

BEFORE



Solid Investment

This West Washington Park duplex was purchased by property investor Andrew Johnsen via 8z Platinum Partners. Together with his brother, architect Roger Johnsen—the duo owns architectural and interior design company Jtwo Design and Development—he strategically knocked out walls to open up the layout for entertaining purposes, updated appliances and aesthetics, and converted it from one to two bedrooms in the process.

Purchase price: \$150,000 per unit.

Renovation costs (includes materials and subcontractors, though half was DIY labor): \$35,000 per unit.

Resale value: \$250,000 to \$300,000 per unit.

Potential return on investment (ROI): 100-plus percent.

AFTER



REAL CHARMER The original door and window casings were reused in the renovation to maintain the older charm that appeals to so many homeowners.

WALLED IN Creating exposed-brick walls is a time-consuming process, but Johnsen knew it would be hugely alluring to potential buyers.

OPEN UP Modern home buyers want to entertain, and an open, airy layout facilitates that. Here, the wall closing off the kitchen from the living room was knocked out to create a more spacious, inviting vibe ideal for parties and gatherings. Guests in the living area can converse and mingle with hosts who might be tending to food or drinks in the kitchen.

HOME IMPROVEMENT SPECIAL

HOME MADE

Thinking about a remodel? Tired of your circa-1985 kitchen? Want to jazz up your walls or have the house all your friends are talking about? We've consulted the experts, tracked down the craftspeople, crunched the numbers, and shared our own DIY stories. Ready, set, renovate. *Edited by Julie Dugdale*

WINDOW WORK

New windows (with original casings) and insulation were added to lower heating bills.

KITCHEN AID The old kitchen was outdated and lacked creature comforts such as counter space, a dishwasher, and modern fixtures. Adding this island and coordinating the appliances solved both the aesthetic and functional dilemmas.

BELOW THE SURFACE Many old houses in Denver have built-in equity in the floor; just pull up the dated linoleum or carpet to find beautiful wood floors that simply need sanding and coating to make them brilliant again.

THE GREEN BUILDER

Scott Rodwin: PRESIDENT,
RODWIN ARCHITECTURE AND SKYCASTLE HOMES

WE KNOW, WE KNOW...greening your home is so trendy, it's not trendy anymore. That doesn't make it less important. LEED-certified, award-winning green building expert Scott Rodwin can take your home from a resource-sucking vacuum to an efficient, sustainable system that leaves a fraction of its current carbon footprint. Rodwin has worked in the green building field for nearly 20 years and has witnessed the evolution of the concept. "The trend is irreversible," Rodwin says. "Folks of all political stripes are recognizing this. For architects, we're realizing we're able to deliver more value to clients."

Rodwin and his team, who teach residential sustainable-building workshops (catch "Understanding the Rules for Building and Remodeling Homes in Boulder" on May 8 in Boulder), specialize in what he calls "deep green custom homes," or remodeling and building with



Typical client:
Young eco-savvy couples having children and considering family health; families and retirees with the resources to build the most responsible dream home possible.

Price range:
Rodwin's services start around \$2,000 (smaller DIY green projects can start at \$100).

More info:
rodwinarch.com or skycastlehomes.com; find a clearinghouse of Colorado's incentives and tax rebates for home energy fixes at DSIREusa.org.

energy efficiency, resource conservation, and environmental quality in mind. That means complying with metrics like HERS (Home Energy Rating System)—most 30- to 40-year-old homes in the Denver-Boulder area are 50 percent over an acceptable HERS score—and helping you meet other certifications such as the EPA's Energy Star or Water Sense programs.

More specifically, Rodwin can solve problems with both your housing "envelope" (foundation, walls, windows, roof) and indoor air quality. For example, simple projects like adding insulation, replacing leaky windows, and weather stripping are high-impact fixes; and choosing NAF (no added formaldehyde) finishes, nontoxic paints, and switching out a synthetic carpet for a natural wool rug with jute backing can minimize the harmful particles in the air you breathe. Rodwin also designs with "embodied energy"—the amount of energy required to extract, manufacture, and dispose of a material such as granite or cement—in mind. Your house may never end up at net zero, but Rodwin will tell you every step counts. "The field is changing so fast, it's amazing," Rodwin says. "And we're at the bleeding edge of the trend."

Rodwin Architecture's
LEED Platinum-certified, near-net-zero "Edge House" in Boulder.





Fessler Masonry's Anasazi sliver wood-burning fireplace.

