

Budget ideas for furnishing a new house

By Lisa Jennings, Scripps
Howard News Service

We finally bought a house. After renting all our adult lives, we followed the American Dream and went deeply into debt for the privilege of mowing our own lawn.

The house hunt was a nightmare. And it ended with the writing of far too many checks with far too many zeros.



At least we thought the worst was over. We bid farewell to our real estate agent, loaned out our copy of "Home Buying for Dummies" and moved all our worldly goods into our new digs.

That's when we discovered that our worldly goods didn't fit. Nothing looked right.

We needed some new stuff.

And we needed it on the cheap, as our meager fortune was blown on the down payment.

Where do you go to decorate on a budget?

We called Jackie Glisson, an independent interior designer who doesn't typically work with clients on such a strict budget. But he graciously offered to share some of the secrets designers use to cut costs – as well as giving advice on where to shop.

A designer in Memphis, Tenn., for nearly four years, Glisson has done everything from completely renovating and decorating luxurious homes to helping a client on a \$500 budget accessorize her house before a family reunion.

Before becoming a designer, he was president of Home Decorating Warehouse, which closed in 1997. So Glisson is well acquainted with the needs of budget-minded decorators.

To demonstrate some of his ideas for this story, Glisson "made over" our virtually empty living room.

Sadly, most of the items used were borrowed and we had to give them back. But his magical transformation of the space inspired a wealth of ideas that could apply to any home.



"Everybody worries about money," said Glisson. "And everybody loves a bargain."

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He described our house as "craftsman style," a typical bungalow.

The living room has a non-working fireplace flanked by built-in bookcases with leaded-glass and oak doors. Stained-glass windows

glow with morning light, and the floors are wood.

In the room, we had a couch, a bookcase and a TV.

And that was about it.

As we headed out to shop, Glisson said he preferred earth tones and warm colors that would complement the room's oak touches.

But he recommended that we keep in mind the design requirements of a household that includes a 3-year-old child.

"With children in the house, look for patterns that would hide a multitude of sins," he said. "Try to use flooring as close to the color of dirt as possible."

Our first stop was I.C.B.'s, a discount store that carries overruns and returns from popular mail-order companies.

There we found a sage-green slipcover embossed with a leaf pattern to cover our 13-year-old couch. An instant reupholstery job for \$99.

Next we headed to a garden center. Vases, urns, topiaries, a gazing ball, baskets, a set of lovely wood boxes – he chose items I would never have considered, which were perfect for the space, from a \$10 bowl to an iron bench for \$82.50.

The store also had a large selection of concrete pedestals, statues and figurines that work well both inside and outside a house.

Glisson picked out a large stamped-tin "screen" with a faux finish that looked like marble (\$125) to tuck at the back of the fireplace.

Then he chose four Celtic crosses (ranging in price from \$13.50 to \$35) for a wall arrangement and two Grecian pedestals (\$35 each).



Pedestals?

Our next stop was a store that offers both custom-designed and stock glass tabletops.

Quality glass pieces do not come cheap. But this store had a few pieces set aside that may have small defects, such as a bubble or a scratch. All of those pieces are \$40 each, an amazing savings considering original prices went up to several hundred.

Glisson picked a piece that would fit on top of the Greek pedestals (he used tiny rubber grippers on the pedestals to keep from scratching the glass) for an elegant sofa table. The 3/4-inch glass had a polished "ogee," or rounded edge,

and, if it had a defect, we couldn't find it. The original price was between \$300 and \$400, said owner Bryan Carter.

The total price of the assembled table: \$110.

On to Pier 1 Imports, which was having a sale on wicker chairs. Glisson picked a chair (\$122.50) and ottoman (\$52.50), and matching stone-gray, feather-stuffed pillows (\$65 and \$75) as well as a set of wrought-iron candelabras (\$35 and \$80) that he planned to put in the fireplace.

Just because we can't light a big fire doesn't mean we can't enjoy the glow of a lit flame.

Perhaps the best find at Pier 1 was a \$275 kilim wool-and-jute rug.

It was the most expensive item of any Glisson picked out, but it pulled all the elements of the room together.

At Target, we found two funky lamps – one is a mini Eiffel Tower – each for about \$30. The shades were \$13 and \$15.

Glisson also fell in love with a purple glass vase for \$15 in which he threw a handful of yellow tulips.

At the Williams-Sonoma furniture outlet store we found a rough-hewn wood bench that served as a funky (and childproof) coffee table for \$78.

We needed something for the walls, so Glisson sent me to B.A. Framer, a Memphis store that carries a selection of inexpensive framed prints and also a big inventory of stunning framed mirrors.

And they were on sale for 70 percent off.

I picked a gold-framed mirror with beveled glass on sale for \$48, down from \$159. Glisson placed it over the mantle and angled it into the room to reflect more light.

From a \$7 art book Glisson bought at an auction, he cut out Van Gogh paintings. Most secondhand bookstores carry such books, he noted.

Glisson took the pages to a frame shop and requested a textured glaze similar to a "canvas transfer," which gave the prints a "painted" look. The glazing technique generally runs from \$5 to \$25, depending on the size.

With inexpensive gold-painted wood frames from Tribble's, each cost \$20.

The final touch was an assortment of pillows made out of Turkish rugs, ranging in price from \$29 to \$45.

Yes, bargain-shopping takes footwork. That's where it comes in handy to use a designer.

"Saving money doesn't come without expense of time," said Glisson. "I shop for a living, so I'm in somebody's store every day.

"I was a compulsive shopper before I became a designer," he added, which is why he enjoys shopping for other people. "This sates my desire without bankrupting me."

Shopping is one thing. But it was when he assembled the room that Glisson



really shined.

A simple basket was filled with lemons for a splash of color. He used fake lemons (\$1.59 each), but real ones would offer a nice scent as well. (Don't want to buy that many? Stuff paper into the bottom of the basket and cover that with lemons to give the appearance of abundance.)

Around the candelabras in the fireplace, he wrapped silk ivy to cover the ash-stained floor.

The largest Celtic cross was tucked into the bookcase, leaning on a horizontal stack of books.

And when he was done, the room looked terrific.

In all, the entire decoration would have cost about \$2,200 (not including tax or designer's fees).

Not bad.

There was just one problem:

The living room looked so good, it made the rest of the house look shabby.

Make room in those store aisles, fellow bargain-hunters.

We need some new stuff.

Lisa Jennings writes for The Commercial Appeal in Memphis, Tenn.

Photos by Scripps Howard News Service

1) Interior designer Jackie Glisson transformed the old living room of this Craftsman-style house into a new front room with earth tones. 2) The old living room. 3) This glass sofa table was assembled from two pedestals for \$35 apiece plus a glass top from a local glazier's "back room" where one can often find assorted pieces for \$40. 4) These Celtic crosses, lit by light from a stained-glass window, were purchased at Rachel's, a store in Memphis, Tenn.

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