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Extreme Faux Makeover

Dilapidated Arlington house gets new look thanks to volunteer artists.

By Katherine Mann
April 5, 2006

For Arlington residents looking to spruce up their homes without breaking the bank, "The House that Faux Built" is a chance to see some creative faux finishing techniques used by local artists to beautify a 1940's brick colonial. Only faux, paints and plasters were used to make this fixer-upper into a bright and airy abode.

"Every room has one major artist as a room captain," explains Adrienne van Dooren, the project chair. Internationally renowned artists volunteer their time for the project. Ticket proceeds will go towards building a new home for a family made homeless by last year's hurricanes, thus, corporate sponsors provided many of the materials used. Additionally, birdhouses made by some of the artists will be sold on Ebay to benefit Noah's Wish, an organization that helps animals left homeless by the hurricanes.

In addition to selling tickets for tours of the house, it can be rented out for private functions for \$500 between April 15 and May 15 and the checks will go to Habitat for Humanity. The house will be open to the public between May 15 and June 15. But the house itself will not ultimately be sold. "We want it to be a museum for faux," explains van Dooren, owner of Creative Enterprises in Alexandria.

Jne' Medellin, the room captain for the basement bath, created a Greek-themed room. She used Venetian plaster provided by Behr to create murals of Greek women, and deliberately used colors provided by the manufacturer, "not custom colors," she says, to demonstrate what can be done inexpensively.

Julie Miles of J. Miles Studios and husband Brad Duerson finished the Gentleman's room in a walnut woodgrain using oil paint. Miles painted the six-and-a-half-foot ceiling black, which "brings it up," says van Dooren. Duerson provided the chair and floor molding in the room, and "kept me fed," says Miles. While she admits jokingly that "the faux house tested our marriage a little," she says it was a great experience. "It was excellent to meet some industry standard people."

In Chicago, a sister project is taking place, which is the renovation of the Church of the Atonement. Tania Seabock of Seabock Studios has volunteered her time to work on both projects. She painted a ceiling mural in the dining room using micro-mosaics. She's also working on a religious icon for the church using egg tempera, an old world technique. "I've done most of the work at home," she says, but she's definitely had some late nights at the faux house.

Once both projects are completed, van Dooren will publish a book showcasing before-and-after photos, titled *The House That Faux Built: How to Transform Your Home From Shabby to Showplace Using Paints, Plasters and Creativity*. The book will use examples from the house and the church to teach readers how to redecorate on a shoestring. A portion of the book proceeds will also go towards homeless hurricane victims.

The estimated cost of the work, with every surface of the house being covered, is about \$100,000, according to van Dooren. "There's a Trompe L'oeil bathrobe in the bathroom that's museum quality art," explains van Dooren. "But stenciling is a lot cheaper to do." Of course, the average homeowner wouldn't choose to redo every surface, but only a select few. The artists took advantage of all the space to cover so that they could really show off faux techniques.

While the artists get a chance to showcase their work, they also get to educate the public about faux finishing. "A lot of the products weren't easily available before," explains Medellin. "The ones used in the house are very cutting edge." But how long do the finishes last? "I use several coats of varnish, and UV protection if something is exposed to sunlight," says Seabock, explaining

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how faux finishing can last for years.

Van Dooren was able to gather artists from the US, England, France and Rome to participate. You might think that such industry figures might bump heads, but "amazingly, it went great," says Miles. The artists enjoyed working with and learning from each other, and are pleased to do something that benefits others.



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