THE STONEMASON

Jonathan Fessler; OWNER, FESSLER MASONRY

JONATHAN FESSLER HAS APPRECIATED the beauty of stone his entire life. Even before his first masonry job (i.e., chimney cleaning) as a teenager in Pennsylvania, he was drawn to the trade. “Ever since I was a kid,” Fessler says, “running around in the woods, seeing these beautiful stone walls and barns, I was very inspired.”

Years later, after putting time in at local landscaping firm Robert Howard Associates, Fessler launched his own Denver-based masonry company in 2003. His work ranges from elaborate custom fireplaces and flatwork patios to outdoor barbecue grills and sculptural landscape elements. While he does plenty of repair jobs on household features like crumbling stone steps and pathways, and ample block and brick work, Fessler most enjoys the artistic side of stonemasonry, and tries to stick with a hammer and chisel for tools. “You get more of a defined look when it’s chiseled,” he says, “like there was more time put into it.”

Most of his materials come from Colorado stone yards in mountainous locations like Telluride, Lyons, and Masonville outside of Fort Collins. Once Fessler gets the client’s approval on the type and look of the stone, he orders it and sends it to a fabricating company to create the right shape and size stone for the job. “The intricate part of the trade is piecing things together, having the right stones and dimensions for the job, having forethought,” Fessler says. “To be really good at stonework, you have to be a creative person. I’m in constant pursuit of mastery. There are so many things to learn.”



Typical client: Homeowners in their mid-30s to retirement age with houses in the foothills, such as Golden Gate Canyon and Indian Hills.

Price range: Varies depending on materials, tools needed, and labor time.

More info: fesslermasonry.com



Dungeon Diaries

When a DIY basement facelift is worth the grunt work and the hassle.

I’m not going to lie—in two years of living in our house, I had never really cleaned the basement. Long-dead bugs curled up in the corners and a film of dust coated the windowsills. I’d never seen the point of tidying up what, in my mind, was an uninhabitable dungeon. Instead, we wanted to hire someone to refinish it. That is, until we got a bid for the work—a cool \$75,000—and decided the oddly shaped rooms and slipshod drywalls, circa 1985, were more charming than we’d initially thought.

But that left us with a question: How do we make the 600-square-foot space pleasant enough that we’d use it without having to take out a loan? The answer, we decided, was a superficial facelift; one that we would bravely—er, stupidly—undertake ourselves.

Our to-do list was daunting. The decades-old matted and stained carpet had to go. The bizarrely pockmarked and water-damaged drywall needed to be repaired, spackled, and re-sanded. The mud-brown paint covering every surface was also on the eighty-six-it list. A set of poorly installed shelves had to be repaired. The bathroom needed a new sink and mirror. And ah, that cave-like ambience...a product of inadequate lighting.

We ordered carpet—and had it installed (there were some things we just couldn’t do ourselves). We went to Home Depot. A lot. We fussed at each other. A lot. And we cursed (yes, a lot) whoever had previously owned our home and half-assed easy projects (paper towels should not be used to patch holes in your dry-wall!). We worked long weekend days and weekday evenings for two months. We got dust in our lungs, plumber’s caulk in our hair, and paint-roller muscle fatigue. It was exhausting. But when we were done, we had a bright(er), more functional space where we now watch TV, play with the dog, catch a nap on the new sofa, and feel comfortable hosting other human beings. Oh, and the bathroom is so much less disgusting now that you could almost call it inviting. Our DIY basement upgrade is not professionally executed by anyone’s standards, but it made our dungeon into a living space that we use—and that I now happily keep clean.

—LINDSEY B. KOEHLER

Basement Budget Breakdown

Carpet = \$1,600
Paint and primer = \$300
Misc. materials (brushes, spackle, plumber’s caulk, sandpaper) = \$250
Bathroom sink = \$169
Bathroom mirror = \$119
Furniture = \$1,500
TOTAL = \$3,938



Three-color softening distressed paint on a Douglas fir ceiling, by Icing Studios.

THE FAUX FINISHER

Jen Hunt: ARTIST/PRESIDENT, ICING STUDIOS

WALKING INTO A ROOM with a signature wall or ceiling created by Jen Hunt is a bit like stepping into another world. Her artistic specialties as a decorative painter and faux finisher can transform a ho-hum room into a visual masterpiece. Hunt's repertoire includes surface finishes (for walls, floors, ceilings, and doors) such as European-inspired plasterwork; soft patina glazes for that chic "distressed" look; artist-rendered wood grain and marble; and trompe l'oeil murals (paintings that create the illusion of a 3D space that isn't really there). Her work can be as elaborate as a textured ceiling-mural or as simple as crown



Typical client:

Hunt works mostly in homes worth more than \$1 million, in areas such as Cherry Hills, Bonnie Brae, and Castle Pines.

