

Turn home's flaws into soulful space



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By Catherine Murrell, Special to The Courier-Journal

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Name: Marlee LeDai

Position: Author, "Living Spaces: Bringing Style and Spirit to Your Home" (Revell, September 2004, \$14.99). LeDai is based in Sisters, Ore.

Résumé: LeDai formerly served as editor and columnist for Virtue magazine and was a contributing editor for Aspire magazine. She's currently working on an inspirational travel book for women, tentatively titled "Go Girl," to be released this spring by Revell.

Quote: "The places we have lived mark our soul, and as a return on that investment, by living soulfully we transform houses into homes."

Q: In "Living Spaces," you encourage your readers to focus on the spirit or soul of their homes. Can you share a few suggestions on living in and arranging a home in a more soulful way?

A: Taking a soulful approach involves seeing your home exactly as it is and not feeling you need to remodel it and make the bathroom shiny brand new or enlarge your home to include that extra family room or bedroom. Instead, you see all the flaws in your home as meaningful. It's the same approach you may take to things that happen in your family.

That's how family is created, through the flaws. Home becomes more soulful not just because of the good times you've had there, but also the bad things.

We're so crazy about spending a lot of money on our homes and making them beautiful, just as we're crazy about becoming the perfect family.

A more soulful approach recognizes that we all have flaws and accepts the flaws. If we work with these flaws, we create soul exactly where we are.



Rearrange the accessories you have to create a new look.

BY MARY ANN GERTH, THE COURIER-JOURNAL

Creating a more soulful home is not about how big your house is or how much money you spend on decorating and remodeling. It's about how you use the space you already have and how you use the things you already have.

When you're in the mood to redecorate, you don't have to go out to the store and spend a lot of money. You can take all the things you have and rearrange them, reorder them. Place them in different ways to create a whole new look.

Instead of buying a new vase because the one you have in a certain space fell and now has a crack in it, consider what the old vase means to you. Where did it come from? Did your child knock it over while playing? If you keep it, will it always remind you of your children growing up? You may choose to treasure it for what it is, with the flaw.

If you have upholstery that's worn, you can cover it up with a beautiful fabric that you love, or maybe you'll find that you like the way it's worn. It may be one of the details that make your house a home.

If you are going to go out and buy something, buy only what you really love. Don't buy something just because it matches a certain style or matches other objects in your home. There are so many beautiful objects out there, and everyone responds differently to different styles of décor. Your home will feel more soulful if you choose only what you respond to emotionally and what you love.

I love to shop at thrift stores. You can find a beautiful little thing for a dollar. It may be in just the color you love, or it may have a design on it that's meaningful for you.

Q: What advice do you have for clearing out clutter?

A: The first thing to keep in mind when decorating small spaces is to avoid putting too many things in the room. We Americans just seem to like to have things around us. But there's something to be said for simplicity and white space — space in which we can just be and relax. You don't have to cover the whole wall with paintings. Leaving some of the wall blank can be refreshing.

As for dealing with existing clutter, the best advice is to get some help. I find that I tend to be attached to my personal clutter. But if I can get someone that I trust who has a non-attached perspective to help me, I can more easily let go of the objects I don't need anymore.

If you have boxes or piles of objects that you're not sure what to do with, have someone you trust help you go through everything. It really helps to have somebody to talk you out of what you think you need.

My other advice on clutter is to go through the things that build up in your home. Go over each room once a month and sort through the objects that have collected in the space. Decide what you really need and what you don't need. It's amazing to me how quickly we gather things to us, how much comes in through our doors.

Because things tend to accumulate so quickly in our homes, clearing clutter needs to be an ongoing process. If you get rid of clutter and maintain a clutter-free space, it's amazing how



much easier you will be able to breathe in your home.

Our physical environment can have such a powerful effect on our emotional and spiritual life. If you keep your space from becoming cluttered, you'll find you can think more clearly and have a clearer overview of the details of your life.

Women in particular have so many things to look after. Our calendars are crammed full, and our homes are full of things that need to be maintained. All these material demands take away from our soulfulness and our spiritual life.

When you de-clutter, you have less to look after, less to maintain. You have more time to develop your spiritual life, more time to imbibe grace.

Q: Any final words on creating soulful spaces?

A: I think our homes are metaphors for our lives. If you think of every room in your home as a reflection of who you are, you will look at and live in your home in a new way. Think of the spaces in your homes as reflections of your spiritual life.

I love windows and skylights. For me, windows let in light and are a metaphor for how you want to be seen in the world. Having a lot of windows makes the statement that you want people to see you and to know you. Windows also bring in light and shed light on the things that are important to you in your home and in your life.

If we look at our homes and lives as metaphors, we can identify what we like and what we want to change.

Are we cramming clutter in all the corners because we're attached to clutter and relentlessly attached to the past?

If we let go, we'll have space for new things to come into our lives.

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