

Create a look you love in your home

by Maggie_Reed

If you ask Gale Steves what shade of beige you should choose for your flooring, expect a very long pause.

"I never answer that question. I head them toward color," said Steves, decorator and designer.

GALE STEVES - Gales Steves conducts 'Decorating From The Floor Up' workshops for consumers across the county. CNS Photo. BUILD A BRIDGE - Don't let a hall go bare. Warm it up with a runner, suggests Gale Steves, and help bridge the look between rooms. CNS Photo courtesy of Karastan. SET BOUNDARIES - A rug can help define a space. Karastan's 715 Sereno sets the boundaries for a seating area that is cozily placed along a bank of windows. CNS Photo courtesy of Karastan. The main reason people choose beige is for the resale value.

"When you sell, why not let the new owner put in beige and enjoy the colors now," she said.

Steves conducts Karastan's "Decorating From the Floor Up" workshops nationwide.

"I've shopped my way across the country and found ways to make decorating any home as simple as possible," she said. "Now I'm glad I can share these tips, tools and trends with all those who are interested."

Karastan developed the concept of "Decorating From the Floor Up" because no other company was doing it, said Esther Perman, spokeswoman for Karastan.

"People find it special, and it's free. It is very valuable information because it keeps us in touch with consumers."

The workshops are hour-long interactive design seminars on the basics of how to infuse a room with a signature style. Guests are encouraged to bring photos, floor plans, fabric samples, paint chips or whatever they wish to work with.

People need to reaffirm their own taste, Steves said. Basic problems she encounters when people are choosing floor coverings are that they are afraid of color, they don't know how to cope with the shape of their rooms and they worry about fitting in furniture so it looks like it relates.

"The floor is the most neglected place in your home. Your floors comprise 30 percent of your home," the Long Island, N.Y., native said.

In order to find the right fit, Steves said, people need to define their problems, create a floor plan and take a color personality quiz to see what they really like.

"Secretly, we all want to make a statement. It's how we get to that process and through it that matters," she said. "People need to articulate and be prepared to be proactive."

Steves has a couple of rules and tricks to help consumers.

"I have the paper bag trick. People need to make templates of their furniture out of paper bags as well as measuring. This has saved people hundreds of dollars when selecting rugs," she said.

Then there is the sizing rule.

When choosing a rug size for a dining room, add 30 inches per side to table dimensions for chairs with arms and at least 24 inches for chairs without arms. That way everyone will have plenty of room to push his or her chair out to a more conversational position before and after meals without moving off the rug.

Prior to her engagement with Karastan, Steves was editor in chief of Home Magazine for 10 years.

"I had the unique experience of being able to visit readers in their own homes. I learned a tremendous amount as we talked about their hopes and dreams," she said. "My approach was to talk to, not at people ... to make it fun and funny.

"I learned people have the same concerns, no matter where in the country they are or the size of their house. They want good quality and they want it to last."

Above all, Steves said, make it your own.

"Live with what you like. Your place will look great and others will fall in love with it."

Steves currently lives in New York City with her husband, Phil, and their Welsh terrier named Cricket. They also spend time at their weekend house, a renovated barn in Roscoe, N.Y.

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