Price range:

Varies by square footage for faux finishing and by scope for muraling.

More info:

icingstudios.com



Wall finish: "New York distressed paint" by Icing Studios.

molding. "I really enjoy paradoxical projects," Hunt says, "in which the designer or homeowner demands a very specific feel, and yet they don't know what that is. Or when a wall must capture the vibrant color palette seen in accents without competing with the surrounding elements."

Hunt's faux-finishing experience stretches back 14 years. Before that, she put her graphic design background to use in the advertising field—but quickly realized it wasn't a good fit. "I struggled to perform in a creative industry that required me to sit at the same desk, in the same building, and park in the same parking spot," she says. "I was drawn to the physical challenge of climbing ladders and scaffolding."

Hunt began muraling and was eventually drawn to Denver for its mix of high-end residential clients and unstuffy vibe; she opened Icing Studios in 2006. Her unique skills have even snagged her a celebrity client or two: Four years ago, she was hired by Siegfried and Roy's Denver-based interior designer to work on their mansion in Las Vegas. She covered an entire wall in faux ostrich finish and placed a silver leaf design with patina glaze on an octagonal chapel ceiling. Over the top? Perhaps. But Hunt hasn't let her practical side escape her. "If I know a client is going to sell a home, I'll have a conversation and ask, 'Do you *really* want to do your dining room in red?'"

THE METAL WORKER

Jon Volek: OWNER, METALHEAD FABRICATION

YOU MAY HAVE SEEN Jon Volek's metalwork in the signage, patio railing, or artistic backsplash at your favorite restaurant or shop in the metro area. Luckily, his pieces look just as slick in your home. Need a custom stainless steel kitchen island? A pair of accent wall sconces? A modern iron-and-glass coffee table? Volek is your man for custom one-offs, art projects, and furniture. "I try to get away from the repetitive stuff," he says. "Anyone can do a railing. I like to put my own flair on it."

In the cutting and welding business for almost 11 years, Volek works out of his home studio in Golden, where he has an open-door policy for neighbors who need help with household projects. In fact, 95 percent of his business is word-of-mouth or return customers. Though he attended school briefly for welding, Volek is mainly self-taught; having grown up with a father who was a custom-home builder, he says creating is in his blood. "I enjoy working with elements from the earth that have a rough edge," he says. "You can take rust and make it look like a million bucks, or like a piece of marble by adding a patina."

For certain jobs, Volek collaborates with OmniCut, a company that uses "waterjet" technology to slice through thick metal. Then he adds the details, like distressed edges or interesting watermarks. "I always want to take on new stuff, incorporate new media," Volek says. "I've stockpiled ideas for years and years. I have a sketchbook of ideas that no one's seen, and I believe I can take these products to the next level."



Typical client: Homeowners of all types who want custom one-off pieces of furniture and conversation items.

Price range: Varies widely by scope, including the type of metal and welding application.

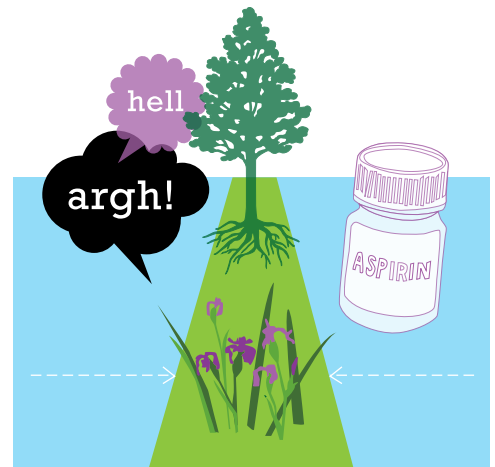
More info: metalheadfab.com



A Metalhead Fabrication wrought-iron staircase railing.



A custom-made aluminum sink by Metalhead Fabrication.



My Personal Hell

How we turned the worst part of our property around.

We bought our cute Tudor in Park Hill four years ago and since then, nary a month has passed when we don't find something to fix. First, it was landscaping the backyard. Next, we painted nearly every room in the house. Then, it was rewiring all the light fixtures. But there was one thing that remained the bane of our existence: the hell strip (otherwise known as that swath of land between the sidewalk and the street).

