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**Designer Sandra
Lambert helps a
Basking Ridge couple
re-envision their home**



The foyer received a full facelift that matches the home's new elegance. The floors, stairs and rails were sanded and stained darker, while the old wood spindles on the stairs were replaced with decorative iron. Bolder architectural moldings were installed to equal the scale of the space.



Originally outfitted in dark colors and patterns, the great room is now lighter, brighter and more contemporary yet warm and inviting with its skilled use of color, texture and custom furnishings (including a distressed mirror and limestone mantel) that are scaled appropriately for the high ceilings and vast expanses of wall space.



If a plastic surgeon were to tell you that you might be better off moving this bone here or that one there, you'd say that's crazy.

When an interior designer tells you something similar about your home, your initial reaction might be the same. But the bones of a room aren't always well conceived. Or sometimes they've simply outlived their usefulness.

That idea came into play when a Basking Ridge couple hired interior designer Sandra Lambert to give the dated interior of their home a fresh look. She could have worked at the surface level, simply changing colors

and materials and swapping out furnishings. However, the floor plans and structures within certain rooms didn't make sense from practical or aesthetic standpoints.

"I remember [the husband] asking, 'Why are you going to take X number of dollars to make it beautiful, when it's not functional?'" says Lambert, a state-certified interior designer, a professional member of the American Society of Interior Designers and owner of Realm Designs in Somerset County.

Heavier columns were added to the great room, along with a second focal point: a wall covered in marquetry wood that supports a flat-screen television. A 14-foot-long painting above the columns provides a splash of color in the mostly monochromatic space.



Such a full-fledged rethinking of a home might not make sense for clients who, like this couple, have children who are grown and gone. However, they are planning ahead for the day when they have grandchildren and the house becomes a hub for family gatherings, Lambert says.

MORE THAN A FACELIFT

It took a little convincing to help the homeowners see the greater potential in each room. An early project that brought them on board with Lambert's

vision was the redesign of the master bathroom. The original plan was simply to change the finishes. But Lambert presented an alternative: They could strip the room of its compartmentalized and maze-like layout, moving around plumbing and fixtures. A built-in tub deck that gobbled floor space would be replaced with a freestanding tub that stood at an angle. That would allow them to install a grand shower with two showerheads, a rain head and body jets; two sinks; a custom makeup table; and a separate toilet room. Lambert also captured unused space



Left: Lambert convinced the owner to reclaim space from a hallway and a seldom-used butler's pantry to rearrange the kitchen floor plan. The result is a far more functional and expansive room that accommodates two islands (one for prep, one for serving) and an ample table.

Above: In changing the floor plan, Lambert was able to move the range, sink and appliances out of the flow of traffic. Guests can easily pass from the great room through the kitchen and into the dining room without stepping into the cook's workspace.

in the attic to create a coffered ceiling that increased the height of the room, adding light, air and luxury.

Agreeing to such drastic changes in the bathroom gave the homeowners the trust in Lambert and the confidence to proceed with an entirely different concept for the kitchen, she says. One of the biggest concerns with the old kitchen was traffic flow. "The path behind the cook was always crossed by people going to the dining room," Lambert says. She visualized a very different and much larger room where the essential functions were grouped together and away

from passersby. The concept required claiming a hallway, closing off access to the backyard from the kitchen, demolishing a butler's pantry and relocating utilities. It was a tough sell. "Once they wrapped their minds around it, however, they saw the benefit," she says.

No load-bearing walls were involved, so they were able to move ahead without an architect. The new floor plan captured about nine feet of space, which allowed for two islands (one with a butcher-block top just for the cook and a serving island made of





The dining room, which won an American Society of Interior Designers award, has a European café-like flair with its rich wall covering, high wainscoting and mix of seating. The custom cherry table expands to accommodate 16.

granite that looks like Carrera marble) and a generously sized kitchen table. Twenty-four-inch rollout units housed within the cabinetry offer more shelf space than the original butler's pantry, which was only 12 inches deep.

IN SCALE

Throughout the home, Lambert made other non-structural but necessary changes to anchor her designs. In the foyer, for instance, she added larger architectural moldings that were more appropriate for the scale of the space. She did the same in the great room, adjacent to the kitchen, installing larger columns in the opening between the rooms and scaling up the size of furnishings and accessories. In the master bedroom, she redesigned the tray ceiling to eliminate some awkward angles, adding to the room's newfound restfulness.

All these changes to the home's envelope — the bones, if you will — support an overall vision that is lighter, more modern and more elegant than the dark and dated décor that was installed in the early



Above: Now that their children are grown, the owners wanted a quiet, romantic space for themselves. Their luxurious master suite is still a favorite family spot for television viewing with its comfy club chairs and ottomans.

