

The Matchmaker

Whether clients want to purchase a “home with potential,” a newly renovated home or list a home that “needs work” the multitasking real estate maven **Deborah Nye** has a solution.

by **THEODORA MALISON** photography by **JEFF ANDERSON**

For as long as Deborah Nye can remember, home renovations played a major influential factor in her life. Her father renovated the entire interior of her childhood home, a multi-unit with several other tenants. He had a real knack for the work—a gift, even—and Nye paid close attention. Her passion for home renovation blossomed from there.

Later, after purchasing a single-family home, Nye’s father meticulously renovated the new residence room by room while they lived in the home. This time, though, Nye did more than just observe; she worked side by side with her father, scraping wallpaper, honing her eye for craftsmanship and learning the value of quality.

“I knew how to do tiling, painting and all sorts of things related to renovation by the time I was 13,” she recalls. “I didn’t realize it would be a foundation for my future.”

Some years later, Nye developed her creative talents at Rhode Island School of Design. After graduation she launched her own shoe company, which embodied her love of classic design, only with a modern twist.

When she had to contend with a medical issue, she was forced to abandon her work. At the time, she saw this as a wake-up call, saying “it was the kick in the pants I needed to change my life, and I looked at this as an opportunity to do something different.”

By chance, Nye discovered a home on its way to foreclosure. It was in dire need of rehabilitation, but her background had prepared her for the challenge. Just as she did as a teenager, Nye went to work—and in eight weeks, she had given the interior an entirely new aesthetic.

“After seeing how smoothly the project went, I knew I wanted to keep doing renovation and had to figure out a way how,” she says.

She eventually became a Realtor to gain access to information, gave up her outside design job, and looked for more projects. Today, her career marries both passions, and for many clients, her skills go hand in hand.

We sat down with Nye to learn more about the many hats she wears, her most recent home-renovation projects and how she remains not only a jack of all trades but a master of them, too.

You’re a real estate agent, designer and a home rehabber. How do you combine all of these together?

I guess I’d say that everything I’ve done relates to everything else I do. My education channeled me toward design. My childhood and adult experiences with renovation give me an understanding of what’s needed in a home. My desire to build relationships and help people carries through to working with buyers and sellers, especially when suggestions are needed for what work to do in a home and whether or not it would be worth it.

How do you incorporate your design style when making



renovations on other homes?

My style could really be best described as “classic with a modern twist.” For example, I love some pieces of antique furniture—I can visualize it painted and with different hardware, adding that modern twist. I look at what people want in a home and what’s selling in the market. Then I look at what the house is, how it’s laid out and what era it was built. Sometimes, taking a really old row house and making it all new doesn’t look right. Sometimes the house is brand new and I’m starting from scratch, and that’s when I have more freedom. But incorporating character is very important to me.

There’s a project I have on the market now. It has original size baseboards, five-panel doors and crown molding, and that worked with that particular project. I try to look at a house and figure out how to incorporate its original features, while updating it to what buyers actually want. That sometimes means keeping the original flooring, but it also means that sometimes the floors are so damaged it wouldn’t make sense to keep them. It’s nice to be able to keep an original railing, banister and original baseboards, but I also think it’s important to update them in ways that give people what they want in this market.

Tell me about your project on 8th and Fitzwater. I understand this was a big deal for you.

This property was amazing. It’s a 1,000-square-foot house in a premium location, and I



thought we could save most of the house and revamp it in a really new way. We started demolition and the whole back wall fell down, so the project ended up pretty much being a new build. So I embraced the opportunity to do high-quality finishes that are better than what most builders tend to use. We added a fiberglass rooftop deck, which has a 360-degree unobstructed view of the city, and the house has ample yard space, too. Everyone wants outdoor space in the city.

For the interior, there’s a lot of personality and character. I added gray-toned Canadian maple floors throughout that have warmth to them. Keeping with the “updated and classic” theme, the house will stand the test of time. I also installed a cool metal railing and gorgeous tile. And I do love tile. Deciding the pattern and layout of the tile is so very important and so much fun for me.

The house has two full bedrooms, and I took the third bedroom and made it into a flexible space. It’s an open room that could be enclosed if you wanted, but would make a great office space, extra living space or a great play room for children.

Another thing that is really marketable

about the house is that it’s an efficient and economical house. There’s central air on the first and second floors, and a mini split on the third, so the third floor has its own heating and air system. The house has a lot of flexibility for use, and everything is so much nicer because of the distinct and updated style.

You mentioned another project you recently completed, in the city’s Brewerytown neighborhood. What can you tell me about it?

This one was a perfect example of how to update some of a home’s original character and be able to pay homage to the classic features. For example, although we did use new baseboard, we went higher for a more traditional look. We added a more classic-looking, beautiful wood floor, updated the kitchen with stylish cabinets and subway backsplash. A brick accented area in the first-floor powder room continues the updated classic theme.

What is it you love most about your many talents/jobs?

As an agent, I get to be the ultimate voyeur. I go into people’s homes and see how they use the house, and whether or not I can match somebody to that house. It’s almost like a matchmaking game, in that you have to match your buyer to a seller, or vice versa.

I’m very hands on and love doing pretty much everything by myself. I’m not trying to be a 50-million dollar super-agent; I’m just trying to do business that I enjoy and make sure the people I work with feel I serve them well. Clients tell me my enthusiasm always comes through, and people always say to me, “You have so much energy. How do you do it?” My answer is coffee—but besides that, I’m just passionate about what I do, and lucky to be able to do it. ■

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