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Stylish Solutions

By Ann McDonald



To get this shot, Photographer Erik Nelder removed the fireplace cover and put the camera through the actual fireplace! We had people on ladders holding the pots back and had moved the basket cabinet over to align properly. See photo on page D10. Photos courtesy Couture Chateau llc

Most of us would love lives that are picture perfect - happy families with kids nicely dressed enjoying family activities with mom and dad; good meaningful conversations happening in a beautiful room - but life is not a magazine shoot, even if we can orchestrate the things around us and want it to be. Life is, however, beautiful in all its process mess.

As summer comes to an end, stylish suburbanite, I wanted to share inside tips you can use today to navigate the process between inspiration photos and the creation of your ideal space that lives as beautifully as it looks. My hope is to equip you with tools, so design and decorating makes you smile, and thrive, each time you walk into a room.

First things first: Remember that photo shoots for decorator magazines often involve things like pushing the sofa up against the bookshelf, hanging off a ladder while the table is three feet away from the chairs or climbing a fence in a quarry. What that means is, we can't recreate the same room elements from a photo for real living.

So just how do we design so spaces and places look and live beautifully?

Before we get to the pretty, my team and I sit down and review what I affectionately call "The Life Envelope." This refers to the next seven years of your life relating to the current project.

What is it you want your life to be in seven years? What are your personal goals? Family goals? Will you be staying in the home for generations or is it short-term? Design to facilitate that.

Instead of creating space that is static or holds you back, examine goals, hopes and dreams first. Create designed space that moves you forward in real and practical ways.

It's like sailing. You get to the destination faster and with more style points if you know the currents under your surface and prevailing winds. Get the unseen issues tackled and the rest is - as they say - smooth sailing.

Do you have a young family with children in preschool and want to make sure art and music are still passions when they are teenagers? Design space to create energy and anticipation for practice. Don't place the piano or art studio in a dingy corner of the garage or the basement family room. Integrate those into core living spaces.

There is science behind design, and we love the beauty part, but in order for it to thrive for you in your own home these things need to be addressed.

Next we look at your "Space Envelope." The space envelope refers to a proverbial cube-like border around the spaces and places we will be designing. It's a non-negotiable "design fence"

within which we make decisions and bring completion - all consistent with your "Life Envelope."

Why? Just like other areas of life, focus, follow through and completion are the game changers for excellence. Ask yourself what spaces need to be designed together to be consistent. Why is this space a priority? What are the potential pitfalls of this space and how can you avoid them? And do you have a reasonable budget? The "Space Envelope" keeps us from getting carried away.

By putting a decision cube around a space, even if it's a 24,000-square-foot combination of five buildings on a 400-acre mini-ranch, we prevent distraction. It's equally important on a 600-square-foot kitchen remodel, maybe more so, as lives are curated in those 600 square feet.

For today, take stock of these tips for your own spaces. I created this process when my interns and new grads who had amazing technical skills, struggled to complete projects of excellence. It has been so well received, design professionals from across the country use this training for themselves, not just for their employees. We are in process of creating a complete homeowner accessible version as well this fall.

As stylish suburbanites, you are therapists, counselors and lifestyle consultants. My goal is to equip you to thrive and reach your individual and family goals seven years out - through design.



Photographer Erik Nelder



In this shot, Design Photographer Peter Medilek was on a ladder. Real life looks nothing like a photo shoot.



This photo was taken in Israel while filming design inspiration videos. We reasoned that if marble could handle 4,000-plus years outside and retain beauty, it would probably be OK in a vacation project off continent.



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