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# Luxe *for* Less

BY NANCY RONES

With her newly purchased Myers Park condo in need of some design updates, first-time homeowner and Charlotte native Mary Margaret Williford, twenty-seven, devised a plan. She'd invest her whole decorating budget in redoing the kitchen.

As if it were scripted, Charlotte Harris, Williford's high school friend, who is an interior designer with Aida Interiors, lived right upstairs; evenings of casual wine chatter between the two women often turned to Williford's vision for her 1,100-square-foot condo. Williford was intrigued when Harris said that her \$5,000 budget could be stretched to update the kitchen, dining area, and living room. The advantage to having a designer's eye on-site also became clear. "I had old furniture that I was going to just toss, but Charlotte helped me see what was worth saving," says Williford.

In the end, the pair forged a working relationship. "People get scared about using an interior designer because they assume it'll be expensive," says Harris. "Younger designers, like myself, often have lower rates than veterans. I could also relate to Mary Margaret's budget-mindedness, and knew where to find inexpensive versions of fabrics and accessories that she liked in magazines."

Williford, admiring the finished product, says, "Charlotte wound up saving me money and turned my condominium into a real home."

## Luxurious Living Room

Under Harris's direction, the living room that once felt very bare and dorm-like captured comfort and took on a more mature air. "I wanted Mary Margaret's home to feel collected by mixing in one-of-a-kinds, family pieces, and items from her travels," says Harris, whose contacts with local workrooms eased the process in reworking some vintage finds. For versatility, Harris reupholstered the larger pieces in solids, allowing for changeable pillows and throws to dictate style.



**1** Nature in all its glory: a piece of driftwood served as the muse for this custom table snatched up at Luxe Home Couture's annual flea market event. \$550, Luxe Home Couture.

**2** Williford saw her old mustard-colored sofa with rolled arms and canine-chewed legs as trash; Harris saw treasure. "The sofa had good bones," says Harris. "It was less expensive to rework the piece than buy it new." The total cost to rebuild it: about \$1,000. Sofa fabric by Pindler & Pindler, fabric #2273, color A128, \$38.80/yard; pindler.com. Work by H&F Upholstery.

**3** Castaways found in the basement of Williford's parents' home, the two Henredon club chairs were revived with a contemporary green fabric. The material Harris used mimicked one that her client coveted but was about one-quarter the price. Fabric by Dogwood, #2365-7, celery in Pelham texture, \$36.90/yard; dogwoodfabrics.com.

**4** "This fun zebra print rug warms things up," says Harris. "I made sure the size of the rug would skim under all the furniture to help tie everything together." Faux zebra rug, \$620, Luxe Home Couture.

**5** Purchased from a consignment store, the \$43 wooden side table with Asian fretwork offered subtle style until the owner had it lacquered, for a high-gloss—and high-style—finish. Side table, \$43, Southend Exchange; lacquering by Gary Goble, \$150.

# Chic Kitchen

The small galley kitchen was dark, and with basic gray laminate counters and run-of-the-mill oak cabinets, the room lacked any “wow factor.” To infuse the space with more light, Harris called in a contractor, who removed a wooden pegboard for hanging pots that was over the window and blocked some of the rays. He also substantially enlarged the pass-through window between the kitchen and dining area. An antiqued mirror backsplash was installed on the wall above the stove to further play with light and to draw the eye away from the outdated stove. “Designers have the talent to not only highlight certain things, but to also mask what you don’t want to see,” says Harris.

**1** Painting the stock cabinets a grayish beige gave them cachet and complemented the new darker gray walls. Paint by Pratt & Lambert in Lambswool, #11-30.

**2** Out with the brass and in with a rattan light fixture that feels modern and continues the natural theme. Leran Pendant Lamp, \$39.99, IKEA.

**3** A graphic Roman shade draws attention away from pedestrian laminate countertops. It was mounted above the window frame to give the ceiling a visual lift. Patricia fabric by Linda Svensson for IKEA, \$7.99/yard, IKEA.

**4** “Accessories really finish a room,” says Harris. They look “related,” but the two lofty vases were discovered in different stalls of the massive antique mall Sleepy Poet. Amber vase, \$20, amethyst vase, \$22, Sleepy Poet Antiques Mall.



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## Inviting Dining Area

In the dining area, Williford envisioned friends eating appetizers and sipping cocktails. To keep the vibe relaxed, a counter-height butcher-block table—a family piece of Williford’s—and bar stools subbed for a traditional dining table and chairs. Previously, the walls of the dining room were painted a peachy beige—a different shade than what was in the living room and the kitchen. It felt choppy, says Harris. Coating the walls of the dining area as well as the living room and kitchen in the same gray/taupe paint (Benjamin Moore, Kingsport Gray) allows the three spaces to flow together for one overall entertaining area. The single shade also makes the condo feel warmer and bigger.

**1** “Mary Margaret fell in love with this high-end fabric,” says Harris. “It had such great colors, and I knew we could make a big impact by investing in just a couple yards. I covered the seats on the stools and then used the leftover scraps to make pillow fronts for cushions on the couch.” Fabric by Schumacher, Chaing Mai Dragon, \$206/yard; fschumacher.com.

**2** “This farmhouse lantern has a rustic quality, and it’s something that Mary Margaret will likely want to take with her down the road when she transitions to a single-family house,” says Harris. Iron Farmhouse Lantern, \$345, Luxe Home Couture.

**3** In keeping with Williford’s organic style, Harris picked up these unique antler shelves, which were on consignment. \$75 each, Southend Exchange.

**4** At Harris’s instruction, Williford pored over design magazines for inspiration. She ripped out an image of a pricey, brightly colored flat-weave area rug, and Harris tracked down a close equivalent at IKEA to give the space more punch. Hand-woven Alvine Ruta wool rug, \$149, IKEA.



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