Right: This mahogany armoire was custom-made to fit a nook in the master bedroom where a dresser once stood.



1990s. The great room probably best exemplifies the home's revived outlook. Lambert gave it a sophisticated, salon feeling, replacing a wood fireplace mantel with limestone, and swapping out an undersized tapestry for a custom, antiqued mirror that is scaled in proportion to the high ceilings and the large windows. The palette is understated, but it benefits from rich patterns and textures in the materials and furnishings.

Luxurious details abound, especially in the dining room, which won a Design Excellence Gold Award from the New Jersey Chapter of ASID. Lambert incorporated a variety of seating to create the ambience of a European café. The walls are covered in silk grass cloth, to which Lambert added an inset mirror, thick moldings and wainscoting painted with a multi-layer finish that resembles crushed leather. The furniture, which includes two sideboards and buffet hutches, is a mix of pieces from about six manufacturers.



Left: The master bathroom is earthy, natural and timeless in design. The footprint of the room is the same, but it was expanded visually by adding a coffered ceiling and replacing a cumbersome tub deck with a freestanding tub set at an angle.

Above: The new floor plan in the master bathroom allowed for a grand shower stall complete with rain head and body jets. A custom vanity with a burl inlay and marble top looks like fine furniture.

As with everything else in the home, “we didn’t take the easy route,” Lambert says. But the result was worth it. **DM**

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SOURCES Overall: design, Sandra Lambert of Realm Designs Inc. in Somerset County; general contractor, Chet Mosco of Majestic Homes in Westfield; engineer, Ben Horten in Randolph; audio/visual equipment, Bravo AV Consulting in Far Hills. Foyer: console, Charleston Forge in Boone, North Carolina; rug and stair

runner, David Anthony Carpets in Midland Park; floor refinishing, Kelly Carpets in Cedar Knolls; wall covering, Ralph Lauren in New York City and Antonina Vella through Seabrook Wall-coverings in Memphis; lamp, Eurofase in Richmond Hill, Ontario. **Great room:** sofa, TCS Designs in Hickory, North Carolina; fabrics, Michael Jon in Los Angeles and Kravet in Bethpage, New York; tufted chairs, Sam Moore in Bedford, Virginia; television console, Bausman & Co. in Ontario, California; iron side tables, Anvil Fireside in Mississauga, Ontario; chandelier, Dana Creath Designs in Newport Beach, California; sconces, Circle Lighting in Somerville; wall covering, Maya Romanoff in Skokie, Illinois; arm chairs, Hooker Furniture in Jamestown, North Carolina; custom mantel, Architectural Supply in Hous-

Right: The guest bedroom was transformed by placing a slubby silk curtain in front of a set of windows to create the effect of a wall. This allowed a new orientation for the bed, which opened floor space for furniture.

Below: A thoughtful redesign has guests bypassing the first-floor powder room in favor of this guest bathroom.



ton; recliner, Leathercraft in Conover, North Carolina. **Kitchen:** stone countertops, Bridgewater Marble & Granite in Bound Brook; tile backsplash, Tuscany Tile in Warren; cabinets, Fieldstone Cabinetry; fabrics, Robert Allen in New York City and Maxwell in Vancouver, British Columbia; upholstery, Masterpiece Furniture in Middlesex; table, Hekman in Zeeland, Michigan; chandelier, Minka in Corona, California; appliances, Sub-Zero through See-More Appliance in Metuchen; butcher block, Signature Custom Woodworking in King, North Carolina. **Dining room:** console, Hekman; table, Bausman & Co.; artwork, through Realm Designs; area rug, David Anthony Carpets; artwork framing and installation, L.A. Frame in Green Brook; decorative painting, Wall FX Studio in Sparta. **Master bedroom:** built-in armoire, Old Biscayne Designs in Americus, Georgia; fabrics, Pollack & Associates and Castel, both in New York City, and B. Berger through Duralee in Bay Shore, New York; consoles, Millcreek Furniture in Salt Lake City; window treatments, Realm Designs and Sew What's New in Pittstown; chair and ottoman, Pearson in High Point, North Carolina; headboard, Christopher Guy in New York City. **Master Bathroom:** makeup mirror, Remcraft in Miami; plumbing and fixtures, Hardware Designs Inc. in Fairfield; custom cabinetry, Realm Designs. **Guest room:** furniture, Stanley Furniture in High Point, North Carolina; custom framed mirror, Tim Houting in Moravian Falls, North Carolina; bedding, Wildcat Territory in Long Island City, New York; bench, Bernhardt in Lenoir, North Carolina, with fabric by Nobilis in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. **Guest bathroom:** sconce, Kichler through Circle Lighting; fabrics, RM Coco in Cape Girardeau, Missouri; Kravet and Lee Jofa; wall covering, TRI-KES in Dallas.

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