

Italian Style with Universal Appeal

INTERIOR DESIGN FOR THE MASSES

When Ted McWilliams of McWilliams & Associates hired me to design a model home for their new twin home development, I eagerly welcomed the project. The development is named after a town in Italy called Bellante, and the model for the upcoming Parade of Homes Tour was to be called "The Caprice." Having visited the Isle of Caprice, I had witnessed firsthand the beauty that provided the inspiration for this new model home.

I carefully considered the client that would buy this home. The client would be in their mid-forties or older, and be interested in living in a luxurious, maintenance-free home set on a golf course. The style that is most pleasing to this population would be traditional with a casual flair.

With blueprint in hand, I went to work. My first challenge was to redo the design of the lower-level family room: this area had been architecturally rendered and constructed in a way that left very little space for furniture. The builder desired this home to have a family room, game room, and a bar area, but it was impossible to have all three with this design. So, after much thought (and getting Ted's agreement), I redesigned the space. First we moved the fireplace from the corner, which allowed us to place the newly-expanded seating area (two sofas and a chair) centered under the window.

Next we moved the bookcase and entertainment wall. We placed a flat screen TV above the fireplace which allowed for viewing from every aspect of the room, including the bar area. Directly behind the sitting area we now had room for a game table.

Next, I selected flooring, cabinets, countertops, tile, fixtures, lights, cabinet hardware, appliances, paint colors, and all the faux finishes. I chose with an eye toward finding something distinctive that would also appeal to the masses. I also kept in mind that someone else would be making this space their own so I tried to provide a palette of fresh new ideas that would work with most decorating. Each of these elements had to fit the location, the project, and, most importantly, the budget.

I now had a formidable list of rooms to conquer: a living room, family room, bar area, kitchen, dining room, a sitting area off the kitchen, a sun room, master bedroom, two lower level bedrooms, and three bathrooms.

So off I went on the hunt for furniture and fabrics for all 3,189 square feet. I spent hours looking at furniture pieces, considering scale, fabric, design and colors. I'd constantly ask myself, "Does this fit this home? Would this appeal to the masses viewing this model?" I kept the budget in mind and made decisions quickly.

I searched until I found the perfect drapery fabrics for each room that would complement the furniture and the architectural design of the home. As each design appeared in my mind, I sketched the window treatment. When that was done I sent off the designs to my work room to wait for pricing.

I chose a warm color palette of rich gold/brown tones throughout, adding an accent wall in burnt red for a two-sided fireplace. I opted for tropical brown granite for its earthy color palette, complemented by cinnamon-stained cabinets, and floors in white oak for durability and color variation. I chose two-panel arched doors, and millwork in a creamy white. For carpet I went soft as butter in a warm gold/bronze tone. The island I had painted black to go with the appliance color. Oil-rubbed bronze door hardware tied in with bronze lights with neutral shades: all these were selections with an air of the timeless and classic about them, chosen to appeal to the great majority.

Since the office was the first room you see upon entering, it needed a "wow factor." To that end I had the walls painted in a vertical shimmer stone stripe in moss green with subtle gold metallic overlay. I framed the window overlooking the front in bold burnt red-and-gold-striped silk drapery panels. A touch of Italy came via the wood and iron desk and a bookcase and hutch with metal stamped door panels.

I chose to furnish the living room with a channel-quilted sofa and loveseat in a velvet brown/gold fabric. A vertical-striped velvet chair was flanked opposite the fireplace, television, and bookcase wall. The throw pillows were variations of these fabrics with a touch of fringe. The cocktail table was mirrored to reflect the beauty of the room. This combination was inspired by the romantic beauty of Italy and the luxury they enjoy.

I was gratified to find that the lower level turned out to be the favorite of most visitors to the home. As visitors entered the room, they were greeted by two chocolate brown leather Chesterfield sofas. (I purchased them at a steal compared to an original "Chesterfield.") Lime green linen drapery panels with equestrian accents framed the back yard. The downstairs also boasted a full bar and game table: we had them setup with poker, beer, and cigars so that the room nearly shouted, "Come on, you know you want to live here!"

The master bedroom included a carved four poster bed in rich mahogany. Reused from a previous model, it was blanketed in red, gold silk, and paisley bedding. A settee and ottoman in gold and red floral sat centered in the bay window, surrounded by striped red, green, and gold silk drapery panels casually hung by bronze metal holdbacks. The art hanging near the bed depicted a couple doing the tango. I made these choices to create a master bedroom getaway for visitors, one they could see themselves sleeping and rising and living life in.

So, was my plan successful?

I was later asked by Ted McWilliams to create a lower-priced model home in this same color palette and fabric combination due to the great response of model home viewers.

I guess the masses like it. It's sold.

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