



*Mitchell Sotka shows what a little rearranging and paring down can accomplish. Shelves flanking the fireplace now have fewer books sharing the space with carefully chosen objets d'art. Two small paintings were hung on the backwall of the bookcases. Green fabric over the windows provides a hint of color and softly filters light. Sotka focuses attention on the mantel using a mirror and proportional decorative pillars and wooden baskets. The couch and end table were moved, creating space for the club chair and ottoman. The space is streamlined, yet cozy.*

▲ before

after



Savvy designers also know one of the easiest, and least expensive, ways to change a room's look is with paint. "Paint can make a big impact in a room," says Diane Murray, an interior designer and owner of Perspectives. "You can even paint your ceiling the same color as your walls to make a small room seem bigger."

But with so many color combinations out there, how do you choose one that's right for you? Easy, says Sotka. "Pick a color from your sofa or throw pillows, and use it to find a shade of paint that will complement your décor."

Of course, paint can do more than add a splash of color. According to Pat Perrino, owner of P. Perrino Custom Homes, paint and plaster can be used to create the illusion of a stone wall. Or layer it on a drywall beam ceiling to mimic the appearance of wooden rafters. Paint can also be used to give wood cabinets a distressed look or to replicate expensive crown molding over doors and windows.

"By getting creative with paint, you can achieve a custom look for a very reasonable price," Perrino says, although he does caution homeowners to seek out professional help for difficult paint jobs.

Another easy way to add color and enhance the look of a

room is with drapery panels and other window accents. Sharon Rosenberg, president of Earl Agin and Associates, suggests adding drapery panels to soften the look of window blinds or hanging a simple, no-sew swag over a decorative drapery rod to create an elegant statement. Mix and match tab-top curtains for a unique look, or add fringe and beading to a panel's hem, creating a one-of-a-kind designer finish.

"The right window treatments can pull a room together and give it a polished look," Rosenberg advises.

She also recommends hanging light-colored curtains during the summer months, saving darker, heavier fabrics for winter. Adding decorative tassels and tie-backs is an inexpensive way to refresh old draperies. Or invest in decorative hardware to dramatically alter the look of a room.

Once the walls are painted and the curtains are hung, it's time