

Affordable, stylish faux is the way to go

During the Renaissance, wealth meant quarrying Tuscan marble and carting it across the Alps to be chiseled into columns for the front porch. It was more a matter of self-importance than practicality, and it didn't take a rational person long to commission a more affordable alternative - in other words, fake it. The faux (literally translated "fake") style of the Renaissance, like today, became much more popular than the real thing.

Faux is in vogue, it is practical, and it looks just as good as - and sometimes even better than - the real thing.

"To finish a wall in faux style involves mixing glazes, paint and plaster in layers over a base coat to create any number of textures and effects," explains painter Mark Williams of Chateau de Faux. "The techniques and effects are endless."

One of the more popular techniques is known as Trompe l'oeil, or "trick the eye." Williams says many people are afraid to use dark paints and colors because they have been told it makes a room look smaller.

"By using the Trompe l'oeil style, dark paints can be used to create an optical illusion," he says. "Things appear to be three-dimensional, thus making a room look larger or deeper than it is. What's more, the imagery is extremely realistic."

He has recreated ancient maps, beveled ceilings, angelic frescos, windows with outdoor scenes, Italian verandas, and niches with wine bottles so realistically tucked on its shelves one might reach for them.

Other methods involve working several tinted glazes into plaster to bring out its natural beauty, or "burnishing" Venetian plaster to a high gloss by rubbing it with a steel trowel until it shines. "Ragging" brings about a mottled or wallpaper look; "stippling" is used to replicate a leathery texture; and "color-washing" uses a brush or cloth to wipe water over a basecoat or color-tinted glaze to soften or wash out the color underneath.

Williams has recreated many surface textures using faux finish: cracked stone, brick, wood grain, metals, marble and granite to name a few, but he also paints murals.

"I paint by eye unless someone has a picture they want recreated," he says. "I rarely use a stencil and I mix my own oil bases and paints."

Realistic-looking murals work best in the lackluster areas of your home like hallways, corridors and landings. They are also very popular in children's rooms.

Once the walls and ceilings are faux finished, Cindy Kelley, window design consultant at Drapery World Designs in Big

Cove, suggests utilizing additional faux style amenities.

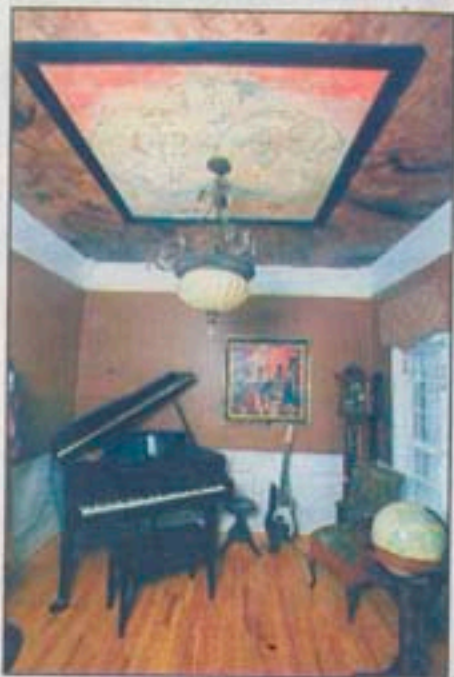
"Faux wood blinds and shutters are available in white and true wood grain textures and come in the standard 2-inch and 2 1/2-inch sizes. They are resilient in high humidity; they do not fade, warp, or turn yellow and they repel dust," she explains. "Hunter Douglas carries an amazing line of custom vertical blinds in faux textures that, when closed, looks like a wall."

Available in bamboo, different shades of marble, various wallpaper textures and even a shiny aluminum, faux verticals are not made just for windows and doors. They can hide cubbies, separate rooms, and serve simply as décor.

Hal Moore, owner of Drapery World Designs, believes customers are well served by many faux-style hardware products like curtain rods, poles and finials.

"Made from resins, they can look like metal, wood, iron, or antique, and they come in bronze, crackle and a variety of other finishes," he says. "We have many faux fabrics that look and feel just like suede, leather, fur, silk and alligator hide. They can be used to upholster furniture and headboards; cover pillows and ottomans; or custom make drapes and shower curtains."

