



**AFTER:**  
 (Left) Pulling the piano out from the corner and straightening it created a cozy seating area that men tend to gravitate toward after dinner parties. The photos are (left to right) by Jeffrey Conley and David Fokos from John Cleary Gallery. A new Tizio lamp tops the existing antique secretary.

**BEFORE:**  
 (Below) Angling the piano into the corner actually made the room feel smaller by taking up more space. The top of the secretary and the piano were overly accessorized for the couple's new simplified style.

# Sociable Space

SIMPLE FURNITURE MOVES AND ADDITIONS OPEN LIVING ROOM TO ART AND ENTERTAINING



**BEFORE:**  
 (Above) The smaller more colorful rug, white table, formal chairs, two coffee tables and a too-tall end table were keeping this room from being cozy and comfortable.

**AFTER:**  
 (Left) New custom upholstered chairs, custom table from Peck & Co., custom rug from Creative Flooring and cylindrical table from Pilie provide comfort to guests. The ceramic vase is from Goldesberry Gallery.

**After seeing their neighbor's Shelterstyle.com dining room makeover,**

Lynn and Paul called for help in updating their 20-year-old living room, which was too formal for their 2008 lifestyle. As the couple renovated their home through the years, their interiors had gradually evolved into a clean, more contemporary style, and they wanted a friendlier setting for family and friends plus a neutral backdrop for their ever-changing art collection.

**RUG & ARRANGEMENT**

"The sticking point was the area rug," Lynn says. "We just couldn't find anything that worked in the space. Everything either seemed to conflict with the art or was very expensive." Since they had already had one red wine mishap, they didn't want to worry about ruining another rug. They really wanted to just enjoy the room and not be concerned about whether someone was going to spill something.

Another problem was how to arrange the furniture. When they bought the home in the late '80s, the couple removed the wall between the formal living room and sun porch, creating an L-shaped room in the process. They had nosed their piano into a corner of the "L," thinking it would diminish the piano's presence in the room, and moved the main seating area into the larger portion.

The arrangement didn't facilitate conversation because the two sofas were so far apart. With two coffee tables in between, the room seemed crowded. They needed additional seating and she wanted a table in the room that would seat additional friends for large dinner parties.

"The room just wasn't as inviting as we knew it could be, and since we entertain frequently, we wanted it to be more comfortable, without the hassle of renting and setting up additional tables," says Lynn.

Because I see a room the way the camera does, I knew the '80s white hoofed corner table stood out more than it should in the room.

**tip** In a photograph, your eye will go to the lightest and darkest items in a room first. The furnishings need to balance the art, furniture, fabrics and accessories in the room.

**FURNITURE ADJUSTMENTS**

After listening carefully to Lynn's needs, I proposed a furniture rearrangement: Move the piano from its diagonal placement to parallel the wall, and move the pair of French chairs and glass cylinder table by the piano. Instead of two coffee tables, I suggested one large glass and steel table, which was custom made by Peck & Co. By moving the two sofas closer together, I suggested we could make room for a combination flip-top dining/sofa table behind the sofa for those dinner parties. A few days later, Lynn found the perfectly sized Baker Furniture table at Reeves Antiques.

My first observations were that the raspberry French chairs were too formal for the main seating area, the room needed additional comfortable seating plus colorful pillows to pull the raspberry chair color onto the new armchairs, new dark bronze floor lamps and "de-formalizing." For consistency, I suggested a larger, more textural, casual seagrass rug that echoes the other seagrass rugs in the house. I also suggested Lynn find small round tables to place beside the chairs for guests to set down their drinks. Lynn found cylindrical black granite tables at Pilie, which were perfect.

My design associate, Dorenda Longoria, proposed a number of AutoCad floor plans for Lynn and Paul to choose from. The couple's living room provided an additional challenge: a ceiling beam and attached load-bearing wall columns on each side of the room. Placing chairs so they would function, yet not feel crowded by the wall columns, was

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**Little details create great impact.** Moving furniture just a few inches can make a room cozy and comfortable.

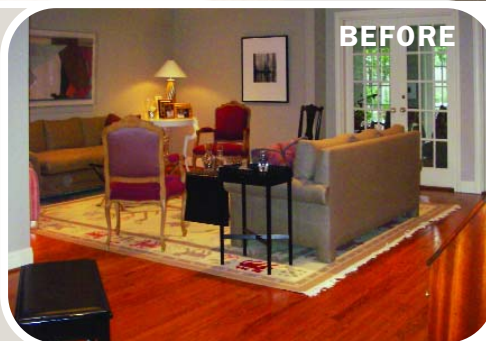
**Buy furniture to serve two purposes.** A sofa table with a flip top can seat dinner party guests, too.

**Think “green.”** Existing furniture can be painted, rearranged or reupholstered instead of discarded.

Sometimes the most effective strategy is not to buy more furniture and accessories for your home, but to **first rethink the pieces that are already paid for.**

**AFTER:** The newly painted round goat’s leg table and neutral new armchairs, tables and floor lamps let the new Lance Letscher collage from McMurtrey Gallery over the existing sofa take center stage. The photo on the table easel is by Lindsay Oshman and the large photo on the wall is by Rodney Smith, both from John Cleary Gallery. The lamp was simply moved from another room.

**BEFORE:** The two coffee tables forced the sofas too far apart, leaving room only for smaller, more formal chairs, and created a more “confrontational” seating arrangement (like two football teams on the 50-yard line).



crucial to the design plan.

Using the dimensions we provided for chairs, sofa table and coffee table, Lynn went shopping. She fell in love with some very expensive pieces, which we had custom made at a fraction of the cost of retail, including three armchairs, coffee table from Peck and Co. and a custom 12-by-15-foot seagrass rug bordered in practical cork binding from Creative Flooring. The chair and pillow fabrics came from Calico Corners.

**A TOUCH OF PAINT**

Since there was no reason to change the Benjamin Moore “Revere Pewter” HC-172 wall color that flows beautifully throughout the house, I selected a complementary color, Benjamin Moore’s “Copley Gray” HC-104, to paint the white table.

“I can’t believe the impact that moving furniture a few inches can have on a room,” Lynn says. “Our friends love the space and find it really attractive and comfortable and comment they’ve never seen another room like it. I think we have achieved a space where the art takes precedence over the décor — which is exactly what we wanted.”



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