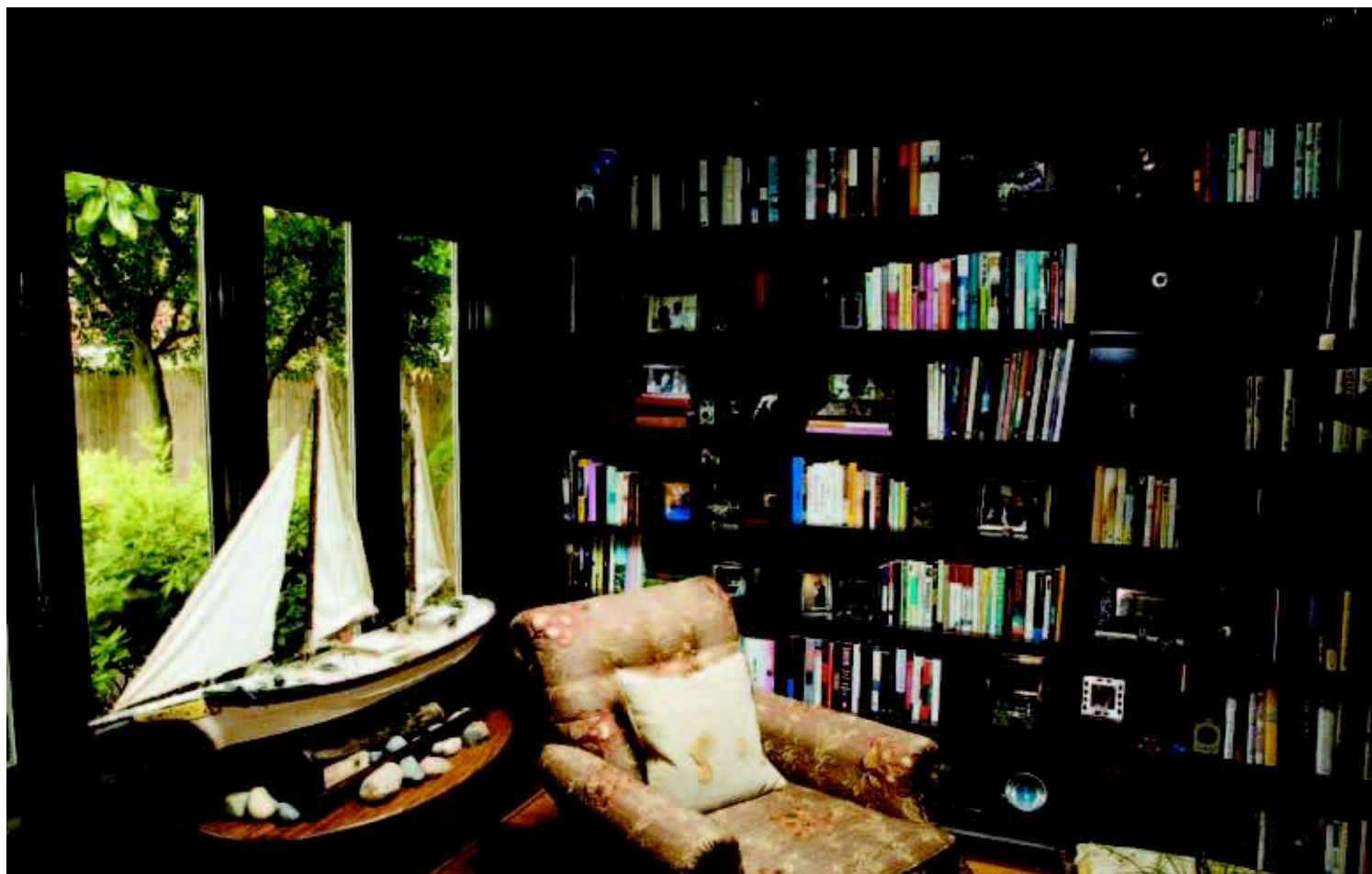




## Yvette Freeman

*As one half of the brother and sister team behind Freeman Development Group, Yvette Freeman makes her living restoring historic properties in D.C., but it's her own home that she really brought back from the brink.*



## From an ugly duckling to a beautiful swan

By Katie Wilmeth  
For The Examiner

Yvette Freeman can't resist ugly houses.

"I like the ugly duckling," said Freeman, standing in the hallway of her Palisades cottage on a recent weekday morning. "It's normally the one I'm attracted to, and she was certainly the ugly duckling of the street."

