

Designs on Romance

by Jonathan Fong

Admit it. The first time you visit the home of someone you've just started dating, don't you love to snoop around the place to get some clue, any clues, about this potential mate? You might look at the pictures on the wall, the books on the shelves, maybe the style of furniture to get an idea of their interests and tastes. But a home speaks volumes more about a person than that.

A home reveals your personality. It's a visual representation of your psyche. It says where you are right now in life. And it reflects how ready you are for a relationship.

So what is your home saying about you? Is it saying you're a real catch? Perhaps it's saying you have a great sense of humor. Or is it telling the world you're selfish, immature, and stuck in the 80's? Ouch.

But don't worry. Even if your home is sending out distress signals, you can decorate and accessorize to invite love into your life. That's right, the way you decorate can improve your love life. Because when you make a few changes to where you live, you'll be making big changes to how you live.

1 MAKE ONE DRASTIC CHANGE IN YOUR HOME.

When I say drastic I mean so different that it's completely unrecognizable. You don't have to alter your whole house or apartment. Just change one room, or even one corner of a room. What you are doing is making a symbolic gesture. You are saying goodbye to the old "unlucky in love" You and hello to the new "I can't believe I'm getting all these hot dates" You. It's a facelift for your home, and a new start to your life. And not just a nip and tuck facelift, either. It's a complete Witness Relocation Program facelift that lets you start anew.

If you're nervous, start small, like a bathroom. It's amazing what a new paint job, a different shower curtain, new linens and new area rugs can do. If you're feeling brave, transform an entire room. Change the wall color. Buy new furniture. You want no trace of the past in that room, so every time you enter it, it's a reminder

that you're a new person, too.

2 GET RID OF WHITE WALLS

If you ask people why they have white walls, they'll probably say "I couldn't make up my mind on a color," or "I didn't want to pick a color and then see that it was a mistake." Think about it. Don't these excuses sound a lot like reasons people avoid relationships? Write this down and put it in your fortune cookie: If you can't commit to a color, how can you commit to a relationship? Pick a color. You can do it. Besides, white is boring and sterile, two adjectives you don't want associated with you when you're looking for love.

So how do you choose a color, then? You're probably a pretty good judge of color already. You just don't know it. Go into your closet and pick out your favorite items of clothing. What do you wear over and over again? What outfits do people always seem to compliment you on? If you look so good wearing these colors, you'll also look good with these colors sur-

rounding you on the walls. By starting with what's in your closet, you can create a whole palette of colors that will wake up your walls, and your life.

Once you've chosen some colors, be brave. You have to dive into color, just as you must take a chance on love. Start by buying a pint of your prospective color and paint a small section on the wall. Don't be afraid of making a mistake. If you don't like it, try another, and then another. One friend of mine tried over a dozen different colors on the same wall until she

4 BUY HOUSEWARES IN COMPLETE SETS

When you're buying dishes, buy the complete set for eight with salad plates and those cups and saucers you'll never use. When you're buying towels, buy the whole set with matching hand towels and wash cloths. (And buy more

than one set.) Why? First, it shows that you are now an adult. You're not a college student anymore, so don't accessorize your home like you're still in a dorm. Revel in your adulthood.

The most important reason, though, for buying complete sets is because it used to be that people waited till they got married before they got these items (and usually they were gifts). But by owning them before you're married, you're telling the universe that you are comfortable as a single person. You have a life. You're not waiting to get married to feel complete.

"If you can't commit to a color, how can you commit to a relationship?"

found the perfect one. Hey, it's just like dating. If it doesn't work out, just move on to the next one. And you don't have to worry about hurting the color's feelings because you didn't call back.

3 LOSE THE CLUTTER

Before you get into a relationship, you need to get rid of your emotional baggage. The same thing goes with the unneeded physical baggage that's cluttering your home. You know what I mean. Most people have ATM receipts from bank accounts that are no longer open. And from the looks of all their out-of-date magazines, you'd think they were dentists. Throw all the junk away. This goes especially for items that remind you of a past relationship. That stuffed bear your ex won for you at the arcade? Dump it. Those maracas from that party you threw together? Hasta la vista! From this day forward, you are starting with a clean slate, so let your home reflect that. Then you'll be open to filling your home with new souvenirs, new memories, and new relationships.

From left to right: 1) Talk about drastic change. Aluminum shingles transform what was once a bedroom into a romantic lounge. 2) No, those aren't white walls. Panels of faux fur, silk flowers and satin make this bedroom a whimsical retreat. 3) A room is bathed in red -- the color of passion 4) Well, here's one use for that cup and saucer.

And ironically, it's only when you accept that you're already a whole person that you happen to find your other half.

When we hit the dating scene, we spend so much effort on new hairstyles, clothes and teeth whitening kits that we forget that it's our homes that are the true reflection of our selves. So the next time a date comes over, remember that your home is an open book.

Make it a book with a happy ending.

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