

## ROOM TO IMPROVE

Craig Kellogg

Q. What can I do about a spouse who vetoes my decorating ideas?



Kris Tamburello

A. "American women are divided into two classes: the happily married and the decorators," Dorothy Draper, the decorator and advice columnist, once said.

Home design remains a test of wills, with both men and women speaking authoritatively on matters of taste. Unfortunately, just as many — and not only men — hold fast to the threadbare and the out of date, be it a hobbled footstool or a beloved but baggy sofa slipcover.

So start with several questions: Are you proposing something extreme, since even the loveliest ideas can seem foreign at first? Does your partner feel that saying no is part of the job description? Are there larger control issues in your relationship? Are you living with someone who has a hard time spending money?

In the spirit of compromise, you have probably tried minor concessions to your partner's taste. I'll assume that you are not attempting to layer on disquieting quantities of lace or floral prints. You can build trust with small projects where success is nearly assured. Buy several inexpensive oversize throw pillows from West Elm, or reorganize a bookshelf around a collection of groovy West German ceramics. As the room starts looking better, your other half may loosen up.

But what if the living room is ground zero in a turf war? Try forging a design alliance with a supportive friend whose taste you trust. Then it's two against one. Better still, hire a like-minded decorator.

Of course, some men are hardwired to oppose painting brick or stained wood. They may never agree to junk an old refrigerator, no matter how clunky, as long as it keeps the beer cold.

It's worth remembering that decorating ideas can take time to sink in, and that a steadfast reactionary may eventually relent. That is the guiding philosophy of Amy Lau, a young decorator in New York (212-645-6168; [www.formsofdesign.com](http://www.formsofdesign.com)) whose work, including a space-age living room, above, is boldly contemporary.

She recalled a buying trip on which one client fell in love with a brightly colored modernist chandelier. Her husband hated it.

"Four months later we put it up in their space and pretended we had never seen it before," Ms. Lau said. It's still there.

The fact is, reluctant decorators make crabby shoppers, especially on open-ended sprees. Canvass stores for prospects before dragging your partner along. And don't solicit opinions for decisions you have permission to tackle solo.

If your partner spends money reluctantly, use your own. The writer Plum Sykes recently wrote about her husband's veto of expensive seating she wanted from a West Village boutique. She confessed that she nodded politely and immediately ordered more.

Ms. Lau mentioned a client who wrote a deceptively small check to a gallery for expensive Scandinavian pieces, then paid the balance in cash.

To stop endless financial negotiations before every purchase, you can establish a monthly décor allowance that accrues even in decorating downtimes. Prepare realistic budgets and estimates of what this project or that one will cost. Share all of this with your decorator, but take pains to avoid citing dollar amounts around your partner, at least initially. This should ease you forward while postponing some nettlesome conversations until the wheels of progress are in motion.

In the end your spouse may never put complete faith in your plans or admit wholehearted satisfaction with the result, no matter how conservative the design or how little you spend. So plan a big party to celebrate the results and take satisfaction as your guests, and their compliments, roll in.

Questions about furnishings and décor may be sent by e-mail to [room@nytimes.com](mailto:room@nytimes.com). Unpublished questions cannot be answered individually.