



AFTER

AFTER:

(Left) New comfortable seating plus an armoire to house the television were purchased from Star Furniture. The game table and chairs were relocated to the home office. The recliner was repurposed to the master bedroom.

Tropical Study

COUPLE CAPTURES THE CASUAL ISLAND LOOK
IN THEIR NEW HOME'S LIBRARY



BEFORE

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(Above) Like a lot of houses, the front room had no purpose and was filled with leftover furniture. Step one was assigning a purpose for the room.

AFTER:

(Left) Using the zigzag bookcase formula on the "Tips" page of www.shelterstyle.com, Marian styled her own bookcases using accessories she has owned for decades.



AFTER

Marian Arens first contacted me when she lived in another home and was trying to decide whether to remodel or sell to achieve the more casual, tropical look she and husband Dick wanted. After our meeting, the couple decided to buy a newer, one-story home with lots of windows, to which they added a swimming pool surrounded by palm trees.

The couple wanted a fresh start in their new home and to establish an overall design plan before buying any new furniture. "I know you try to reuse existing furniture and accessories in new ways, and that's exactly what we needed," Marian explains.

Like a lot of homes, the couple's front room had no purpose. They already had a comfortable living room with a large television that we had decorated. Unlike some of the houses they looked at to buy, Marian did not want to furnish the study with leftovers that didn't fit in other rooms. "I knew that I didn't want a boring, stuffy parlor, nor a messy office for my husband. I wanted this room at the front of the house to set the tone for the rest of the house," she explains.

tip> The key to a successfully decorated room is first determining how the room will be used, noting what storage is necessary and lastly, deciding the desired number of persons who will be sitting in the space.

After listening carefully to how she envisioned using the room, I suggested two plans because I believe in giving a client more than one option. Choice No. 1 involved using the room as a library, relocating the existing game table and chairs near the window, purchasing an armoire for the TV and adding a couple of new reading chairs near the bookshelves facing the window but with a clear view to the television.

Choice No. 2 involved using the room for entertaining, conversation and TV watching. This option meant replacing all of the seating and creating a comfortable "X" arrangement with four chairs around a circular table in the center of the room. Marian's "homework assignment" was to sit down and talk to her husband to determine how they both wanted to actually use the room and then choose one of the two options (or go to Plan 3: developing an entirely new arrangement).

"You gave me two viable options for the room," Marian explains. "Dick encouraged me to go with the more dramatic option, which required buying new furniture. It definitely made a bigger statement and provided a very comfortable room that did not mimic the 'sofa, three chairs and coffee table' that we already had in the living room."

Marian admits she had trouble visualizing the furniture arrangement and feared it would look overcrowded. Working with her friend, Nancy Turner at Star Furniture near Willowbrook, she e-mailed me three choices for armoires, eventually deciding on the Bermuda Bay by Kincaid Furniture armoire, which Dick preferred. Its doors open easily above the Bernhardt leather chair arms.

Color can transform a room with vitality — and put an end to boring "builder beige." Since the study needed a shot of color, she agreed to paint the entire room with C2Paints' "Thatch" (C2 # 7272), a shade deeper than the nearby living room. In addition, I suggested she add color to the back walls of the bookcases and e-mailed photos to illustrate the idea.

tip> To keep a smooth flow of color, select colors on the same paint card, darker or lighter. ▶

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diy decorating | TROPICAL STUDY



BEFORE:

(Above) A TV in the corner of the study was not functioning for the owners. They needed an armoire to house the unused larger TV from another room — and comfortable seating to view it.

AFTER:

(Left) New palm trees from Mirage Floral anchor the corners and repeat the home's established tropical theme.

trade secrets

Get a high-end look on a budget by **buying chairs instead of a sofa and chairs** to add seating to a room.

- Think outside the box by **painting the back wall of bookcases a vibrant color**, rather than the entire room. Paint consistently gives the most “bang for the buck.”
- To eliminate costly mistakes, **hire a professional to establish an overall flow between rooms** and keep you on track so that you only purchase enough furnishings and accessories needed to complete your project.
- Sometimes the most effective strategy is to not buy more furniture and accessories, but to **rethink the pieces that are already paid for**.

ABOVE:

A woodcarving from Open Windows Designs Home Décor & Gifts provides a dramatic focal point in the bookcases, which were painted Benjamin Moore's “Mayflower Red” HC-49 to coordinate with the terra cotta entry.

The brick red bookcase color was inspired by the terra cotta walls in the nearby entry hall and dining room and Marian's red hair and freckles (a custom mix from Martin Senour Paint that was computer-matched to Lowe's American Traditions' “Greek Amber” 2006-5B). I left her with two possible paint colors and the homework assignment to buy testers and actually paint the colors on large foam core boards, which can be purchased at Michael's Arts & Crafts for less than a dollar.

tip> Because I cannot be there at night to see what moonlight and incandescent light does to paint colors, sample boards become cost-effective “homework” and help prevent costly mistakes.

It is always good to live with a paint color for a few days and move the sample board around the room, taping it on different walls so you can really see if you like it. Do not paint directly on the wall because it leaves an outline of texture behind and confuses you with the colors that did not work.

To continue the tropical feeling Marian likes so much, she bought two framed dragonfly prints from Star Furniture, which we hung on each side of armoire. We also resolved not to add curtain panels to the room. “That decision alone paid for the design services in the study,” Marian says with a smile.

Palm trees from Mirage Floral placed in baskets from Tuesday Morning add tropical texture and ambience to the room's blank corners.

tip> To create drama at night, an uplight, placed behind the trees on the floor, creates palm-frond shadows on the ceiling and walls.

The most rewarding aspect of my job is sketching out a road map for homeowners to follow and then turning them loose to select furnishings that reflect their own personal style and taste. “The written homework assignments, sketches and measurements you left behind gave me a place to start because they narrowed my focus to shop for very specific items and sizes,” Marian says.

She was pleased she could create a tropical look without using one tropical print fabric, and that I helped her combine different materials in colors she liked to achieve the look she wanted.

“You convinced me that I did not need to purchase all new items for the bookcases. I got the look I wanted at a fraction of the cost of buying new accessories. The study now functions as a great conversation area when we entertain,” Marian says. “It's the perfect spot for appetizers and wine or coffee and dessert and is such a cozy, comfortable room. Guys always gravitate toward those comfortable leather chairs.”



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