But after a year of extensive renovations, an additional 18 months of intense decorating and design, and some serious TLC, Freeman took her ugly duckling house to swan status.

Today, the cute-as-a-button cottage has a new lease on life and caring owners who are constantly adding to the home's charm.

Freeman, a self-taught designer who once made her living working in technology, and her husband, Mike Sigal, who works with Washington-based Sigal Construction, bought the house in October 2005 — their first as a married couple.

Freeman saw the home's potential even though "it was literally almost falling off the foundation."

The previous owner had let the house fall into disrepair and nearly everything — the plumbing, the roof, the floors — had to be replaced or refinished. (The previous owner, apparently, also had questionable taste. The hardwood floors, for example, had been covered with green indoor/outdoor carpeting that reminded Freeman of the Brady Bunch, and the house was painted in a "dim, hospital" gray).

Once Freeman finished the major remodeling on the house, she set about infusing it with her own style.

Just as with Freeman's penchant for rescuing homes from the brink

of extinction, much of the furniture and accents in the 2,790-square-foot house are also enjoying a second act.

The house is filled with finds Freeman and her husband have picked from flea markets and antique stores. (In fact, Freeman is so flea-market savvy, she has a storage facility where she restores and keeps pieces that don't have a home in the house now, but someday might.)

In the living room, Freeman's coffee table was once the front door of a Methodist church in Pennsylvania. The table under the window started its life on a boat, and the fireplace mantel was brought from a row house in Northwest that Freeman and her business partner brother Joe restored (interestingly, on Swann Street).

In the dining room, the sideboard was once the archway of a stained glass window in another church. A large clock was rescued from a French watchtower, and a large sign that was stolen (not by Freeman) from the bow of the Seatrain Savannah, a steamer ship that sank off the coast of Fire Island, hangs high in the room.

Freeman purchased the sign at an antique store in upstate New York as a tribute to her mother, Savannah. However, Fire Island is a wildlife sanctuary and therefore removing anything from the area is forbidden. About a month after Freeman bought the sign, she received a letter from the sanctuary asking that it be returned, but "too late. It's on the wall."

Although Freeman's style — one that she describes as "comfortably eclectic" — includes numerous

reclaimed objects, there is certainly nothing second-rate about it.

Freeman decorated the home in an understated color palette of four shades of taupe ("They step up or down depending on what room we're in") to give the space a soft, sophisticated feel — and to allow for all the rooms to work together.

"When we have parties and people over, all of the furniture on the first floor is interchangeable [because it all matches the same color palette]," Freeman explained. "I can bring something from the TV room to the living room or the back of the house ... and it still looks good."

And then, of course, there's Freeman's "little black dress" design theory.

"Everyone needs a great little black dress as your staple," Freeman said by way of explaining how she goes about decorating a room. "I do the same with design. [I find] the 'little black dress' of the room and then I accessorize and build around it."

In the library, for example, the little black dress is a replica of the Maddie F. Culver, a 19th century boat that used to ship fruits and vegetable to Virginia. The replica was once a wedding gift to Freeman's parents, and her mother gave the boat to her when her father died. Today, it's the focal point of the library. The room was designed around it and therefore has a bit of a nautical theme, with leather club chairs, a chandelier hanging from a frayed rope and walls painted black with a rust effect.

In the backyard, Freeman also kept to a minimal color palette — in this case purple, white and bright red flowers — in order to play up the swimming pool (which was a "green swamp" when Freeman bought the house.)

Upstairs, there are three bedrooms. The upstairs is still a work in progress, Freeman said, but she does have the little black dress for the master bedroom. A king-size, handmade sleigh bed that Freeman bought as her first "real" piece of furniture 17 years ago is the centerpiece of the bedroom.

"I ate oodles of noodles with all my disposable income so I could afford to buy this bed," she said of the love-at-first-sight piece of furniture for 100 years."

And knowing Freeman's design style, you believe her.



The house is filled with finds Freeman and her husband have picked from flea markets and antique stores.

PHOTOS BY DAVID JOLKOVSKI/FOR THE EXAMINER

## STYLE KEYS

### YVETTE FREEMAN

**Style Philosophy:** "Design should be affordable for everybody. I'm excited about working with someone that says 'I have \$1,000 to spend for an entire room' just as much as I am for the person who says 'I have tens of thousands of dollars.' I get excited about the whole thing, the whole process."

**Style Secrets:** Use a color palette. "(If you can) wrap your head around a color or a color palette that you like, if you stick with that palette, you'll end up with a more sophisticated space. As opposed to every room having its own color. I think themes work, but I think, long term, if you stick with a palette it will last you more years."

