

# STYLE

WEEKLY

## Cover Story: A Fresh Start

How to invigorate your home in a season of new beginnings.

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Shake off the dust and pull out the paintbrush. If ever there's a time of year to energize your décor and try a new look, it's now. Spring doesn't have to involve trendy new purchases, but it might mean adding color and life and looking at your interior with new eyes. Here are suggestions from Richmond designers, decorators and retailers on how to put some snap into your space —not just for now, but for the long run.

### 1. Swath it in Silk

Luxurious, iridescent silk fabrics are hotter than ever, showing up in everything from draperies and pillows to bedding and even upholstery. “They have to be checked,” cautions Madalyn Hopkins, owner of Whetstone Upholstery & Interiors. “But silks can be used to cover sofas that don't get too much wear. The colors are beautiful — French blues, bronzes, yellows, wonderful shades of green. And silks are not just shiny. The raw silks and silk blends can look like linen and are very pretty.” Pictured: Silk fabrics, most from Thailand, come with embroidery, polka-dots, stripes, plaids and many colors. These are from Whetstone Upholstery & Interiors Inc.

### 2. Come to Life

Though the stores are stock-full of silk flowers, who can resist the real thing? “I don't do fake,” says decorator Todd Yoggy about artificial blooms. “Something that's not real gets stale and old and always looks the same except that it's collecting dust. Fresh flowers and orchids can come and go and constantly evolve. There's a whole process there that is an unexpected pleasure in a house. “Animals add life, too, of course. And as Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “The ornament of a house is the friends who frequent it.” So instead of a picture-perfect but never-used interior, open the door and invite people, plants and pets inside.

### 3. Borrow Ideas from Commercial Design

If there's a proving ground for new materials, color schemes, inviting layouts and avant-garde lighting, it is often in public spaces — shops, boutique hotels and restaurants.

Observant travelers will find ideas worldwide. In Richmond, a noteworthy project is Hyperlink Café on West Grace Street, designed by Dawn Robinette of Starch (pictured, right).

Its details and modern materials make it sing, and some could translate into residential

interiors with a decidedly current edge.

### 4. Add the Artists Touch

One-of-a-kind pieces give any space particular personality. “When you buy something that’s an original piece of work, it carries with it the energy and creative thought process that the artist put into it,” says Louise Ellis, an artist and owner of Astra Design Inc. “When you look at it, you can see and sometimes feel the thought process and decisions that this person made. You don’t get that from a piece of plastic.”

Pictured: “Blue Chair” by Michael Fitts, oil painting on found metal, from Astra Design.

### 5. Consider New Colors

Stuck on a palette change? Consider a vibrant textile to give you ideas for combinations, such as these dishtowels from Crate & Barrel. Or look at art for inspiration, or a scene from nature.

“Anytime I’m working with a client who is afraid of color,” says Mark Grovesteen of the Interiors Group, “I suggest getting a quart of the color we’re considering and painting a small section of wall or a board and just living with it for a few days. Colors change with the light three times during the day and the best way to experiment is to live with it.” He suggests Benjamin Moore’s Louisberg Green, Creamy Yellow and Plymouth Brown as current favorites.

## 6. Look underfoot

Grandmother knew when to pull up the Oriental rugs, and the bare-floor look still suits many homes today. If the standard summer-replacement sisal rugs aren't your thing, check out cottons in sherbet shadings. And if you're living with a stained carpet, now's the time to lighten the look with a clean surface underfoot. Consider some of the newest materials in flooring, including cork, bamboo, laminates, even exotic vinyl that mimics leather or snakeskin.

## 7. Change Your Shape

Round is great for plates, but different shapes are fresher and colors are bolder. Cases in point are these square dishes from Crate & Barrel, which set off the curvy red bowl to spice up a springtime table setting. Look for tropical hues, earthy Asian influences and glass pastel pieces to serve up seasonal fare with aplomb. Add bright salad plates to your usual white china and you've got a sweet splash for small investment.

