

The Great Cover-Up

It's time to get down with 'upcycling'

By JEFF SCHNAUFER
CTW Features

If the economy is keeping you from buying new furniture for your home, maybe it's time to give your old furniture a new identity – or even a new purpose. From South Dakota to South Carolina, designers, inventors and upholstery experts are employing creative tactics to revitalize old furniture and home accessories.

"This is the new rage right now," says Judi Kieffer, president and principal designer of Kieffer Design Group in Boise, Idaho.

A growing number of entrepreneurs and companies have seen the light when it comes to resuscitating furniture and home accessories. Consider the case of frockZ, a Baton Rouge, La.-based company that creates decorative and versatile slipcovers for lampshades.

"Customers love them; we get steady re-orders and lots of rave reviews," says Shelly Dick, a practicing lawyer who started the company with friend and neighbor Wanda Guadamud, a business administrator.

FrockZ can be fitted for either cone or drum-shaped lamps, with colorful floral, geometric and even zebra-striped styles, available for between \$26 and \$34.

After forming in 2007, the company now has frockZ in more than 170 retail outlets across the United States.

"Rumor has it a frockZ will be on the set of 'Desperate Housewives,'" Dick adds.

Of course, slipcovers are not a totally new concept in re-shaping the look of your furniture. Neither is painting. It's the new way to do it that makes news.

Take Simply Spray, for instance. The



The upswing: Combine vetted home-décor problem-solvers, like slipcovers, with fresh, ideas, like upcycling, to take your worn-out furnishings from frumpy to fabulous this weekend.

Lincoln, R.I.-based company has launched a specialty Upholstery Fabric Paint line to encourage "upcycling" of furniture and home-décor accessories with fresh colors that don't harden soft, touchable fabrics such as cotton, linen or canvas. Upcycling entails the use of existing décor, accessories and materials to increase the value, functionality and aesthetic of an otherwise defunct piece of furniture, home décor or other lifestyle item.

Unlike traditional aerosol spray paints, Simply Spray paints are nitrogen propelled, non-toxic, non-flammable and virtually odorless fabric spray paint. Available in nine colors, including Burgundy, Brite Red, Burnt Orange, Plum, Navy Blue, Periwinkle, Hunter Green, Saddle Brown and Midnight Black, the water-based paints will not harm the environment when discarded. It sells for \$12.99 a can.

Of course, you don't have to be an entrepreneur to re-invent your furniture and accessories.

Katie Hixon, president of Katie Hixon Interiors in Columbus, Ohio, says painting is the simplest way to give a piece new life.

"Those old brass candlesticks that are tired and pitted – spray paint them with a flat black paint and then rub some of the new paint off to let the old brass show through," Hixon says.

"You can also go for an Art Deco look and have the pieces sprayed with lacquer for a very dramatic look at a fraction of the cost of new."

For other ideas, Hixon suggests trimming a lamp shade with fringe or ribbon to give it new life. Pillows can be revitalized by applying fancy buttons or a mixture of button styles for a funkier look. You can even cover a pillow with new fabric by using an iron-on fabric binder to make the hem and just cut the fabric wide enough to tie a knot at each corner

Images courtesy of frockZ, istockphoto

without sewing. Hixon says a sofa with loose pillow backs can be made to look almost new with a full make-over of fresh fabric on the pillows instead of reupholstering the entire piece.

Old furniture can also be given a new purpose, experts say.

“With repurposing, the choices are limitless,” says Kerrie L. Kelly, a Sacramento, Calif.-based director of interior design at the Art Institute of California

ples of repurposing furniture because it is one of the most universal pieces, Kelly says.

“I have used dressers in entryways – a tray on top gathers keys and mail, and drawers capture hats, gloves, scarves and mittens,” Kelly says. “Other repurposed ideas include a dresser or buffet in a workroom to store art supplies and in a kitchen for pots and pans. Adding a granite or butcher-block top can make a dresser



Image courtesy of "The Gentle Art of Domesticity" (STC Craft, 2008)

Old faithful: Don't ignore the traditional home-renovation and makeover standbys – crisp, white dining-room chair coverings, a fresh coat of paint and vibrant fabric for a reupholstered sofa or throw pillows always makes an impact.

and author of “Home Decor, A Sunset Design Guide” (Oxmoor House, 2009).

Perhaps the latest furniture piece being given a second life is the giant television armoire, she says. “Modern flat-screen and plasma TVs are turning these armoires into relics, but they don't have to be,” Kelly says.

“So get creative and change the purpose for a functional use in another area of your home. With some adjustments – removing the doors, replacing wood shelves with glass, and adding a mirror as a backdrop – an old armoire can become a wine cabinet. Or it can be repurposed into a home office, with storage for a computer and drawer space for paper and a printer.” Or possibly storage in a spare bedroom for craft and hobby supplies, or for seasonal décor items.

A dresser is one of the best exam-

just right in the kitchen.” Kieffer suggests turning outdated panel doors into tall floor mirrors and adding old doorknobs on the sides as a catchall for purses, scarves and jackets.

A fun-styled old headboard and bed can be repurposed into a bench by making the headboard the back, the two posts and footboard for the front and the two side rails as the bench seat. Even an old window pane with glass can be turned into a bird feeder under a favorite window with mounting chains at a 90-degree angle.

“You can put different seed in each panel,” Kieffer says.

Of course, some furniture just needs a little TLC. Reupholstering can be expensive, though, and should be decided on a case-by-case basis.

“I normally only reupholster quality pieces,” Hixon says. “It is not eco-



Image courtesy of Behr

nomically feasible to redo work on an inexpensive piece, when you can replace it with a brand new one of the same quality for less. The same guidelines apply to wood furniture as to upholstery. If the quality is there, it is worth the investment.”

Of course, you can always consider reupholstering a piece of furniture yourself.

“Doing upholstery isn't easy, but you can save money and there's a great deal of satisfaction in recovering your own furniture,” says Ken Bowles, the Sonoma, Calif.-based editor of Upholster! Magazine Online (www.upholster.com). Before you get started, Bowles says, you should take

a little time to prepare.

“Get some books or videos to help you,” says Bowles, whose Web site has 75 pages of how-to information and a discussion board that is used by both newbies, upholstery pros and people starting their own businesses.

And, perhaps the most important bit of do-it-yourself upholstery advice: Take “before” pictures. Lots of them.

“Take some photos and close-ups before beginning,” Bowles says. “Don't strip a piece down to the frame and expect to remember how it goes back together in a month.”

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