

# HOMES • RESALE & RENTAL

Editor: Sheila Brady, 596-3709 • sbrady@thecitizen.canwest.com

## Decorating for the sexes

Renovating and decorating can be a marital minefield with explosions over colour, lighting and a bit of wall space, writes **KAREN TURNER.**

It was only a few metres of wall, but for Lori Steeves and Jonathan Hayward, closing off an entrance to their kitchen and extending the front hall was a huge, contentious issue.

Last December, the couple bought a 1956 bungalow near Kirkwood Avenue and quickly discovered renovating and decorating a home is a difficult exercise of give and take that can sometimes come to blows.

"You have to be willing to compromise," says Ms. Steeves, an interior decorator and owner of Simply Home Decorating, who admits keeping an open mind is paramount.

"The argument is often not about the decorating. It's a power struggle. There's a fear that it's (the home) not going to be comfortable. It's not going to feel like your space."

Let's face it: your home is your haven and no matter how much you love your partner, you're not about to settle for just any colour on the walls or fabric for the couch.

"A home is very personal," says the 29-year-old decorator, who will be offering decorating survival tips to wary couples later this month at two free Decorating for the Sexes seminars at Chapters.

This Moncton native knows that blending two people's tastes and personalities under one roof can be challenging. Battle lines are sometimes drawn over the smallest detail and heated words exchanged when neither person is willing to back down.

Which brings us back to the Steeves/Hayward kitchen and front hall.

When the couple bought the three-bedroom bungalow — affectionately dubbed the bunker because of its solid brick construction — they were impressed with the size of the rooms and the ample backyard where Kodak, a nine-year-old German shepherd, roams.

With everything in the house original — from the windows and kitchen to the black-and-white bathroom floor — a renovation was essential. Both agreed it was important not to compromise the integrity of the home's design. "The house had such excellent bones."

But the centre hall was broken up by five doorways. Both favoured an open plan with a large kitchen and dining room for entertaining. She grew up in



PHOTOS BY JEAN LEVAG, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

While renovating their bungalow, interior decorator Lori Steeves and her partner, photographer Jonathan Hayward, hit a few snags trying to blend their tastes and decorating styles. Compromises were made, resulting in an open kitchen and dining room, a romantic master bedroom, below, and a 1950s-inspired bathroom featuring a wall-mount sink with an extended counter on either side.

New Brunswick and he in Newfoundland, so kitchen parties are a regular event.

That's when they hit their first snag. Adding an extra stretch of wall to the hallway put them at odds. She wanted to lengthen the wall to match up the kitchen archway with the opening to the living room. He worried the hall would look like a bowling alley.

Mr. Hayward, who spends several days a month living out of a suitcase working as a news photographer, eventually conceded, but not before winning a few arguments of his own.

The professional shutterbug insisted on maxing out the house with halogen pot lights on dimmer switches to create mood lighting in the evening or to provide bright task lighting.

At first, Ms. Steeves resisted, fearful the rows of recessed lights dotting the kitchen ceiling, the perimeter of the dining room and down the hallway would look too modern.

He won.

In the hall, there are seven pots casting a warm glow on a gallery of black-and-white photographs of their trips to New York, Paris and Prague. Over the dining table, he chose a reproduction Tiffany lamp with a



dozen stained glass tulip shades. Surprisingly, the oversized fixture blends with the minimalist pendant lights suspended over the breakfast bar.

"Lighting is key in a house," says Ms. Steeves, a self-confessed pot-light convert. "In any given room, you need several types of light and everything is on dimmers to give you different levels of light at different times of the day."

When it came to choosing colours, she stood her ground.

A fan of strong, deep hues, she combined dark reds, rich caramels and grey-greens,

drawing inspiration from the area rug in the living room.

In the hall, she agonized over whether to paint the end wall a deep crimson. She took the plunge and is delighted.

"Red is an advancing colour. It encourages you to take that long walk down the hall."

Romance was on her mind when she picked the deep wine window panels and iron chandelier over the sleigh bed in the master bedroom.

Across the hall, her home office is wrapped in pale green to keep her creative juices flowing when poring over colour charts



for her clients.

"It's fresh. It's alive. I love nature so being surrounded by green reminds me of the outdoors," says the avid cyclist and skier.

As an added extravagance, the closet doors were replaced with long, silk draperies tied back with large tassels.

"Every room has at least one big splurge," she says. In the

kitchen, it's the slate backsplash; in the 1950s-inspired bathroom, it's the bulky wall-mount sink

Her advice to successful decorating? Keep it simple.

"You don't want your decorating to infringe on your everyday life. You want it to enhance it."

The free Decorating for the Sexes seminars will run May 27 at Chapters Kanata and May 28 at Chapters Pinecrest at 7 p.m.



In the Steeves-Hayward hallway, seven potlights cast a warm glow on a gallery of photographs of trips to New York, Paris and Prague, while an end wall is a deep crimson for visual punch.

## It's all about give and take

Renovating involves compromise and knowing when to stand your ground, **LORI STEEVES** writes.

When I first met my partner, I was attracted to his sense of style, his funky wardrobe, an extensive shoe collection and an impeccably decorated bachelor pad.

After two years of living with Jonathan Hayward, we bought our new house and started planning an extensive renovation. I thought how fun it would be to collaborate with a

creative guy who shares my appreciation for good design. And he wanted to be involved in the decision-making. Even better — or so I thought.

I would describe the following weeks as difficult, stressful and anything but fun. We argued over big decisions and small details. Tears were shed, compromises were made and apologies were offered and ac-

cepted. Remarkably, we ended up on speaking terms, with a home that reflects each of us as individuals and the two of us as a couple.

Renovations can shake even the most solid relationship and decorating as a couple can be difficult. Here are a few words of advice for couples undertaking a project together, drawn from both my personal and professional experiences.

Realize that you will have to compromise; however, don't compromise so much that neither of you is satisfied with the

outcome.

Choose your battles. You will need all your energy to get through this project so decide what is important and let go of the little things. If you reach an impasse, call in a mediator.

Remember your relationship is more important than any design dilemma. You will be happier in an imperfect home with the person you love, rather than in a perfect home all by yourself.

**LORI STEEVES** is an interior decorator and owner of Simply Home Decorating. Visit [www.simplyhomedecorating.com](http://www.simplyhomedecorating.com)