

Problem **Solvers**

In the first in a regular series, our experts help you transform your interiors



Above: Jeffrey Bilhuber transformed the Carltons' dining room; the walls are painted in Wainscot #55 from Farrow & Ball, the sideboard is from Crate & Barrel, and the tableware is from Calvin Klein Home. The curtain on the far window remains drawn, blocking an unfortunate view of a neighbor's garage while still allowing light to filter through. Below: The dining room before the change; the plaid fabric masks what is really a round piece of plywood.

Dan and Lori Carlton had been living in their Victorian house in a New York suburb for four years and had spent all that time making costly and time-consuming renovations, including the removal of a stucco facade, an addition, and wall repairs. But the interiors remained hopelessly unfinished: in the dining room, a fabric-draped piece of plywood served as a table, and a fireplace was missing a mantel. Upstairs, a garretlike guest room-cum-home-office was as cluttered and undefined as its proportions were awkward.

Assistance came from designers Jeffrey Bilhuber, and partners Christina Murphy and Celerie Kemble, courtesy of *House Beautiful*, who selected the Carltons for the relaunch of "Designer Challenge," a column that will match readers with decorators to solve design dilemmas. The enterprise >

BEFORE





Clockwise from left: Celerie Kemble, Christina Murphy, Dan and Lori Carlton, and Jeffrey Bilhuber on the Carltons' front steps. Right and below: The fireplace's bare "face" was "given a nose" in the guise of a mantel from Pearl Mantels; the leather armchair is from Toad Hall at ABC Carpet & Home, the upholstered one is by Stickley.

was also featured on national television last spring in a joint project between the magazine and the ABC television show, *The View*.

In the dining room, Lori wanted to keep things practical yet unconventional. "I didn't want my mother's dining room, with a table, a buffet, and a hutch," she says. "And I wanted a table my kids could drop a fork on without worrying about the finish."

Bilhuber crafted a plan for a room with a twofold purpose: eating *and* lingering. He set a painted-wood table off-center, installed a luminous banquette within an underutilized row of bay windows, and had the walls painted a warm Coca-Cola shade. A sisal carpet was cut to showcase a beautiful inlay pattern that already existed on the wood floors. On the ceiling, a dearth of moldings left an unfinished air to the room. Bilhuber papered the space with a graphic Albert Hadley-designed print from Hinson.

Upstairs, Murphy and Kemble identified a lack of purpose as the major problem for the attic catchall that the >



designer challenge



Carltons had fashioned into a home office. "It was a makeshift space that was predominantly used as a guest room, but was also used by the children as a playroom," says Kemble. The room's gawky proportions—sloping ceilings provided a mingy rectangle of usable space—made functionality even more elusive.

The duo lined both walls with a bold striped wallpaper

from Farrow & Ball to highlight what little verticality there was and furnished a work space with a Plexiglas desk and chair that levitate in their transparency. "Anything heavier would have been like driving an SUV into a birdhouse," says Kemble. Pale yellow paint on the ceilings brightens the light from the lone window, and a daybed from Desiron multitasks as extra seating or an extra bed for guests. ●

Above, left and right: The jack-of-all-trades office had also been used as a guest room and playroom and boasted the accompanying effluvia to prove it. A desk and chair from Plexicraft provide function without being overbearing; the filing cabinet and Roman shade are from IKEA, the sisal on the floor is from Stark. This view: Throw pillows were custom made; the daybed functions as extra seating and doubles as a bed for guests. For more details, see Resources.