## 8. Finish the Bedroom

**Often it's the last room in the house to be decorated, but Susan Jamieson of Bridget Beari Designs says the bedroom deserves attention. "You probably spend more time there than anywhere," she says, "and it's a space where people spend a lot of time examining what's there. And unlike decorating the public rooms, which flow together and look best in a uniform palette, the bedroom can be a little jewel in the house and something totally different."**

**Jamieson designed her bedroom, below, as a colorful contrast to her mostly neutral décor. Window treatments feature Osborne & Little sheer fabric beneath yellow silk with ruffles. Antiques, paintings and sentimental accessories are personal touches.**

## 9. Clean and Edit

Need it be said? A pristine house, and an organized one, is the best way to welcome spring. That means moving furniture for a deep-down clean, and eliminating piles of paper and clutter. Editing possessions and storing some accessories (or better yet, giving them away) can make a big difference in your outlook.

Kristin Blankenship of Real Simple Organizing says that many of her clients are overwhelmed with stuff and are relieved when they learn methods of dealing with it. "My motto is: You want to live with what you use and what you love," she says. For everything else, there's a consignment store or Goodwill waiting.

## 10. Control the light

New technology makes it easy to put the house in party mode. In their Henrico County home, Tony and Debbie Lovette can operate all of the interior and exterior lighting with a control panel from Total Lighting Control. For entertaining, one touch sets lights at a festive level from driveway to porch to lamps in every room. At bedtime, one touch shuts everything off. Another, more inexpensive option is to install dimmers to make light fixtures more efficient and rooms more appealing.

Pictured: The Lovettes' living room, designed by Mark Grovesteen of The Interiors Group.

## 11. Do the top

A change in ceiling décor can make a major impact. For this dining room, designer Mark Grovesteen of the Interiors Group added a coffered-look Schumacher ceiling paper framed with simple wood trim.

"Doing the ceiling this way gives a small, boxy room some architectural interest and adds an element of surprise and interest," he says. It draws the eye up while adding warmth and color.

Or Grovesteen suggests installing trim and painting the inside area a different tone or color for a tray ceiling effect.

## 12. Bring on the dazzle

Start with squeaky-clean windows and mirrors, then add new sparklers to complete the reflective effect. "This [mirrored} lamp is great," says designer Karen Kelley of Williams & Sherrill, "because it can go in casual or formal settings and give any room a different twist."

Or, she suggests, "you could add great sconces in mirrored styles, or try some fun, beaded wire sprays tucked into flower arrangements or in table settings."

### 13. Punch up the Accents

Accessory shoppers love to find a new accent piece to brighten their interior. A perky pillow, lively lamp, or fabulous vase can add zing in any price range, and couldn't be more effortless. This hand-painted silk pillow from Williams & Sherrill puts flowers in the spotlight.

For a hands-on approach, consider taking a class in fabric painting or mosaic to add personal flavor to your décor while expressing your creative tendencies.

### 14. Change the Angle

Take a cue from fashion designers who cut fabric on the bias to get a better look and fit. For a no-cost option that can make a giant difference in a room, rearrange your furniture on the diagonal. Instead of squaring off everything along the walls, pull out the sofa grouping or bed and angle it in the room. Same for the dining table. In many cases, traffic flow improves and the unexpected space around the edges gives some welcome breathing room.

### 15. Plump it Up

If the old sofa and chairs are looking tired or too wintry, new upholstery or slipcovers can accentuate the positive. Gary Inman of Gary Inman Interiors says he's making just that change in his own house. "Slipcovering is a nice way to make your home more enjoyable," he says. "The silk mohair on my sofa isn't right for summer, but cream duck cloth slipcovers are a practical idea with a great brightening effect."

Upholsterers can reshape arms, plump up saggy cushions or add new fill for a better look and feel. These re-upholstered chairs, from Whetstone Upholstery & Interiors, are trimmed in ball fringe. Such fringe and fabric choices are as plentiful as petals on a tulip poplar.