Our historic neighborhood is lined with 100-year-old trees that shade homes and grass from Denver's harsh summer sun. Two such behemoths used to grace our boulevard, but by the time we bought the house, they'd perished, leaving two stump holes and some battle-worn grass that did nothing for our curb appeal. Each spring, the green stalks would peek out cautiously, but by June the sun had beaten them back. The only things that flourished were weeds, even after we planted two reed-thin plum trees to provide a tiny bit of shade.

After spending yet another back-splitting evening weeding the hell strip two summers ago, we finally hit the proverbial wall. My husband fled to Home Depot and rented a pickup truck, a sod cutter, and a tiller. We cancelled all weekend plans, bought a new bottle of aspirin, and spent the next 48 hours tearing up the sad-looking grass, installing edging, and planting a smattering of drought-resistant plants. We watered, and watered some more. We raked a pickup load of red mulch across the ground. And then we waited.

There were a few casualties (a lovely sedum called "Old Man's Bones" didn't make it past two weeks), but slowly, the new plants began to thrive. Irises bloomed. Ribbon grass spread. Russian sage lined the sidewalk with violet stems. In spring, our plum trees (with trunks too thick now to wrap a hand around) set off tiny white blooms; in autumn, the leaves turned a deep, festive red. And each season, I'm thankful that we sacrificed that one weekend to turn our dusty hell strip into, well, a hell of a strip of landscaping.

—NATASHA GARDNER

Hell Strip Budget Breakdown

Rented pickup:	\$60
Rented sod cutter:	\$63/half day
Rented tiller:	\$63/half day
Edging:	\$35
Mulch:	\$80
Plants:	\$25
TOTAL:	\$326



Renovation Redux

Denverite Kayleen McCabe hosts the DIY Network's *Rescue Renovation*, which was recently renewed for its fifth season. The premise: McCabe "saves" homeowners who have botched their renovations with a seven-day plan to patch up the problem and transform the room. She's rescued more than 50 metro-area homes, so we picked this handywoman's brain for ideas to pull off DIY home projects that won't break the bank.

PREP WORK

Before starting, contact your electrician and plumber to ensure that your furnace, hot water heater, and electric panel are all updated and to code (this will typically mean adding electric outlets). For example: You're thinking about adding lighting in your basement; is there enough power in the box? Or, you want to install dueling showerheads—got enough water pressure to enjoy? "Investing in this beforehand will help with surprise costs down the road," McCabe says.

SHOPPING

"Have a plan before you put a sledgehammer through a wall," McCabe says, "and don't assume until you've shopped around that a project is outside your budget. It sounds like a no-brainer, but if it were, I wouldn't have a show to host." Try these places for deeply

discounted appliances, furniture, and supplies donated by homeowners and contractors: **Bud's Warehouse** (4455 E. 46th Ave., 303-296-3990, budwarehouse.org) and **Habitat for Humanity ReStore** (multiple locations, habitatmetrodenver.org). Plus, the "ding and dent" sections of Home Depot and Lowe's are stocked with goods like drywall with a bent corner and "oops" paint returned by other customers (multiple locations; homedepot.com, lowes.com).

KITCHEN

Think Cheap (\$50 to \$300) Paint cabinets, add new hardware, refinish countertops, and add new lights in subtle areas such as underneath cabinets and pantries. "Well-planned lighting can truly make a space feel new," McCabe says.

Stretch the Budget (\$300 and Up) Fully replace countertops (try con-

crete for an affordable, modern alternative to granite), cabinet doors, and sink and faucet (brushed nickel won't show fingerprints). Coordinate all appliances (try the Sears Outlet on Osage Street). "The right mixer can do for a kitchen what a new couch does for a living room," McCabe says. Don't be afraid to spray paint the appliances you have with professional-grade appliance paint, available at any big-box store. "With light, even coats, the finish looks new," she says.

FLOORS

Think Cheap Painting is a good way to add life. Try a whitewash; the wearing on the floors can distress them for rustic charm.

Stretch the Budget Restain or refinish your hardwood floors; or, install an engineered "click-and-lock" floor—a hardwood option you can glue down over a concrete base (check out the Lumber Liquidators at I-25 and East 51st Avenue).

WALLS

Think Cheap Consider making your own wall treatments. OSB (oriented strand particleboard) and plaster provide

a cool texture. "I've done it in the past with a knife," McCabe says. "Make swooping arcs in the plaster for a Venetian plaster effect, and you can hand-stain it and scratch it for a 3D effect. It's like art." Then, update or paint your outlet covers to match.

