

A DESIGN BUDGET COMES DOWN TO PRIORITIES

BY BETTINA MARKS

Design limitations test the strength and ingenuity of a designer, and we can all learn from the solutions many designers have found. If there were no budgetary constraints, we would all live in a fantasy world somewhere in Hollywood.

Perhaps that is what Natalie Weinstein, president of Natalie Weinstein Design Associates in St. James, is thinking when she suggests her clients prepare a "wish list" and a "needs list." From there, she can assess within reason a plan to deliver something in between.

Weinstein's philosophy is evident in the way she lives and works. "It's not frivolous, not about pretty," she says. "Interior design is about making the home an extension of yourself and about empowering you to become a better person."

NWDA offers a variety of services, including space planning and design development for home and office environments, supervision of new construction or renovation, assistance in working with architects, builders and project supervisors, product selection, custom

furniture designs and implementation. Through this wide range of services Weinstein has come in contact with many different types of projects and a diverse group of clients, all with different budgets and needs. The designer, as well as the homeowner, needs to adapt to the given time and budget constraints.

One trend Weinstein finds evident throughout Long Island is with older couples, many of whom are selling their homes, which have appreciated tremendously in value. These couples are downsizing, moving into condos here on LI, instead of relocating to warmer climates like Florida to save on taxes, because they would rather stay close to their families. They are able to get value and stay within their budgets. Young couples are also buying their first homes and taking the necessary time to decorate to adhere to budgetary constraints. These two very different demographics both find themselves in need of cost-conscious ways to decorate their homes.

"Reduce the wish list by prioritizing," Weinstein explains. "The home is one of the largest investments most

people make in their lives. It is their security, their nest, where they come to rejuvenate and to feel safe, especially in these times. You must consider the short term versus the long term. Any improvement to your home will increase its resale value. Painting, wall-papering and re-flooring are investments for the future, and paint is the single most affordable material to work with on a shoe-string budget. It can totally transform a room without much expense."

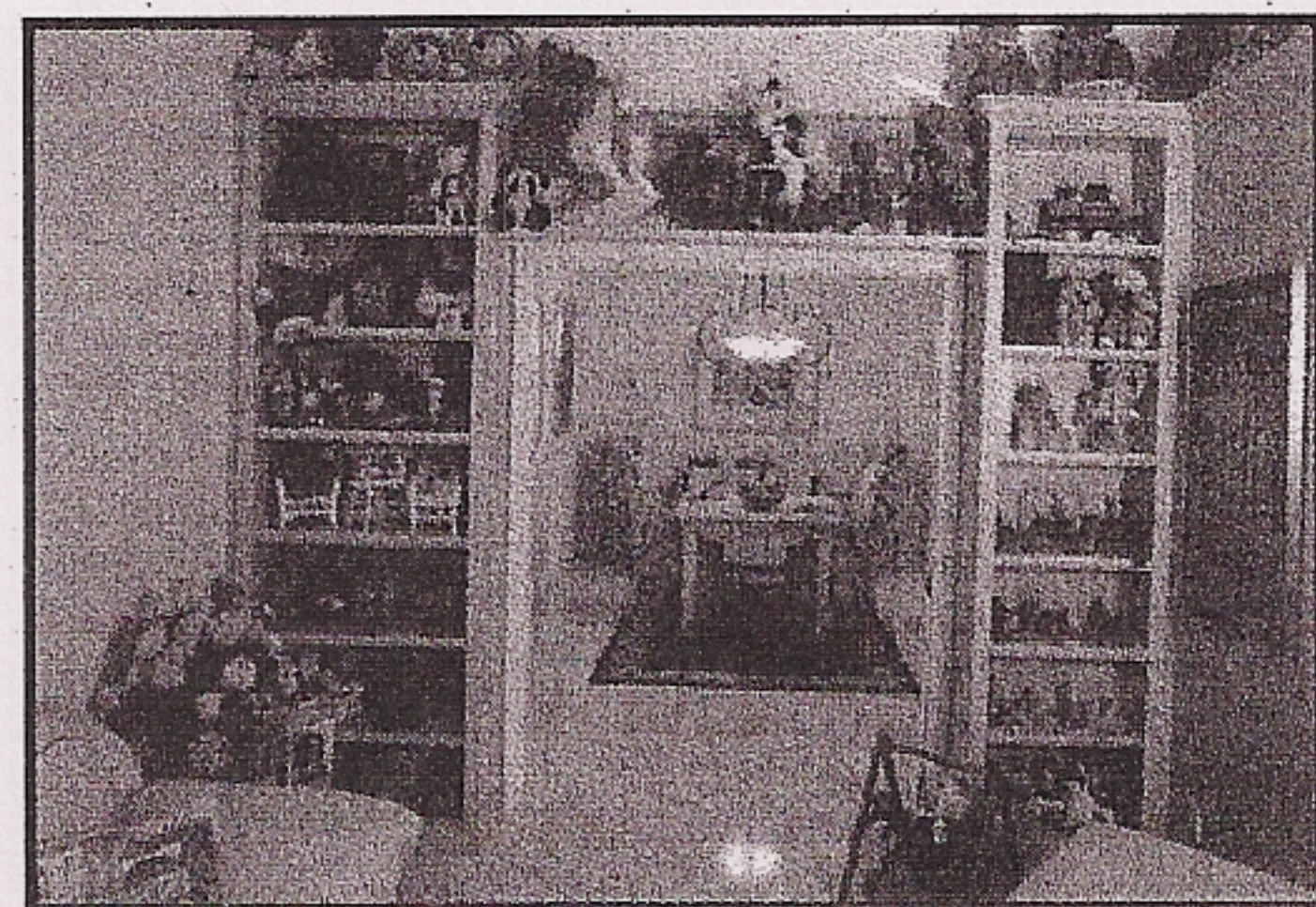


Weinstein doesn't compromise on the floor plan or on space and keeps her eye on function. She works from the floor up when choosing area rugs, color scheme and style, and by making considerations for space, puts the layout in better perspective. She suggests

if a client has bought a new home they begin with the children's rooms, because children need stability, order and discipline. Next, she'll focus on the public spaces, the den and the kitchen and then she'll address the bedrooms. The living room and dining room is usually done last. She tries to coordinate the interior spaces with the outdoor landscape.

In order to cut costs, she suggests purchasing ready-made furniture instead of developing custom-made pieces. If one falls victim to fads, they'll be fashionable now but not later. Use of foam and mica in the 1980s is a perfect example of "Here today, gone tomorrow." She believes in utilizing classics that stand the test of time. She maintains that tradition in her own lifestyle by citing her "classic black Chanel suit," as the single most used item in her closet. With an unlimited budget, however, you can be as trendy as you wish. Weinstein's budgets range from \$8,000 to \$80,000 per room for her high-end clients.

Regardless of budget, Weinstein



insists upon not compromising quality, but suggests thinking about buying less. She always tries to utilize a client's own things and coordinate them with the total new look, taking more time to complete the project, if necessary.

Purchasing items from the Bombay Company and Bed in a Bag, as well as ready-made collections from Waverly, or Ralph Lauren and Tommy Hilfiger collections from Bloomingdale's with coordinating window treatments, will save the cost of custom product development. Buying posters and prints and framing them appropriately will also be more affordable than acquiring fine pieces of art. Weinstein often takes her clients shopping and helps make selections to accommodate their budgets.

"A bargain," she says, "is something of quality that you get for less money."®

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