

Go from decorating debates to home harmony

By Irene Woodworth

Did you know that one of the biggest challenges in a marriage can be decorating decisions? When a couple decides they want to remodel, redecorate or redesign their home, I often ask them how healthy and strong their relationship is before we do anything. They often look at me somewhat puzzled. They are surprised that decorating-style disagreements are right up there with the challenges of in-laws and money. I have been a designer and worked with a variety of couples. It is interesting how many times I have put on my counseling and negotiator hat.



Irene Woodworth

Many times I will have a wife call me for a design or color consultation. When we start talking about the process of our services and scheduling an appointment, I will often ask if the husband is able to also be present. The wife will often tell me that it does not matter; her husband usually goes along with what she likes, and he is not really interested. Then I ask her who holds the remote to their television when they watch it together. I find out that the husband will usually hold and handle the remote. Then I tell her that since he is also living in the home, we need to have him included in some of these decorating decisions. It will also avoid any further disagreements if they are both present and hear my presentation. Many times the husbands will become my biggest fans!



One of the biggest decisions a couple may make in marriage is how to decorate a home. Women shouldn't just assume their partners don't care. In the redesigned family room shown here, the décor was re-worked in a way that both spouses were happy with the outcome. (Photo provided by Irene Woodworth)

Once, I had a wife call me and tell me that she had tried redoing her great big living room about four different ways with no solution. Her growing family would congregate in her small family room instead. She was skeptical, but wondered if I could come out and consult her on doing a redesign for her home. I did the consultation and learned how they lived as a family, how often they entertained, and how many people we would need to redesign the room to meet their needs. We later went and redesigned her home and did the living room, dining room and family room. She requested that it be done while her husband was out of town. He ended up coming home earlier than expected.

She wanted me to come to show her the “reveal” while her husband would be there. She did not tell him a thing, and it was a complete surprise to him when he came home. He was a very strong and opinionated businessman. This wife found the courage to change her challenging rooms and have an outside professional come and do a redesign using her existing furniture. Even though her husband was not consulted in this

decorating decision, he challenged me at first. I looked him straight in the eye and told him if there was something he did not like in any of the rooms that I would redo whatever he wanted.

I also explained to him how hard change was for people. For example, my husband did not like change very much. He would get nervous as I would redo our homes. I learned as a young bride it was best to do my redesign projects while he was working or out of town. My husband then asked me if I did make any new changes, would I give him a heads up before he came home. One time, for instance, he went to go sit on a chair and it was no longer there.

After a week, my client’s husband finally got used to the changes we had made in his home and only wanted one accent chair to be moved back to its former place. I complied. We later redesigned several rooms throughout the home and also painted and updated the couple’s full basement. When it came time to remodeling their upstairs master bathroom, the husband told his wife to call him before we made any decorating and remodeling decisions.

I learned to honor the men in their homes and consider their opinions and their tastes. By doing this, I have received respect from them as a professional. It also caused their willingness to “buy in” to the project we were doing in their homes. It becomes a win-win for all.

Here are some tips on navigating those decorating debates with your spouse/partner:

1. One of the things I ask of my clients before meeting with them is to go through some home decorating magazines, or even look at some pictures on the internet of rooms they like. They may not like everything in the room, but perhaps they are drawn to the colors, architecture, or the room’s focal point. I ask them to circle what they like in the room. They may not know why, but it is appealing to one of their needs or design styles.

Sometimes they like the texture of various items or furniture in the room. I had a client

whose husband told her he liked a picture of a certain room

which she did not like. She asked him if he liked all of it or just parts of the room. He said he really liked the stone fireplace in the room. To her surprise, she shared that the only thing she liked in the room was also the stone fireplace. So, that became a great starting point for choosing their design together.

2. Find out what your spouse or partner “feels” like in the room. Do they feel cold and disconnected? Do they want it to become warmer, more welcoming, or cozier for them? This is another way to get on the same page for upcoming decorating decisions. Sometimes you may want similar things, but you have called it something different. That is why it is good to discuss feelings and what you both hope to accomplish in each of your rooms.

3. How do you handle those opposing decorating styles? I have had couples where one person liked the contemporary style and the other preferred the traditional style. So, we learned to compromise and give each of them something they like in the room, such as an updated traditional look like a Pottery Barn look or Restoration Hardware styles.

4. Get an outside professional to help you negotiate those design decisions. It is important that the professional honors you by requesting information on how you live and what you like or do not like about a room.

5. Discuss what the top decorating priorities are. If you both have opposing views, then have a drawing where each one chooses, from a list, what they want to accomplish, and do that. This will also keep those items mentioned as a top-priority list for a designer to help you accomplish your dreams.

6. Decide what your decorating budget will be for your room/rooms. Make sure you are on the same page with your finances. You can always do the main things, such as painting a room and changing some of the accessories and artwork. Perhaps you have a sofa, but it does not fit into your new color scheme. Sometimes you can purchase an online slip cover that will suffice until you can afford that bigger purchase piece.

I have helped many homeowners by assisting them in doing some “budget” decorating shopping. Do not forget that you can sometimes find a good piece of furniture that has been gently used in thrift stores or consignment stores. A great consignment store that carries a variety of furniture is Ricochet Consignment Store in Garden City, across from Hawks Stadium.

7. Keep in mind that men want to be “comfortable” in their space and with their furniture purchases. Women sometimes like the “look” of a certain piece of furniture, but it is not really functional for their lifestyle. Keep in mind that you’ll be hosting visitors in that room, as well as entertaining kids, grandkids and furry members of your family, too.

8. If one of the spouses has a very distinct and different style that does not really work in a major community room, perhaps that person can have a study/hobby room, or their own room dedicated to their unique color palette and style. We have even created “men caves” that are perfect for having the guys over for football season. ●

Irene Woodworth is known as “Idaho’s Color Lady” and is founder and CEO of Redesign Boise. She is a national redesign award winner, motivational speaker, certified redesigner and color consultant, and instructor on redesign and color. She has a degree in education and interior design and has taught various decorating and color classes throughout the country. She may be reached at Irene@RedesignBoise.com. For more information, visit RedesignBoise.com.