Stretch the Budget

Add insulation if you're doing completely new walls and have open studs, joists, or rafters. "It's a fantastic investment for maintaining a consistent temperature, and for sound reasons," McCabe says.

LIGHTING

Think Cheap Change to LED bulbs for more natural light, and add dimmable switches for valuable ambience options.

Stretch the Budget

Update your fixtures. Add something fancier, like new pendants or visually interesting features. "Adding an unusual light fixture is a great way to do something 'crazy' to a room without going overboard," McCabe says. "You can treat it like it's a piece of art." (McCabe suggests visiting the design and antique district along South Broadway.)

What's In It For Me?

Remodeling any part of your home can be costly, whether your end goal is putting it on the market, improving your quality of life, or simply beautification. The first thing most people wonder: How much of this investment will I get back if I sell? Is it worth it? We asked managing brokers/owners Patrick Finney (8z Platinum Partners) and Ryan Carter (8z Real Estate) to do the math.*

RENOVATION	COST (\$)	ROI (%)	RESALE IMPACT	FUNCTIONALITY	PERSONAL ENJOYMENT
Kitchen	10K-50K	70-100	👉 👉 👉 👉 👉	👍 👍 👍 👍 👍	😊 😊 😊 😊 😊
Bathroom	5K-25K	65-100	👉 👉 👉 👉 👉	👍 👍 👍 👍	😊 😊 😊 😊 😊
Open up floor plan	3K-10K	100+	👉 👉 👉 👉 👉	👍 👍 👍 👍 👍	😊 😊 😊 😊 😊
Basement	10K-50K	60-80	👉 👉 👉	👍 👍 👍 👍	😊 😊 😊 😊
Deck addition	5K-15K	70-85	👉 👉 👉	👍 👍 👍	😊 😊 😊 😊 😊
Landscaping	1K-15K	50-70	👉 👉 👉	👍	😊 😊 😊 😊
Garage addition	10K-25K	70-100	👉 👉 👉 👉 👉	👍 👍 👍 👍 👍	😊 😊 😊
Roof	5K-15K	50-75	👉 👉 👉	👍 👍 👍 👍 👍	😊
Windows	5K-20K	70-95	👉 👉 👉	👍 👍 👍 👍	😊 😊
Heating/cooling	3K-10K	70-95	👉 👉 👉	👍 👍 👍 👍	😊 😊 😊 😊

*Broker Notes

COST: Based on homes between \$250,000 (just above Denver's median home value) and \$500,000. **ROI:** Finney and Carter used the national average for Return On Investment figures as a guide but tweaked the numbers based on their experience in the local market. ROI will be higher when design choices (think neutrals) appeal to the broadest possible spectrum of buyers. **RESALE IMPACT:** If you've purchased the property as a sheer investment/fix-and-flip, you'll be most concerned with this result. **FUNCTIONALITY:** How much will this renovation improve your day-to-day routine? For example, a homeowner will get more actual use out of an upgraded kitchen than new landscaping. **PERSONAL ENJOYMENT:** Aside from practicality, will this feature up your quality of life? For example, even though you are going to "like" parking in your new garage, you won't be hosting guests and drinking a glass of wine in your garage like you would be on, say, a new back patio.

THE ORGANIZER

Jana Henderson: SENIOR DESIGNER, THE CLOSET FACTORY

EVER FEEL LIKE YOU'RE losing it because you've misplaced your keys or favorite shoes—again? With 17 years of storage space design experience, Jana Henderson of the Closet Factory in Centennial can take one look at your problem area, whether it's a walk-in closet, a mudroom, a pantry, or a home office, and formulate a plan to maximize, streamline, and style your available storage space. She'll weigh possible solutions—think adjustable shelves, drawers, counter space, roller baskets, hanging storage units, and cabinetry—design a blueprint with 3D software for easy visual approval, and install it. What you won't find: a prefabricated design-in-a-box that you put together. Each element is custom-cut on-site, right next to the showroom. "For most people, their space isn't used well," Henderson says. "A lot of times, there's just a closet rod and a shelf, and stuff just spills out. If you've never had an overhaul done, you'll be totally amazed at what this does for your life."



