

## "Home Sweet Home"

Home... to me, it is my nest, my cave, my comfort zone for heart and soul, my safe haven. Home is also the place where I design my environment to reflect my personality, turning my surroundings into an extension of myself and making them part of me visually as well as ideologically. Home is where I come back to after an outing, and it awaits me with my worn slippers, my comfy recliner and my happy pets. Home is where I know every nook and cranny, every creak and groan, every smell and every patch of light and shadow. My home is my castle... I have the right to make it almost inaccessible to unwelcome intruders and welcoming to those I love and respect. It is my retreat from the world, the showcase for my treasures, and the stronghold of my values. Home... it is my second skin, my soil in which I am rooted, the roof over my head and the blanket for my soul. Sometimes I wonder how a professionally decorated house or apartment can be a real home to the people who live in it. To me, it seems as if that was the same as wearing a stranger's clothes or somebody else's prescription glasses. Sure, it may serve the basic purpose and it may look better than if you used your own things and ideas, but it's just not you. Isn't hiring somebody to create your living space, your home, a lot like having the secretary choose your friend's birthday present flowers and put a birthday card in front of you to sign while making your dinner reservations? The birthday is remembered and observed, the employee quite possibly has impeccable taste and chooses well, yet the whole setup misses the original idea by miles. What about adding one's own personal touches to a professionally created environment then? Would this fix the problem? It might – but usually, such a professionally designed environment is finely balanced, and changes or additions as small as a misfit picture frame in the wrong place or a chair pulled closer to the coffee table for comfort mar the professional's composition and, in a way, defeat the purpose behind hiring a decorator in the first place. I personally believe that a home should grow over time and be cultivated by those who live in it, rather than be served like a classy but prefabricated dinner by a stranger. Strangers just never put the right amount of salt in it, if you ask me. Have you ever watched a dog turn 'round and 'round before finally lying down for a cozy nap? Some animals in the wild do the same thing, and I think the purpose of this is to create a sort of molded dip in the ground cover for added comfort. As for me, I like my slippers molded to my feet, my chair molded to my body and, generally, my home molded to my mind and soul. These things do add a lot of comfort to the dog bed part of life. Comfort is not the only reason for having things "just so", though. If you have a runaway brain cell (singular) like I do, you probably live pretty much on instinct at least some of the time. Living on instinct means, in part, that you don't notice much of what you're used to, but anything out of the ordinary makes you perk up your ears and squirt some adrenaline through your system just in case it's needed. For me, any unfamiliar noise, smell or sight does it, and I get flighty without meaning to. At the same time, being in my familiar, second-skin surroundings at home gives me peace of mind and a feeling of security which is as intense as that nervousness is. I suppose you could say that there is a lot of mental and emotional security in old slippers and the faint buzzing of your refrigerator. Security. Have you ever noticed that your home is the only place in the world where your level of security is entirely up to you? You have choices ranging from unlocked doors to barred windows, both in the physical and the figurative sense. You have the option to keep out the unwelcome by way of locks, caller ID and the "off" button on the TV. Although there are exceptions such as determined criminals or junk e-mail over which we can't always have control, the home is where we make the rules, where we decide what or who may be part of our personal lives. Whether we entertain friends, have a family get-together, take in stray animals or people, or post "No Trespassing" signs around our property and refuse the traveling salesman or missionary, it's our choice.