

# MAJOR ROOM MAKEOVERS

## ON A TEENY, TINY BUDGET

Convince your friends that you hired a fancy decorator—and possibly won the lottery—with genius tips from *Good Morning America* anchor and thrifting savant Lara Spencer. Her new book, *I Brake for Yard Sales*, shows you how to turn castoffs into gold.



Turn to page 156 to see where this sign ended up

Welcome to my double life: all glammed up interviewing A-list celebs on a red carpet one Sunday, and getting down and dirty at a flea market the next. I love my career in television and have been at it for a long time. I have worked in local news in

Chattanooga, TN, and New York City, and on *Antiques Roadshow*, *The Insider*, and *Good Morning America*. I have also been moonlighting as a decorator and antiques business owner for almost a decade. When the cameras stop rolling, there's nothing I'd rather be doing than sale-ing. It's all about three words: *rescue, recycle, reinvent*. Found treasures add personality to your home and ensure total one-of-a-kindness. It's creative, it's thrifty, and it's chic!



◀ **Hate the color? Paint it!**  
I put some spring back in the step of this \$40 chest by painting it a glossy Kelly green. Then I had a mirror cut (which doesn't cost much!) to hide the top, since there's just no painting over Formica.

▲ **Use dining chairs anywhere.**  
These chairs (\$80 for two!) had brown fabric and legs when I set eyes on them at a flea market. I re-covered them in blue velvet, painted the legs white, and used them to flank the dresser. Pairs are great for that.

ALL PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL MCNAMARA

▲ **As long as it looks pricey...**  
...who cares if it's not? These '80s vases look like they'd cost a fortune. Also, the octagonal mirror was naked pine when I bought it at a thrift store. Now it looks expensive with a coat of shiny black paint.



It's too matchy-matchy if all the shapes in the room are the same. Mix things up!



### Get real art

Yes, you can afford original paintings and drawings. Proof: I bought the still life above for \$75! The only rule about art is that you have to love it. (And if your new love is signed, Google the artist to see what the work typically goes for before you buy it.)

### ◀ Create more space with a mirror.

It's a cheap way to open up a room. Just be careful about the scale—there's nothing worse than a small mirror hanging over a large table.

### ◀ See past the problems.

This amazing Lucite chair was a thrift-shop find. When I bought it, the cushion's foam was exposed and crumbling. All it took was \$10 of fabric and \$20 in new foam to make it fabulous in a vintage-y way.

### ◀ Pick one jumping-off point.

So many decorators use rugs as the starting element in a room, but I usually begin with a fabric I love or colors pulled from an artwork. Most of the shades in this room—purples, pinks, blues—also appear in the framed print, at left, that I found in a consignment shop. It was buried under a stack of gross pictures, but it made me smile. And you know what? It still does!

### Welcome to the deal circuit!

Knowing where to shop is the first step to finding gorgeous stuff.

- Charity thrift shops have great prices and benefit-worthy causes, and tend to hold pretty regular business hours. Plus, donations often come from well-to-do families, so you'll find high-quality stuff.
- Sales at private homes (yard, sidewalk, garage, and estate sales) usually have the best prices but require a lot of sifting through piles. Bring a list of what you're looking for so you don't get overwhelmed. You can find these sales by searching the classifieds, Craigslist, and estatesales.net (which will give you a map of nearby deals!).
- Flea-market pricing is usually slightly higher than yard and estate sales, because you're paying for a more curated experience, where the dealer has done some of the picking-through for you. There also tends to be more variety than at a private sale, because there are so many sellers.
- Auctions have a rep for being holly-toity, but that couldn't be further from the truth. If anything, they're packed with designers and antique dealers who know that art, rugs, and more can be had for a steal at an auction. (I once got a \$3,000 couch for \$200!) But be warned: There are no backsties. Once you've bid, you're in. So if you raise your paddle and the hammer goes down, the "I was just waving at my friend across the room" trick isn't going to fly. Put on your big-girl pants and pay up!

“I found these Picasso lithographs for \$35 and have hung them in a place of honor ever since!”

### What to look for (or ignore)

First and foremost: Turn a blind eye to fabric. If you want to score amazing bargains, look at furniture for great lines and structure (and get past that cheesy '70s upholstery). If a piece has terrific style, who cares about an ugly spackle wood finish? That's easy to cover up with pretty paint.

Of course, not *all* pieces are salvageable. If you shake it and it's unstable, if the arms or legs are loose, or if parts have been glued back on, leave it. And also—look out for bedbugs! Always inspect cushions for little black stains (bedbug poop) and the bugs themselves (you can see them—they look like apple seeds).

