



Karen Anderson

My best home-decorating advice: Don't ask me for any advice

Savvy homeowners understand that there are some tasks better left to the professionals (especially if you come from a decorating-impaired family, like Club columnist Karen Anderson).

At the end of every home remodeling project, I experience a horrible letdown. It all started after my first major remodel (a second-story addition to a 1912 Craftsman house). The final coat of off-white paint was barely dry on the walls when my then-mother-in-law showed up to offer her opinion.

"Very nice," she said.

"So, how are you planning to decorate?"

Oops. I knew there was something I'd forgotten.

When it comes to remodeling, I aim for "classic" and "timeless." I pride myself on designing functional kitchens, clever storage spaces, and livable living areas.

When it comes to home decorating, I want to collapse on my unfashionable sofa and cry. The decorating magazines are filled with comments about things being "so last year's style" or "so last season's colors." This can't be right. Why on earth would people repaint, reupholster and redecorate every few months?

At the time my former mother-in-law inquired about my decorating plans, I'd been blissfully ignoring the topic for years. My excuse is that I come from a decorating-impaired family.

My mom's decorating style is "low maintenance and durable." Her favorite accent color is beige – because beige goes well with off-white. Her definition of decorative accessories is "clutter that collects dust." She views centerpieces as those things you move off the table to make way for the platters of food. House plants? Of course not. They'd get water stains on your (beige) wall-to-wall carpeting.

I'm making fun of my mom a bit here, but I have to confess that I'm not much different. I admire lavish flower arrangements at the homes of friends, but when I try to envision them at our house, all that comes to mind is a blizzard

of limp petals on the table and a slimy vase that I'll have to clean.

It didn't help that I used to be married to a man whose idea of fine furniture was a computer desk with plenty of holes for all the cables. As a result, when we sold our Craftsman in Wallingford to move to a beach house in Ballard, we needed to have the old place professionally staged – after which my then-husband barely recognized the place.

"Do we have enough insurance to cover us if somebody trips over this stuff?" he asked, swatting away a cascade of sheer chiffon curtains the stager had draped – decoratively, mind you – across a doorway.

He looked at the dozens of scented candles she'd scattered throughout the rooms and muttered something about calling the Fire Marshal.

"You left blankets everywhere," he pointed out to the stager.

"Those are called throws," she replied icily.

Grinning apologetically, I nudged him out the door and onto the porch, only to find that the stager had presciently booby-trapped it with a fragile wicker rocking chair. Crash.

But professional decorating did the trick. We sold the Craftsman a week later. The buyers had three small children and two large Tibetan mastiffs. I'll bet they enjoyed the gauze curtains.

The contact with the stager that so traumatized my ex actually inspired me. Impractical though the decorating was, our house had looked beautiful. I began eying the new place in Ballard from a stager's perspective. What if I artfully

arranged vintage bowls and vases on the mantelpiece? Why not spread colorful tablecloths on the side tables and toss a dramatic chenille throw on the sofa? My enthusiasm grew.

Under the heady influence of Pottery Barn catalogs, I gave it a try. And (can you believe it?) my foray into décor was a huge hit ... with our three cats. They climbed the curtains, relocated the vintage bowls and vases, and dragged the tablecloths off the tables (along with the lamps). Then, clearly exhausted by all this décor business, they curled up and went to sleep on the chenille throw.

As for me, I got the answer I'd been looking for: I now know why décor has to change every season.

