

Improvising on high-style advice from the experts

Practical tips put stylish interiors within your budget

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Looking at coffee table books about interior design has two possible effects. It either energizes you with ideas or stultifies you with intimidation. "Orange living room walls — do I dare? A silk-covered chaise longue; I could never afford that."

With its Who's Who roster of design mavens, *Designing Women: Interiors by Leading Style Makers* by Margaret Russell — editor in chief of Elle Decor magazine — could intimidate. Get over it. You might not be able to pay for 18th century paintings of Venetian dogs (a fave of Suzanne Rheinstein). And you might consider sending your sheets out to be washed and pressed a bit much (Holly Hunt's indulgence). Still, practical advice abounds in this book. Study the images by master photographer John M. Hall to glean color combinations and furniture selection and arrangement. Then imitate or improvise.

You can do this. You've watched Martha Stewart, right? She wrote the foreword to this book, by the way. Stewart has been around long enough that you've stopped feeling inadequate and figured out how to adapt her ideas to your own life. Do the same thing with *Designing Women* (Stewart, Tabori & Chang, \$40). The layout of the book makes the process easy. Each of the 16 profiles concludes with a list of tips. Here are the 10 best, no matter your budget or style.

Don't be timid with color. Maintain a balance among whites and neutrals and more intense hues.

Elevate the humble. Something as simple as vintage button cards from the '30s can be framed and hung on the wall.

Buy less. Make sure it is good.

Use accessories that have meaning and tradition. They give a room its soul.

Choose simple materials. Marble, stainless steel and even concrete age with grace.

Set the table with panache. Mix patterns the way you might mix antique and modern furniture , and add unexpected accessories.

Rooms shouldn't be too precious. You should be able to *really* live in them.

Make some changes. Decor shouldn't be static and should reflect changes in your life. Paint the walls, move things from room to room. Slipcover a chair.

Don't take yourself too seriously. A sense of humor in decor goes a long way.

KISS: If you go simple, you can't go wrong.

The list of featured designers in the book is Suzanne Rheinstein, Holly Hunter, Tricia Guild, Ellen O'Neill, Muriel Brandolini, Catherine Memmi, Kathryn Ireland, Liz O'Brien,

Celia Tejada, Sheila Bridges, Mariette Himes Gomez, Anita Calero, Madeline Stuart, Victoria Hagan, Page Goolrick and Charlotte Moss.