A fire engine red arrow points around the corner brightening the white walls of a boy's room. Stacked clay flowerpots make a night stand next to a girl's bed. A redwood picnic table is used for family activities and eating in the kitchen. All of these low cost ideas for decorating are examples of the creativity of students in the Residential Interiors classes in the School of Home Economics.

But designing interiors involves a lot more than just clever decorating ideas. Student designers help create real homes for real people.

Clients, usually from the University faculty and staff, are interviewed by Dr. C. Bud Kaufmann, professor of housing and interior design. If the client's project seems broad enough in scope to deserve class credit and if the project will be educational, he assigns students to work on it.

Students interview clients to find out what they want. Kaufmann calls "psyching out" the client one of the most valuable skills prospective designers can learn. They look at the home or area, measure every inch and note construction details. Back in the classroom, they plan the design, "everything down to the last crystal ashtray," Kaufmann says.

The highpoints of the class are the days students make their formal presentations to the clients. They wear businesslike suits or dresses and call each other "Miss" and "Mr." But it isn't just their attire and demeanor that is professional. They have created plans for the client that include detailed drawings and a precise cost estimate ("including the rubber tree plant").

"This is my first professional course," one student designer says. "I was so tired of designing for imaginary Mr. and Mrs. Smiths, but now I'm dealing with real people."

The client takes the plans, studies them and often photographs them. He keeps only the cost estimate. The plans go into the students' portfolios to demonstrate to prospective employers their ability to think through and carry through an entire project and deal with clients.

The variety of projects helps students develop many kinds of skills. Those inexpensive decorating ideas came from a low cost housing project students worked on for the Extension Division. Extension specialists had drawn up plans with an architect for the low cost houses. Students designed the interiors to show prospective owners how the houses could be decorated on a minimal budget.

The sunporch of the Meekers' home will become a dining room. On the wall between the built-in cabinets, will hang an Indian temple carving.

HOMES FOR REAL PEOPLE

They also suggested some architectural changes to make the houses fit clients' needs. For a family with six children, the students suggested a compartmented bath; for handicapped people, they suggested wider doors and lowered towel racks and appliances that could be used from a wheel chair.

Last year, Altrusa, a women's service organization, in cooperation with the juvenile office and the juvenile court, asked the class to tackle the Monroe Home, a community juvenile center in Columbia.

"It was originally a paint-chipped stucco house that had been chopped up into what looked like hippie pads. The students made comprehensive plans to transform it into a children's home," Kaufmann says.

The detailed cost estimate provided a list for the Altrusa members, who donated specified furniture and kitchen equipment. There was no duplication in the donations. "It gave us direction and was a great service in organizing the home," Mrs. Orrine Gregory, Altrusa member, says.

As well as renovating old houses, students sometimes get to work on a house from the foundation up. As they work with the builders, the designers can make many decisions, such as fruitwood kitchen cabinets or yellow ceramic tiles for the bathroom. They may even be able to correct some "mistakes" in the floor plans and traffic flow or design a fireplace that wasn't in the original plans.

But always students are working for real people. When Dr. and Mrs. Cliff Meeker returned to Columbia after ten years in India, they found that their home, which had been rented, needed some remodeling and several major changes. The Meekers (he's professor emeritus of agricultural economics) had brought back many antique wood carvings, reproductions in stone from Indian temples and other artifacts. They wanted to display their treasures in their home.

"I wanted our home to feel like an American home," Mrs. Meeker says, "but I also wanted it to remind us of happy times in India."

"The students' presentations and finished products were so professional. We won't do all the house at once, but it is nice to have something to look forward to," Mrs. Meeker says.

To show her appreciation, Mrs. Meeker invited the class to a curry supper. □

A typically enthusiastic client, Mrs. Meeker entertains the class with an authentic Indian curry. One student's presentation took place before dinner. (Left to right) Janet Wiss, Claudia Peebles, Debbie Short, Dr. Kaufmann, Mrs. Meeker and Dr. Meeker watch as Linda Sams shows samples and plans. In the classroom, a student gets advice from the professor.