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Design Ideas for Making a Speculative Home Fit Your Design Style



by Cindy Trimble Kelly

The market today is flooded with “Speculative Homes” designed and built by builders to sell for profit. Generally, spec homes are not “Custom Homes” where someone designed every detail, developed a design scheme and selected all the products for the home. Spec homes are built with the understanding that homeowners will change the “interior design” to suit their own style. Materials, colors, finishes and products installed in speculative homes including light fixtures, door hardware, plumbing fixtures, appliances and cabinet hardware are referred to as “builder’s standard products” in the industry. A builder’s standard product is usually not from the latest design trend, is generally inexpensive and neutral in design and color. If you are considering purchasing a spec home or have already done so, understand that most of these products are easy items to change to create your own look and design.

Builders’ finish their homes with neutral colors so new homeowners can introduce any color scheme and the base colors in the home will not clash. Changing the wall color with paint is easy and cheap. Carpet and tile are expensive to change so playing it safe

and going with neutral colors such as earth tones or off whites is the best choice for builders. But on the negative side these materials and finishes can be considered sterile and bland and lacking in personality. You add the personality to each room by the elements you furnish it with and the new colors and elements you introduce.

As a homeowner, there are many things you can do to bring life into a neutral or “sterile” room. First, you may want to develop a theme to create a common look in a room. Themes make it really easy to shop for furnishings and accessories. If roosters are your theme, start looking for everything that is “Rooster.” Color can be added by introducing rugs, accessories, artwork, furniture and new finishes if your budget allows. A single color or “monotone” kitchen, such as white can be warmed up by the addition of a brightly colored rug, colorful wallpaper or ceramic tile on the backsplash, bright colored countertop accessories such as bottles filled with fruit or peppers, a plate stand displaying one of your favorite plates or a colorful bowl of fruit. Change out your kitchen linens including towels, napkins and hot pads. Hang bright colored artwork where you have wall space. If you have a dining table in the kitchen, dress it up with a centerpiece and table cloth. If your cabinet doors are white painted wood, apply a faux finish “glaze” over the white paint which will add a haze of color over the doors. The glaze is a clear color and is relatively simple to apply.

The same holds true for bathrooms – add colorful paint, wall coverings, rugs, linens and artwork and the white fixtures and tiles will look fine. Neutral carpets can be dressed up by adding rugs in high traffic and seating areas. This will also extend the life of your carpets by protecting them.

Forward your design challenges or questions to cindy@trimblekellystudios.com.