### Before you buy: Negotiate!

Dealers are shocked if you don't, and it's part of the fun. Here are a few tips for newbies:

- **Cash is king.** Your negotiating power goes up exponentially when you can fork over bills.
- **Kill 'em with kindness.** Say, "Is this the best you can do on this?" with a smile.
- **Don't point out the bad things about an item.** The dealer knows it's flawed; that's probably why she's selling it.
- **But also, don't go on and on about how badly you want it!** Same goes for raving about the great price. *Hello.*
- **Another tactic:** Use actual numbers. Say there's a \$25 item—ask if they'd accept \$20.
- **Or, try adding a second piece and asking for a better deal.** Sometimes the more things you add, the more discount you get.
- **For larger items, see if they'll throw in free delivery.** It's worth a shot!



Bedroom formula: two lamps + two side tables + upholstered headboard + monogram

### Keep it balanced

As you can see from these pages, I'm a big fan of symmetry. When things are a little askew, the room feels tilted to me. Flanking a bed with side tables and gorgeous lamps—or bookending a chest with two chairs—is a formula anyone can use, and it always works. If you can't find a pair of something, try two items that are similar in scale.

#### ◀ Match your nightstands.

I searched for famous furniture designer Milo Baughman on eBay and scored this pair of nightstands in my bedroom for \$135 apiece. They retail for three times that! I have the eBay app on my phone so I can always keep track of my bids.

#### ◀ Go for funky lamps.

I top them with white paper shades for a clean look that shows off the base. Always, always check the wiring on old lamps, and if it feels crunchy, get it rewired. A lamp isn't a bargain if it burns your house down.

#### ◀ Wallpaper one wall.

It's not a big investment or commitment, and it's an easy way to snap up a room. Another option is wall decals—they're super-fun... and cheap. I love paisley designs, but do whatever feels right for your space.

#### ◀ Personalize your bedding.

An embroidered monogram on the bedspread ties the look together in a chic, personal way. You can also add it to pillows.

#### ◀ Detail the headboard.

I added chrome tacks to my daughter's headboard to jazz it up. They come in adhesive strips, so you don't have to nail them in individually. The lines are perfect, and most cost just \$1 per yard!



5 readers will win a copy of Lara's book, *I Brake for Yard Sales*. To enter, go to [redbookmag.com/freebies](http://redbookmag.com/freebies). See page 174 for details. And submit photos of your own D.I.Y. home project at [redbookmag.com/DIYproject](http://redbookmag.com/DIYproject)—one winner will get a free consultation with Lara!



Even my rescue dogs are secondhand!



*Can you recover it?*

There are some reupholstery projects you can do yourself. Slip seats (chairs you can pop the seat out of) are easy; all you need is a staple gun and fabric. But hire a professional for elaborate pieces like couches and club chairs. Get three quotes, and if it's still too pricey, have just the back or cushion re-covered for an eclectic look.

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◀ **Think outside the trunk.**

I turned this \$100 metal trunk from a thrift shop into a table. I didn't have to do anything to it!

◀ **Look for a sign.**

The graphics, shapes, and textures of industrial pieces like this old sign make amazing art and add a little masculine, throw-up-your-feet feel.

◀ **Don't forget the extras.**

Keep 'em quirky and inexpensive. See that roulette wheel I found at a yard sale? It's a great conversation piece. I'm all about fun animal accents too—hence the ceramic owl and the pair of black Foo dogs. You can never go wrong with a Foo dog. Trust me.

◀ **Consider Lucite.**

Because they're clear as can be, Lucite tables are a great way to add functionality without cluttering your space.

▲ **Try a sleek-looking couch.**

I found the single-cushion sofa I'm sitting on here for \$160 at a thrift shop. The fabric was the worst shade of rust damask when I bought it—but the shape was spectacular. I covered it in velvet and it looks like new. I'm obsessed!

▲ **Have fun with patterns.**

When I found these curvy, modern takes on classic wing chairs on eBay, they looked like the photo on the right. So I had them redone in plaid (I'm mad for plaid), and they fit in perfectly.

▲ **Check the back.**

The 18th-century lithographs you can see above were another huge find. They were in an old dusty box but had beautiful frames. Sure enough, when I flipped them over, there was a label from a famous London framer. Gotta love a good garage sale!

“ Figure out what makes you happy and go for it! ”



**WANT MORE?** Find a zillion other thrifting and decorating tips in Lara's book, *I Brake for Yard Sales*, out April 1.