Finishing any room in your home utiliz-



Michael Mercier/Huntsville Times

At the home of Jim King, the music room ceiling features faux design, including an Old World map.

ing faux is stylish, sensible, affordable and it's still happening four hundred years after it first became popular.

Remodeling? Here are five top suggestions

Here are five remodeling solutions designed to improve function and versatility in your home.

Modernize the kitchen

"The kitchen is the most frequently upgraded room in the house," says John Allen, president of Southern Construction & Design. "Efficiency and lifestyle changes play a large role in that."

"The average kitchen renovation - to completely gut the old and create the new kitchen - costs about \$70,000-\$80,000," explains Fred McDavid, president of Derrick Design & Remodeling. "That includes installing new cabinets, a cooking peninsula, replace the countertops, and knock out whatever walls may be limiting kitchen space."

Replacing old countertops and cabinets is a good start, but don't forget the details. "Make sure electrical outlets are strategically placed," says Betsy Hyman, H/MCBA Remodeler's Council Chairman and owner of Southern Housepitality. "Include deep drawers and appliance lifts in the base cabinets that pull out when needed."

McDavid adds, "They make microwaves that can be pushed into a drawer rather than encroaching on your countertops or mounted in your cabinet space."

Knock out walls

"If you have to walk through two doors to reach the dining room, you ain't got that swing," jokes Hyman. "If a wall prevents people from congregating around the kitchen, entertaining through to the dining room, and out the back door to the patio and yard, then tear it out."

"Replace the wall with strategically-placed columns or a raised eat-in bar that allows conversation to flow into the dining area. Make sure you have room to move - room to travel," she says.

McDavid warns structural issues are to be expected but are easily fixed.

"We can install a flush beam and recess it into the ceiling so it doesn't show," he says. "People can't tell there was ever a wall there."

Harold Champion, president of Champion Home Remodeling & Construction in Madison, has an alternative: "Leaving an exposed header often adds a contemporary look to a room."

Prepare for the future

No one likes to think about age affecting a climb up stairs or ability to reach a high cabinet, but these will occur if you live in your home long enough.

"It isn't necessarily about getting older," says Champion. "Sometimes a health issue or physical handicap causes a change in your

home design. Perhaps an aging family member moves in with you. Renovating for wheelchair access is a common adjustment and installing an elevator may even become necessary."

"You should seek a sustainable lifetime design in your home," says Allen. "If you love your neighborhood and don't want to move... (upgrade) the master bath and master suite with wider doorways; replace the bathtub with a walk-in, non-slip shower with safety railings; remodel the kitchen so you have easy accessibility to food, utensils, cookware, etc.; and adjust entryways in and out of your home to the garage, driveway, carport, or yard."

Conserve storage space

"Organization is a key element to peace," says Hyman. "If everything has a place and is always returned to that place, you aren't worrying about trying to find it."

She challenges people to find multiple uses for every piece of furniture in their houses.

"Empty the junk out of an old storage trunk, throw the junk away, pack it full of liners or seasonal items, and use it as a window seat with cushions," she says. "Take old drawers, fill them with toys, and tuck them underneath the bed. Toss a throw over a filing cabinet and use it as an end table."

Upgrade for efficiency, green living

If your house is 50 years old or more, according to Champion, chances are it isn't properly insulated - if at all.

"Because of the lack of building codes and standards, one of the most efficient remodeling projects you can embark on will be to strip out the sheetrock and insulate the walls," he says. "If you attempt to close in a garage or use it to build out another room, you will have to insulate. Even if the rest of the walls are insulated, the addition of a room without will negate the energy efficiency of the entire structure."

According to Allen, resource efficiency and energy efficiency are major factors in building a house today. An older house has little chance of living up to those standards.

"Non-insulated walls and drafty windows are the source of the highest energy loss in a house," he says.

Both Allen and Hyman are certified green professionals.

"Put your lights on timers and use energy efficient bulbs," Hyman suggests. "Caulk and add weather stripping to drafty windows and doors."

