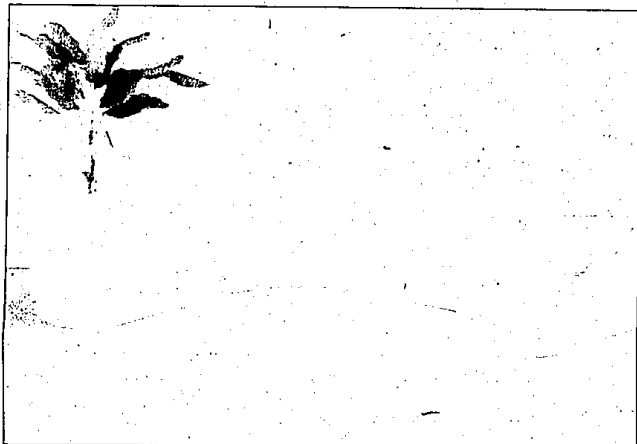
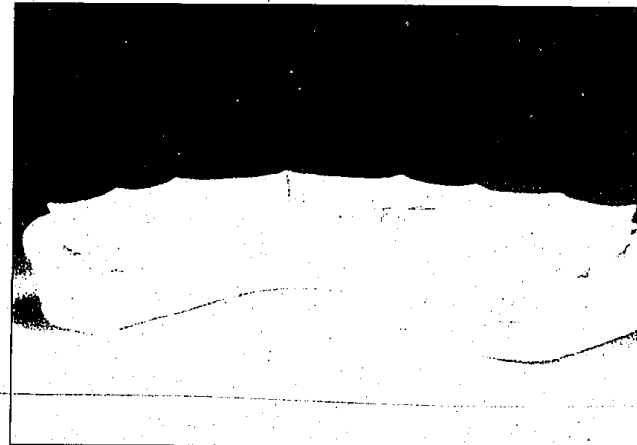
For furniture, the choice is between traditional and contemporary, both designers said, and when asked to pick the more dominant of the two, both favored the traditional, although not as a catch-all theme.

WHILE THE 1960s may call up visions of flower children, rock 'n' roll and peace movements, it also emphasized freedom of expression, seen not only in war demonstrations but Woodstock as well.

That freedom, said Anna Kenedi, an interior designer in Southfield whose residential and commercial work is found on several continents, has taken on a life of its own in the '90s.

"People are starting to be at home in their homes," said Kenedi, who has owned her own firm, Anna Kenedi Design for the last 20 years. "Everything doesn't have to be coordinated to death."

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Computer imaging allows a designer to build a room around a basic black and white photo of a couch (top). First, a wall covering and carpeting are added to show how the couch would look; throw pillows and a potted plant are added to further define the room (middle). After

more thought, the wall covering and carpeting are darkened several shades, a fabric border is added near the ceiling, and a coffee table and additional throw pillows are inserted (bottom) — and voila, a vignette of a room built from a couch.

BOMA, BASM offer seminars

Handicapped accessibility requirements for commercial and multi-family buildings will be the topic of discussion at a seminar from 8-10:30 a.m. Tuesday at Troy's Northfield Hilton Inn, sponsored by the Builders Owners and Managers Association of Southeastern Michigan.

Three speakers will address builders and property managers on the HUD-Fair-Housing-Amendment, which provides accessibility guidelines that take effect March 13.

Jeffrey Supowit, an attorney with the firm of Mager, Monahan, Donaldson and Alber, will discuss legal implications. Kim Beasley of the Paralyzed Veterans of America will

explain how the guidelines will influence architecture and cost of construction.

Lloyd Kraft will discuss the Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and the Michigan Handicappers Civil Rights Act of 1990. He is the chief of the Barrier Free Design Division of the Bureau of Construction Codes for the Michigan Department of Labor.

The Northfield Hilton is at 5500 Crooks at the I-75 Interchange. Registration fees, including continental breakfast, are \$15 for BOMA members, \$25 for non-members. To register, call 737-4477.

In a seminar presented by the Builders Association of Southeastern Michigan on Thursday, Jan. 10, "Financial Survival in the '90s" will be presented.

Tim Bernier and Ken Doms, pre-retirement planning executives with Dean Witter Reynolds, will discuss the problems with today's markets and why they are unpredictable, the uncertainties of the next decade, and the Fixed Mix philosophy of investing.

The seminar will be from 7:30-9:30 a.m. at the Northfield Hilton. Membership fees and the number for registration are the same as for the BOMA seminar.