

## A Couch for Couples Who Don't See Eye-to-Eye about a Sofa

Anh-Minh Le, Special to The Chronicle



Chronicle / Eric Luse

MANDATORY CREDIT FOR PHOTOG AND SF CHRONICLE/NO SALES-MAGS OUT Photo: Eric Luse

Katie McKee had been living alone in her Corte Madera townhouse for several years when her fiancé, Chris Veiga, moved in. Suddenly, her contemporary and - by her own admission - cold furnishings no longer seemed to suit the space.

"We wanted it to feel like a home for both of us," she said. "We needed to come together on what our idea of a comfortable home was and what our style together was."

To solve their dilemma, the pair brought in a licensed therapist - who also happens to run a design business.

Goodfriend Design Group draws on Rachelle Goodfriend's 20 years as a therapist in the Bay Area. "I decided to combine my passion for interior design with my work with couples," she said. "I'm helping people express who they are, inside and outside." (Her client roster also includes families and bachelors.)

In the case of McKee and Veiga - who have been married now for four years - Goodfriend initially worked with them on their living room. Under her guidance, the once-sparse space became warm, inviting and comfortable.

"What she created for us is definitely not what I would pick out for just me," said McKee, "and it's not what Chris would pick out if it was just him.

"But it fits who we are together. It represents both of us, which is really exciting."

Since completing their living room, Goodfriend has moved on to McKee and Veiga's bedroom and kitchen. Veiga, an acupuncturist and Chinese medicine practitioner, also enlisted Goodfriend's help in decorating his previous clinic.

For Goodfriend, the success of a project is measured by more than just aesthetics. "The idea is for people to not only be happy with what we've created," she said, "but that they feel better about their relationship. You learn a hell of a lot when you're designing, and it can be a stressful time."

During her initial meeting with clients, she encourages the homeowners to share their vision for the room. If there isn't one or they don't know how to articulate it, Goodfriend relies on some basic questions to gauge their style: What colors do they like? What is the purpose of the room?

Often, her initial discussions touch on "deeper issues - their home life growing up, what was good, what was bad, what they want to repeat or avoid," she said. "People don't always think about what drives their choices."

She recalled one couple she worked with: He wanted to spend a lot of money on one room, and she didn't. Goodfriend realized that the problem was rooted in their upbringing. "His father had been so thrifty," she said, "and her father had gotten into debt. Both were reacting to their histories - unknowingly."

Goodfriend acknowledges that money plays a big role in the process. "I insist that my clients come up with a budget that they're both comfortable with," she said.

For couples embarking on a decorating project, she warns against hitting the furniture stores right away. "Sit with a stack of magazines and don't talk to each other for half an hour," she advised. "Take the stack, rip pictures out. You don't have to decide why you like the pictures - they just have to resonate with you. Put them in a folder and show them to each other. Then start talking it through."

"The main point is to take the time to write out your ideas, talk about them and really listen to each other."

A few years ago, Margaret and Gilbert Robinson found themselves at an impasse when they removed "a decrepit mud porch" from their 1896 Victorian in San Francisco, she said. They had lots of ideas about what to do with the new space that was available to them - such as turning it into a dining area, a small family room, a spare bedroom or a playroom for their daughter.

But it wasn't until Goodfriend entered the picture that they were able to reach a decision. As the three sat in the space together, the therapist inquired about "not just how we saw the room," said Margaret Robinson, "but what we like, how we like to live, what style we prefer, our living habits."



Chronicle / Eric Luse

"She asked very good questions and listened very well to our thoughts, very skillfully letting us both feel we were being heard and respected, which helped us hear and respect each other's ideas, which had not always been happening as this project moved along."

So what did they end up with? A sunroom/sitting room. "It turned out to be the loveliest and most-used space in the house," said Robinson. "And it changed the way we live, because for the first time we have a central, cozy, beautiful place to sit and read, talk to each other, entertain guests."

Robinson described her style as leaning toward "cozy, somewhat cluttered - piles of books, comfortable furniture with lots of pillows, family artifacts around." Her husband, on the other hand, prefers a "Zen-like austerity," she said. "He would prefer to have nothing on horizontal surfaces, very spare furniture, clean lines and quiet colors."

With its golden-hued walls, grass cloth blinds and Shabby Chic-style floral couch, the sunroom is "a very satisfying marriage of our two styles - which is a miracle!" she added.

Because of Goodfriend's unique therapy/design background, HGTV sought out her expertise for "Get It Together," a program that began in the summer. She developed and administered a questionnaire to assist the show's designer, Chayse Dacoda, in resolving style conflicts between couples.

The series, which is filmed in the Bay Area, often ends with overjoyed homeowners gushing about their new rooms. But in Goodfriend's practice, things don't always go so smoothly.

She worked with one client who initially had lots of ideas and opinions, many of which differed from his wife's. Then he did a 180 and became agreeable to all of her ideas. Within weeks, he had packed his bags and left the house all together. "He stopped caring because he knew he wasn't going to be living there," said Goodfriend.

Although that may have been an extreme case, Goodfriend maintains that a homeowner who is too passive about decision-making can be cause for concern. "A person who concedes too much may end up with feelings of resentment," she explained. "I try to press them to be honest with themselves and their partners, so we don't buy a whole load of furniture for the living room and then one person ends up hating it."

In her own home, Goodfriend makes compromises with her fellow resident: her 11-year-old daughter, Madeline. "She definitely has opinions," Goodfriend said of the design-savvy preteen. "Sometimes, I'll catch her watching HGTV without me."

Goodfriend wholeheartedly encourages her daughter's interest in decorating. "I've given her free rein to design her room," she said. "She's helped me in the public areas of the house, too. I ask her so that she's confident her feedback makes a difference, and that she feels free to express herself to me."

For Mother's Day this year, the pair spent the day painting and decorating the hallway. "We celebrated the completion by going to the nursery and choosing plants together," said Goodfriend. "Home we came and planted them all in the backyard.

"Of course, we then had to go back out and get an ice cream for my daughter and a latte for me."

When the paint has dried and all of the furniture is in place, Goodfriend recommends that her clients celebrate their accomplishments as well. "Go out for a nice dinner or have a meal catered at home," she said. "Mark this experience in some way because - believe me - it isn't always easy."

### **Resources**

Goodfriend Design Group, 1537 Franklin St., Suite 103, San Francisco, CA 94109. (415) 672-3220. [www.goodfrienddesigngroup.com](http://www.goodfrienddesigngroup.com). E-mail Rachele Goodfriend at [info@goodfrienddesigngroup.com](mailto:info@goodfrienddesigngroup.com).

Article Source: <http://www.sfgate.com/homeandgarden/article/A-couch-for-couples-who-don-t-see-eye-to-eye-2500983.php>