"The heating and air system, unless updated in the past 30 years, will need cleaning," adds Allen.

Check the plumbing. If you can afford to replace your old galvanized pipes, it will help

Survive summer heat with backyard oasis

If heat holds you hostage indoors every summer and trekking across your backyard is a lesson in desert survival, consider creating a cooler spot.

Hire a landscaper

A landscaper will draw up a plan based around your needs.

"Will you be entertaining? Do you want a private sanctuary? Is it a place for the kids to play?" asks Mike Jones, owner of Artsapes. "Will you be barbecuing or eating outdoors a lot? Do you want to attract butterflies and hummingbirds or remain critter-free? Do you want to show off exotic plants or grow a productive vegetable and herb garden? These are important questions to ask."

Focus on building a foundation on which everything else relies.

"A good landscaper will make sure your irrigation system doesn't over-water, a common mistake," Jones says. "Grade the ground so it drains away from the house. If you have areas where water collects, redirect the runoff."

Choose your plants carefully. If your space is large enough, Jones suggests adding walking paths that direct your steps to the most colorful or exotic growth.

"If you plant an exotic tree not native to

North Alabama, and you have a lot invested in its flourishing, highlight it with lights or build up its bed to give it power," he says.

"Remember when you plant, leave room for it to grow," he says. "It will look sparse when planted but in 6-8 weeks in the right environment, your plants will burgeon. If they don't have room, those underneath will be overtaken and die."

Create a watering hole

There are many choices for creating a cooling water effect. With children, an in-ground swimming pool may be a logical choice, but the maintenance and upkeep mean it's not the best choice for the occasional swimmer.

Chris Edwards, sales manager at Anders Pool Company, finds empty nesters and young couples get more use from hot tubs.

"Spas come in many sizes, shapes and styles depending on how much space you have," he says. "The only requirement is a foundation and an electrical source. If you do not have a deck, today's spas come with (their) own decking in many styles...with plenty of functional space. Nearly all offer water features like a waterfall, and include remote controls with presets for water temperature."

Edwards suggests installing aesthetic lighting and upgrading the jets.

"Hot tubs are waterproof, so they can sit out in the weather, and they come with covers so you don't have to worry about tree debris," he says.

If you want less interaction and more effect, consider a fountain, wishing well or a fishpond. Most have self-contained watering and filtration systems.

"When you create an ecosystem in your backyard, be prepared for wildlife to flock to that system," Jones warns. "This includes squirrels, snakes, raccoons, opossums and an assortment of birds and lizards. Many people are not prepared for that."

Install a privacy fence

You've got lots of fencing choices, with different materials available: solid tongue and groove "DeckLok" pieces for the DIY crowd; board-on-board slat fencing fitted at customizable widths; affordable vinyl requiring seasonal cleaning; and wood.

Bill Roberts, owner of Tennessee Valley Fence in Huntsville, says wood is still the best bang for your buck, though it requires extra maintenance.

Bamboo fencing material isn't as sturdy as aluminum or metal, but has its place dividing off a tiki bar or a garden.

"By far the most attractive fencing option for buyers today is powder-coated alu-

minum with ornamental enhancements," Roberts says. The coating doesn't rust and is long lasting. "We can now bend, twist, emboss, belly-picket or add any number of other metal embellishments."

Control the insects

You don't want mosquitoes, gnats and flies on the premises. Scott Bumbarger, general manager of Huntsville's MosquitoNix, suggests installing a mosquito and insect control misting system.

Customized to your landscaping, the system's fully automated technique uses nearly invisible nozzles placed every 10-12 feet along the fence-line, on the eaves of your home and in the trees, forming a perimeter around your garden spot.

"A 45-second mist, three times a day eliminates all flying insects within the area," says Bumbarger. "The pesticide is made from chrysanthemums and stored safely in a locked container in your garage."

According to Bumbarger, the system is considered "green" and environmentally safe.

"A good outdoor designer can build a virtual in-home vacation spot," Edwards says. "Outdoor fireplaces, faux brick walls, aesthetic lighting, and even outdoor kitchens with marble or granite countertops."