**Got Your Style From:** Uncle Bill, "My uncle has a very interesting design style and as a child we used to go to New York together — we'll still go once a year. He would take me to antique shops and

places that have interesting, beautiful furniture, and even though I was too young to understand, I certainly appreciate it. He had a very simple design palette."

**Comfort or Style:** "I would always choose comfort. Because I think you can have both. I think you can definitely have both if you do it right."

**Formal Rooms or Family Rooms:** Family rooms.

**Favorite Color:** Chocolate brown. "Every room in this house has something chocolate brown in it."

**Can't Live Without:** White sheets or white towels. "They always feel crisp and more luxurious than they probably really are. It's like going to a really nice hotel where everything is white and clean."

**I Would Never:** "I'm not sure there's anything. I think it's the space. You have to look at the space and see what would

be good. I don't want to say never."

**Favorite Room in the House:** The library

**Most Beloved Object:** The boat in the library.

**Favorite Designers/Influences:** "I love Versace. I just think he's incredibly timeless."

**Hot Design Tip:** Use live houseplants. "They're easy and inexpensive. If you buy things like vines or peace lilies, even the person who doesn't have a green thumb can make them live, and they add a punch of color."

**Favorite Store:** And Beige (1781 Florida Ave. NW) and Decorium (116 King St., Alexandria).

**Favorite Web site:** www.designerplumbing.com and www.barbarabarry.com

**Dream Client:** "Someone who would let me follow them around to see how they

live, get to know them as a person and then they would let me have free rein to design a space that I thought represented them. Or Versace, only because I admire him so much. There's so much of his soul in everything that he touches, and I think that's a big part of design."



**Junk Cars & Unwanted Vehicles**  
Towed away for **FREE!**  
**NO PARTS SOLD!**  
**FAST & FRIENDLY SERVICE!**

- FAMILY OWNED
- 100% RECYCLED
- CASH FOR SOME
- SERVING MD, DC & VA

**CALL DAN TODAY!**  
**703-307-6331**

**A Lender You Can Count On**  
A Name You Know



### CHASE HOME MORTGAGE

- Builder Services
- Construction to Perm Lending
- Purchasing or Refinancing
- Pre-Approvals
- Long Term Locks; 6, 9, 12, 18, 24 months
- Corporate Relocations
- FHA, VA, Military Programs
- Local Processing and Underwriting
- Loans up to 5 million
- Closing cost credit of up to \$700**
- ...many others



Contact  
**A.V.P. George Matthews 877-467-7008**  
email: george.t.matthews@chase.com

**New Saturday Hours!**  
10:00 - 1:00

**It doesn't have to be big to be beautiful!**

Let us design the bathroom and kitchen of your dreams!

Call for your **FREE** estimate!  
**301-881-2402**

- Family owned and operated for over 30 years.
- Professional, experienced designers & craftsmen.
- Financing available to qualified customers.

**Beautiful Baths & Kitchens**  
www.beautifulbathsandkitchens.com

The **Countertop** Company®

**SUMMER GRANITE SALE!**

**Price Match Guarantee! We Will Not be Undersold!**

*3 Ways to Save:*

**Package Pricing Starting at**  
**\$55 sq. ft.**

Call for details. One per customer.  
Not valid w/ any other offers.

**10% Rebate**

Call for details. One per customer.  
Not valid w/ any other offers.

**Granite Starting at**  
**\$33 sq. ft.**

Call for details. One per customer.  
Not valid w/ any other offers.

**Ellicott City**  
9469 Baltimore National Pike  
Ellicott City, MD 21043  
(410) 203-2870

**Rockville**  
15700 Crabbs Branch Way  
Rockville, MD 20855  
(301) 840-0080

**Capitol Heights**  
8741 Ashwood Drive Unit C&D  
Capitol Heights, MD 20743  
(301) 499-6980

**Alexandria**  
7770-A Richmond Highway  
Alexandria, VA 22306  
(703) 360-2094

\* A detailed estimate from any competitor must be provided for price match guarantee.

**EASY ACCESS**

**Hurting because of constant bending and lifting?**

Put **EVERYTHING** in your kitchen at your fingertips without having to bend, lift and twist to get something out. It's as easy as glide and go!

Call Cabinet Correctors Today for a **FREE** Consultation  
**1 (866) 653-6915** Toll Free

*More Space, Better Organization, Easy Access*

Visit us on the web @ [www.cabinetcorrectors.com](http://www.cabinetcorrectors.com)