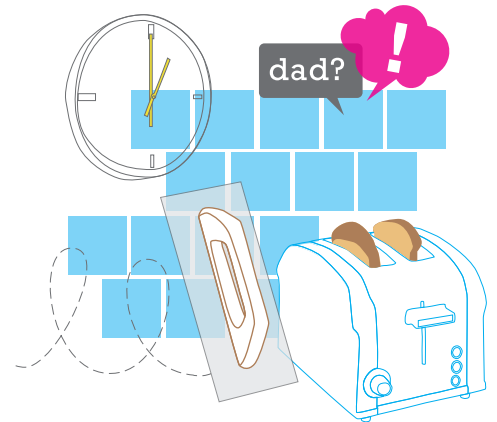
Knotty alder custom closet at the Closet Factory.



Typical client: Anyone from 900-square-foot condo owners to \$22 million homeowners; mostly those with homes of \$400,000 or more.

Price range: \$500 and up; most walk-in closets will cost \$2,000 to \$4,000.

More info: closetfactory.com/denver



Amateur Hour

How I conquered my weekend project-turned-monthlong failure.

Five years ago, I decided my kitchen needed a new backsplash. It was a spur of the moment thing that hit me one morning as I made breakfast. By the time I cooked some eggs and buttered my toast, I'd talked myself into it. I'd never tiled before, but the job seemed pretty straightforward. A few cuts here; a little adhesive there. And if I ran into a hitch, I could always get my DIY dad on the phone. No problem.

I did some prep work first. I watched a couple of YouTube videos, talked to the tile guy at my neighborhood hardware store, and dropped far less on supplies than what I'd pay a pro. Two-day slam dunk, I thought.

I spread an epoxy adhesive on 24 sheets of granite tile—or roughly 3,400 individual, 1-inch-by-1-inch squares—and, armed with my level, slapped 'em up on the wall. I was pretty pleased with the results. The cuts looked neat, and everything was even. My wife was impressed. After a day's worth of labor, all I had to do was grout the sucker. I felt like the king of the DIY world. I even got up that night to admire my handiwork. I pulled out a bag of grout, a mixing bucket, and the rest of my supplies and put them on the counter in anticipation. I couldn't wait to finish the next day.

But by the time I came home from work the following night, I'd caught a bug. I couldn't bring myself to grout anything. I went to bed and promised myself I'd get on it the next day. Three days later, after my doctor confirmed I had pneumonia, the bag of grout was still sitting on the counter. I'd been so proud of my handyman prowess, but now I just couldn't see myself getting back on track. I put the bucket away.

I was going on a month with my amateur-hour kitchen tiles when I finally had enough. One morning before work, I found the grout and the bucket. Within an hour, I was done. An hour! I cleaned the granite and sealed it when I got home. Then I admired those gleaming squares for a really long time.

A couple of months ago, my eight-year-old daughter was inspecting the tiles, in that curious way that little kids do. She asked who put them up. When I told her I did, she looked surprised. "Daddy!" she said. "It's not terrible!" In my house, I'll take what I can get.

—ROBERT SANCHEZ ▲▲

Tile Budget Breakdown

Granite tiles =	\$240
(\$10/sheet)	
Thinset (adhesive) =	\$45
Grout =	\$15
Tile saw rental =	\$30
Other supplies =	\$20
TOTAL =	\$350

THE UPHOLSTERER

Frank Stack: OWNER/PRESIDENT, GEORGE STACK INTERIOR SERVICES

LOOK AROUND YOUR GARAGE. See those 1940s art deco chairs collecting dust in the corner—relics from your grandparents' house that you're always on the brink of tossing? Better idea: Call Frank Stack and get them custom re-upholstered, and boom, you've got a new look for your living room.

The Lakewood-based custom upholstery company boasts three generations of Stacks. Frank Stack and his team can re-upholster anything from sofas to ottomans to pillows to walls, and Stack himself goes on every single call to meet with prospective clients. If customers don't already have fabric picked out, Stack brings textile selections to the house, or heads to Denver Design District if the client doesn't love the options.

Without a company website, one might wonder how a service-based, custom business like this survives. But Stack says they've never really advertised—it's all word of mouth, especially in the vintage furniture market. "No one wants to do vintage stuff because of the intricate, hand-sewn style," Stack says. "But once you do a couple and get referrals going, you kind of find that niche."



Knoll chair by George Stack Interior Services.



Typical client: Varies widely, from typical middle-class homeowners to very high-end designers.

Price range: \$200 to \$800 for a living room-style chair; \$500 to \$2,000 for a sofa.

More info: 303-232-5690