

# SOTA Idea House 2018: See the space, then get the look



Sharon Kimmerle, of Sharon Kimmerle Interior Design in Allentown, was inspired to create distinctive pieces for the living room and reception area using vintage and repurposed materials. (Photo by Sharon Kimmerle)

By **Shannon Sigafoos**  
Of The Morning Call

APRIL 27, 2018, 3:38 PM

**W**hy is there a crushed velvet deep blue couch in the middle of this sitting room? This upcycled coffee table is made from wood pallets? Whose idea was this? How do I get this look?

If you walk away from this year's SOTA (Society of the Arts) Idea House at HoudenHAL thinking thoughts similar to this, then the interior designers have done their jobs. These same designers would also happily work with you to bring their ideas to life inside of your living space.

A design house (also referred to as a show house or idea house) is meant to showcase the talents of designers and spark the imaginations of visitors looking for inspiration — or a new decorator. It's also a place to spend an afternoon with friends and dish about the rooms. Things like: I never knew I needed a red wall in my own bathroom! Or: Shouldn't every busy parent have a laundry chute installed from their children's rooms into their

laundry room? Chances are, as you tour the SOTA House, you'll find something that either suits your own style or convinces you to broaden your design tastes.

In the Lehigh Valley, the SOTA Show House has become a biennial fundraising tradition for the Allentown Art Museum. This year's house — at 9905 Old Route 22 in Breinigsville, and open for tours through May 19 — advocates energy-efficient building and displays a wide variety of innovative room designs. The interior designers who volunteered their time and talents had the task of cultivating spaces that reflect their own personalities, appeal to current design trends and don't distract from the natural beauty and sustainability of the home. At the heart of their work, as well, is drawing the eyes of potential clients.

"Once you see your space, your imagination goes crazy," says Wandra Cain of WW Design in Macungie. Cain, along with fellow principal designer Willy Byrd, was responsible for overhauling the master bathroom. "We wanted to create a focal space. The color red was our inspiration and our whole theme was a global modern urban style. When you first walk into that room, your vision is industrial or contemporary mid-century. We wanted something to reflect those images. Red is strong, radiant and full of energy. We wanted that space to be full of energy."

Amy Bloom Coleman, of SpunDesign in Bethlehem, brings her artistic vision to life in the upstairs loft lounge, loft bedroom and nook at the top of the staircase.

"When I see a space, the entire vision comes within 15 to 30 seconds. I just kind of pan the room and say, 'That's going to go here,' or 'this is what I think is going to go there.' I don't even put it on paper," Coleman says. "My assistant, Sienna Proetto, came up with a painting that ties everything together. Maybe an inch or so of her huge painting has a tiny bit of red in it. I brought in a really cool rug that had a splash of red in it. You don't want to match everything. You just want to do opposite colors and once it's done, you take a tinge of color that's catching your eye on one side and bring it over to the other."

Other designers find a way to enhance the visual appeal of a room by keeping it simple, or enriching the space around permanent features of the house that they cannot change.

"My inspiration came from the fireplace and the fact that the entire home is so energy efficient. I wanted to showcase more raw natural beauty," explains Kelly Dunn of Kelly Dunn Home in Coopersburg. "I've brought in a nice wood sculpture that's made from trees here in Pennsylvania. I wanted to bring the outdoors in and go back to basics and earthy, but there are also pops of old rich colors. I put in a really rich earthy gray that makes the fireplace look amazing. I wanted nature and sustainability to speak for itself and show people you don't have to do too much to make a profound design statement.

The first rule of design is that everyone's tastes are different. The fun part about visiting a design house — for both designers and the public — is that while everyone is zeroed in on aesthetics, that's just scratching the surface of what a designer can add to a home. Designers, decorators and home stagers go beyond cosmetic concerns to ensure that a space feels harmonious through and through, from the floor plan to the accessories lining the shelves and the last fluff of each pillow artfully arranged on a sofa. It takes a trained eye and a creative

mindset to devise solutions that you might have never imagined, and attention to the smallest details helps spaces look polished and pulled together.

“We love to create spaces that feel classic and stylish but also very unique,” says Lauren Farrell of Kemble Richards, an online shopping destination for one-of-a-kind vintage pieces and soft home furnishings. Farrell accessorized the SOTA House’s upstairs hall space. “Antiques play an important role in the personalization of a home, as they allow you to create special details that can’t be duplicated because each piece has its own unique history. The key is layering in the antiques with your existing décor so your room doesn’t stray too much into feeling like a museum.”

Sharon Kimmerle, of Sharon Kimmerle Interior Design in Allentown, was also inspired to create distinctive pieces for the living room and reception area using vintage and repurposed materials.

“I volunteer for Divine Resale, a nonprofit store on Hamilton Street. When a Southwestern Dhurrie rug donation came in, the inspiration struck,” explains Kimmerle, who recently took a construction mission trip with Navajo Indians. “My mind started planning. In my business, slipcovers are a good option. At Divine Resale, we get a lot of jeans. Why not use denim in a slipcover? The room came together beautifully.”

Touring design homes can often be a catalyst for change in your own home, particularly when you see a designer’s work that is a good match for your personal style. As you tour HoudenHAL, take note of exactly what draws your attention. Though good designers and decorators are flexible enough to make the switch from urban apartment to rustic farmhouse to old world craftsman-style without missing a beat, all have a fundamental aesthetic that remains consistent throughout their work.

Be sure to pick up cards and brochures as you explore the SOTA house. Keep mental notes about a design that resonated with you; you can use this, along with other samples you collect prior to contacting a designer, to articulate your desired look in your own home. Most of all, don’t be intimidated at the thought of hiring a pro. Their job is to turn your home into a haven that is uniquely yours.

“We have a consultation with them just to see what they like. It’s not about our style. It’s about what makes them feel comfortable,” says Cain. If there’s one thing I’ve learned, it’s that it’s the client’s house. We come into a person’s home and see what’s already there. One of our best talents is blending. You don’t have to change your style. We blend in and pick out things in their home to make it work for them.”

The other designers involved in the SOTA House echo the sentiment that the customer’s personal tastes always take precedence.

“I offer free evaluations. I’ll come to the space, talk with them, and really get to know the client. I’m very keen on personality. I like to mirror people’s personalities in their room,” says Dunn. When I talk to them, I hear what their styles are. We’re all on Pinterest and all on Houzz, and I see what they’re looking at. Those are all indicators of what they’re drawn to. I’ll walk through that process with them and get an idea of color scheme. I’ll talk to them about certain colors and read their responses. I use that and set up a retainer for 10 hours, because

that's usually how long it takes me to put a full design together. From there, I go and create a floor plan and a layout, and I bring in fabrics, rugs, furniture, décor, wall art, lighting — everything they would need. Then I present it to them.”

With plenty of experience in staging homes as well as remodeling them, Coleman offers clients two different options for fulfilling their makeover wishes.

“I go out and see their space as a consult. For \$195, I can tell them what to do in their space — where to go or what to buy. Or, they pay me \$125 per hour to do it for them,” Coleman explains. “Usually a job may take me from 8 to 12 hours. People will calculate that in their heads to be about \$1,000 to \$1,500 without materials. They'll tell me to do what I want. Nothing is ever a challenge for me. It's just fun. The inspiration comes to me right there, and that's what they're paying me for.”

HoudenHAL not only highlights the abilities of some of the region's most talented design professionals, but shows what kind of magic is possible when they work collectively for a common cause. When you visit the 2018 SOTA Idea House, you'll have the chance to see how it has been transformed by creative minds who are all available to lend an inspiring hand to your home.

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