

## Ask Jeffrey: Chuck the doilies, like Philip Mitchell did in his Chester, N.S., home



Don't take yourself too seriously: Go casual by choosing a mash-up of furniture.

Photo by Kate Bateman; Design by Philip Mitchell Design

**Jeffrey Fisher** Oct 7, 2011 – 4:00 PM ET | Last Updated: Oct 7, 2011 11:15 AM ET

Dear Jeffrey,

*My family has owned an historic house in Port Hope, Ont., for over 40 years.*

*It was originally my parents' home, and when my mother died six years ago (my father passed four years previous) it was bequeathed to me. Since then, my family and I have used the house on weekends and holidays. We've done nothing to the house in terms of renovation or decor, as I thought it was disrespectful to the memory of my parents, but now it's time.*

*We cannot afford to tackle the entire house at once and before I take on the kitchen or bathroom, I would like to start with the room we use the most and refer to as "the back room." This is the cozy room with a fireplace beyond the kitchen where we hang out reading or playing games. My parents have a few antique pieces scattered throughout the house, but for the most part it's floral sofas and doilies. All of this to ask if you have any ideas for the decor of this room knowing that we have two teenagers (almost out the door for university) and we love comfortable furniture, but want the room to look as if it belongs in an historic home.*

*Thank you for reading this long ramble.*

*Maureen*

Dear Maureen,

After editing your email down to the above information I don't think it's a long ramble at all. You just like to be detailed.

Which actually makes the perfect segue to this week's photo. The room pictured was designed by Mr. Detail himself, Philip Mitchell.

Philip has a self-named design firm here in Toronto and the room pictured is actually from the Chester, N.S., home that he shares with his partner, Mark Narsansky.

Their house is a Gothic Revival cottage, and in speaking with Philip, he told me that he and Mark did extensive research on their house before starting on their restoration. I bring this up before moving on to decor because I want to introduce the idea of a restoration as opposed to a renovation. You may choose to do as Philip and Mark did and research every original architectural detail of your house (inside and out) and as you embark on your “reno” room by room, implement some of these details for an authentic look and feel, turning it into a restoration. Just a suggestion.

And now for decor — I love the room above because it has a casual, comfortable feel but at the same time an air of properness. Not formal, just proper. Though we have never met, I picture you flaked out on the sofa doing the weekend crossword while someone does a puzzle on the coffee table and one of your kids is curled up reading in a leather chair. (if you have a dog, I picture her in front of the fireplace) Alternatively, I can also see you having the town elders in to take tea in this room. It’s just one of those rooms.

The colour palette in Philip’s sitting room was established to transition from summer months to the other seasons as he and Mark use the house year round. They wanted something “light enough for summer, but still had enough depth for winter.”

Considering you use your house the same way, I think it’s a good idea to consider a similar palette. He used Benjamin Moore Creamy White OC7 on the walls, providing a perfect neutral backdrop for the warm golden tones of the fabrics.

Philip mixed a chenille sofa with leather chairs and linen draperies to assist with the pan-seasonal feel. By including the beautiful wood chairs, accent pieces and lantern-style ceiling fixtures, he’s able to add to the authentic patina of the room. You mention a scattering of antique pieces in your home. Could any be relocated to “the back room” to help create a layered but still comfortable feel?

If you like the look pictured, I suggest sourcing your sofa and leather chairs at stores like Crate & Barrel or Pottery Barn. They’re my go-to shops for this style and are well priced and very good quality.

The built-ins surrounding the doors at the end of the room were made to store their extensive book collection. Philip chose not to take the bookshelves all the way to the ceiling because the house would not originally have had shelves in this location and he wanted them to look as if they had been added over time. That, Maureen, is detail. Do you have any room to add built-ins? It’s a great way to make a cozy room even cozier, if space allows. And consider that Philip’s bookshelves aren’t typically where one would expect to find them.

Whether you choose to take on a full restoration of your historical weekend home or simply steer it away from floral sofas and doilies, I think you will find infinite inspiration from Philip and Mark’s well-appointed room. With a little proper planning, your sitting room will look as inviting as theirs.

Good Luck.  
Jeffrey

*Send your design question to [askjeffreymfisher@gmail.com](mailto:askjeffreymfisher@gmail.com)*

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