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Stylish Solutions

By Ann McDonald



Wing Chairs are classics. I especially like this frame because it has a curved side flange and a curved front leading edge. Photos courtesy Couture Chateau LLC

stools ... anything that has old upholstery on it. Here's how to change that vintage find into a showstopper:

1) Identify the type of furniture and look for classic styling and good lines, not too many squeaks or tilts. (Note: Some squeaking and tilting may be OK and fixable with smaller repairs and pegs/screws).

Take the example of a chair. Many people like chairs that work in guest rooms and that migrate into an office for clients then move into the family room for a party. Three uses, one piece. I love that. This fits into the "Little Black Dress" type.

One example was a wing chair frame with hideous upholstery. We knew from testing for squeaks and tilts that the frame was solid and well constructed, so \$275 later, the chair was ours.

If I had contracted my frame maker to create this same model from scratch, the wood construction alone, not including springs and eight-way hand ties, would have been \$650-\$700, wholesale. It has a curved front edge and curved wing flanges - not inexpensive details, yet they were 'hidden' under ugly.

As it was, we had a terrific model to work from for less than half the cost. Score!

2) Strip the upholstery using the proper tools. When I purchased this chair, before I sent it off to my upholstery shop, my warehouse manager stripped the fabric to make sure we had a great quality frame.

I like doing this before it goes out because it gives my upholstery shop a clean slate to work

It's summer and that means people all over are cleaning out, dusting off and remodeling. Even businesses take time during the slower summer months to clear out storage areas, and tidy up. How do I know? We get called for design solutions during the summer months. It finally dawned on me: People are clearing the decks and then our phone rings! Garage sales, tag sales and all manner of scouting takes place as clients and friends look for vintage, antique and unique pieces to either streamline from, or infuse into, their interior designs from homes to offices.

This month's stylish suburbanite tip? Pick up pieces that work into an already established look in our homes: I call it "the little black dress" approach.

Just like building a wardrobe, designing a home takes forethought. One of the best preparations is to have a good understanding of what you need and why, especially if you find yourself out and about. If not, you will end up selling next summer what you picked on a whim this summer.

My favorite tip? Go vintage.

There are perfect well-made furniture frames out there sitting under an old pieces of upholstery. My team and I are constantly on the lookout for these beauties and they come in all shapes and sizes. They can be chairs, sofas, settees, ottomans,

with. It also lets us examine the frame to see if glue, pegs or screws will be required to strengthen it before any fabric goes on. You can also change paint/stain at this point.

3) Cover in well-made muslin. People often ask us why we do this. I want to make sure it sits properly. By covering a frame with muslin, a client can sit and test. It costs more, but better before than after.

The muslin is an undergarment for slipcovers and a test model for upholstery.

4) Have a slipcover made (even if re-upholstery is the goal). Yes, we still do this. Many slipcovers of old have bad raps - poor quality, with no lining or details. I like slipcovers because they suit mind-changing. We often spec seasonal incarnations for rooms, so spaces are refreshed easily. They also protect upholstery fabric from sun during harsh summers. It's why we line and interline whenever possible.

Let me know of your finds and frames, hits and misses, and if you find the perfect "Little Black Dress Frame."

Happy Summer!





The back will be finished off in our custom lining, making the muslin covered chair ready for a custom slipcover.



Ann McDonald, IIDA, NAPO, is the Founder/CEO of Couture Chateau, a luxury interior design firm in Orinda. For a complete blog post including other design ideas, visit www.couturechateau.com/blog. Join Ann and her team at the annual Designer Clearance Sale from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Friday, July 31 at 5 Tappan Lane in Orinda. For our exclusive sale email list with coupons, visit <http://couturechateau.com/designer-clearance/>. To see what a sale is like enjoy this video from 2012: <https://youtu.be/jgxjI4XmOYQ>.

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