

Love it or leave it. That may seem like a simple statement. I assure you; it isn't. The only thing I loved about my home was the interest rate on the mortgage and the fact that it would be paid off in less than a decade. That's it. The inside felt anything other than a cozy, peaceful, joyful home. Outdated, a little broken, sad. Quite honestly, it was starting to look the way I was feeling, having lost my parents in recent years. It looked like grief. Not having the gift of design or a clue where to start, it seemed easier to want to leave than to stay. Again, 2.375 was the factor that kept me from jumping ship. There was just so much that needed to be done, not necessarily big-ticket items but a good refresh and several repairs. Where do I begin and who is going to do it? I've tried my hand at painting and home maintenance (thanks, YouTube). I will, however, keep my day job.

Fast forward to a referral from a trusted friend – one Chuck Elliott. Ooooh boy, he had his work cut out for him. It started with an appointment to have a look. Thank God this was not this gentleman's first rodeo because I threw everything at him from a broken rocking chair that was a gift from my late mother, a newly installed privacy fence that wasn't exactly built to last and needed stabilizing and staining, an exterior door that was literally hanging on and a woman that hated the look of her dusty home and had no idea how to articulate what look she was 'going for'.

Chuck patiently listened, assessed and listened more. God bless you, Chuck. There was so much to do, and I had no idea where to start. Overwhelmed is not the word, not by far. He knew exactly what to do and in what order. Through good conversation and reading my expression when I was absolutely stuck, he made a plan. Truth is, I was completely at peace with letting him take the reins. Before this man left my home at our first meeting, however, the exterior door that could have been a free for all, was secure until it could be replaced.

The initial plan came together, budget, timeline, design and we got started. Actually, Chuck got started. I was just along for the ride. There were little things that were big to me – the ceiling return in the hall that looked awful with the peeling paint, the sagging weatherstripping on the front door (which I never mentioned, too embarrassed and I had other things on my mind). Yes, Chuck just...handled it. Didn't make me feel bad, just handled it.

Room by room, we went. There were times I just froze. I couldn't tell him what I wanted. I struggled with this thing called a color wheel. Then there were crucial decisions to be made so that the kitchen and bathrooms were functional (faucets). My brain had not even calculated that new counters would bring about choices like faucets (don't judge). There was cabinet hardware and window coverings. I hated the plantation blinds. Dusty, outdated, partially working plantation blinds. Just take them down and throw them out, Chuck. Well, what are we putting up? Oh, I don't know. I'll figure it out later. Rachael, do you see the windows on the house behind you? Yes, I do. Great. They see you, too. This wasn't the conversation verbatim, but it was super close. Security. Once again, Chuck was looking at things from a different perspective.

And he would as a veteran and a man with a wife and daughters. Absolutely, he just saw things that I naively didn't. And he figured out the kitchen windows. And it was perfect.

Every day, I came home to something different. Some change; some surprise. For the first time in years, I was excited to come home. Not just because I was tired and longed for rest. This was different. I was beginning to love my home. Chuck added something special, I don't know how he was able to get into my head and just make it happen, most especially because I couldn't give him a clear-cut vision. He picked up on emotions, what brought me joy, the things that made me exhale. If I made him nuts trying to figure it out, he never expressed it. Patience. He has a lot of it. A lot.

Chuck saved the best for last. One final room. We've had many conversations over the past several weeks. This man forgets nothing, not one conversation. He picked up on one of the most important to me, my dream of writing. An author's study? What? No, not possible in this house. How do you take a small bedroom and turn it into something magnificent that could be...an author's study? Millwork, that is how. Soft colors. Bold trim. It is in the details. He has put intricate details throughout this house. But this last room? It is really over the top.

This is not the same house. Yes, we stuck to a budget. He heard me (five hundred times). He delivers what he promises. He arranges everything and pulls in other professionals as needed (plumbers, electricians). One invoice, not twelve. He shows up every time, on time. Each day, things are put back. There is no "lingering mess" to contend with when you get home from a long day at work. He offers ideas, picks up on yours but knows how to steer you away from bad (and I do mean baaaaad) trends and decisions yet you remain in control of the final say (who is going to clean the glass roof, Rachael— don't ask). It doesn't take knocking down walls and gutting your home to make it beautiful again (although he can). New columns on the front porch changed the entire look of the house. It is the little details that make such a significant impact. It isn't breaking the bank (he could but he does not).

I do love my home again. I am cooking more than I have in years and enjoying it. I leave, but I look forward to returning. It isn't just "new" again, it is better, it's finished, it's lovely. It isn't painting, it isn't maintenance. This is making a house a home. It's what Chuck does best.

Rachael K.