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A Little Bit Of Everything

A South Florida fundraiser takes a pair of neighboring homes, each for sale, and showcases dozens of contrasting styles.

March 23, 2008 | By Charlyne Varkonyi Schaub, South florida sun-sentinel

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FORT LAUDERDALE---You might think there's nothing good about the slump in the housing market.

It's bad news if you are trying to sell your house, but it's great news for charities trying to find homes for their fundraising designer show house.

The Broward County Chapter of the American Red Cross is featuring two houses across from each other on the Las Olas Isles in Fort Lauderdale. They are open through today.

Not only do the homeowners get a tax deduction for their charitable contribution, they also gain exposure to a lot of potential buyers and free upgrades such as painting and wallcoverings that will make the house more desirable. If the homeowners want to pitch in some of their money for improvements, they get them at a discount. Furnishings are removed when the show house ends.

The houses, each just under 6,000 square feet, feature 35 spaces transformed by interior and landscape designers. The traditional home at 146 Nurmi Drive is on the market for about \$4 million, and the contemporary home at 153 Nurmi Drive is on the market for about \$3 million.

These houses have something for everyone. There are plenty of ideas for those who can hire interior designers to create their dream home. But there are also a lot of great ideas that can be translated for those on a budget.

CONTEMPORARY HOUSE

Tranquil retreat

Sharon Binkerd, Jennifer Erstein, Myriam Payne and Geesji Viguie of Interiors by Decorating Den -- Broward's Designing Women created one of my favorite rooms. The inspiration was the Kravet wallpaper from Lee Jofa in the Design Center of the Americas. Steal their great idea for troublesome architectural features: Cover them with draperies. They hid the unattractive mirrored closet walls with draperies suspended from a ceiling track using easy-to-move ball bearings. The art is an enlarged photo by Joseph Lapeyra. It is suspended from the soffit with hardware that has levelers to easily straighten the art even when the ceiling isn't straight. The room is also eco-friendly with cork flooring, a papyrus floor lamp and Benjamin Moore's low-VOC Aura paint in Mother Earth and Dark Walnut.

Underwater delight

The Florida room is designed to look like an indoor reef. Enrique and Roberto Blanco of E Coleccion in Wilton Manors created a restful oasis divided into three areas -- conversation, dining and relaxing -- with light blue seaweed-like leather area rugs. The room's four columns are covered in a mosaic of dancing jellyfish designed by the Blancos and created by Todd Michael. The lightweight sea-colored window treatments move with the air conditioning and allow a view of the pool and canal while providing privacy. The room's focal point, which resembles an undersea creature, is a Chihuly-style, art-glass lamp composed of Italian Murano glass.

Small room, large design

Barbara Murtaugh-Nash and her team at Blue Sky Interiors in Coral Springs took on a challenge with the small dining room. To reduce the room's height, they ran the brown-and-white wallpaper horizontally instead of vertically. The room is also brought down to size with the antique table that is topped with 48-inch-high lamps and a pair of 1940s vintage prints of egrets and flamingos in mirrored frames. They covered an unneeded pass-through to the kitchen so they could balance the room with framed panels of padded silk fabric. Instead of a medallion, the chandelier is surrounded with four framed mirrors suspended from the ceiling.

TRADITIONAL HOUSE

Duplicating history

Artist Dana Donaty of Dana Donaty Designs in Delray Beach worked with Monica Joyce of Interiors by Joyce in Pompano Beach to create this elegant room. Donaty used the camel bone replica of an arch in the Alhambra Castle in Spain as the inspiration piece for 12-foot panels that flank the fireplace. She duplicated the form on resin board and sent it to a workman to cut out the shapes before she hand-painted the design and backed it on another board. You can use the same idea with painted or fabric panels to reduce the museum-like feeling if your home has high ceilings.

Kitchen makeover

Tired of all the wood cabinets in your kitchen but don't have the money to do them over? Take a tip from Patti Brooks King of Elegant Interiors of Boca Raton. King was told that she couldn't permanently change the kitchen cabinetry, so she removed some of the doors to open up the room and add color with accessories.

Instant art

Kendall Marcelle, M.J. Shepard and Jennifer Townsley of Kendall Marcelle Design Associates in Fort Lauderdale were not allowed to paint or change the dark wood paneling in the office/library, but they wanted to lighten the look of the room. Wallpaper in a damask style was attached to a foam-core board and surrounded with a lightweight frame. Marcelle says you can also cover the board with batting and use a staple gun to attach fabric. Because they didn't want to damage the walls, the frames were attached with fine finish nails. The two frames behind the desk are given more pizzazz with the addition of large sconces. Instead of candles, they are lit with battery-powered candles.