

# Mom and daughter redefine blended home

On the large mirror in the breakfast nook of the Choctaw, Oklahoma, house is the painted word "Together."

It's a fitting motto for Sherry Lopatic and her daughter and son-in-law, Rachel and Michael Tidwell, who merged their two homes into one a year ago.

"How's that working out?" I asked.

"The upside is so great," Rachel said. "We all have a much better place, and aren't spending as much."

But what I really wanted to know was how did all the furniture get along.

"You would think, since we were going from two houses that totaled 2,900 square feet to one house with over 3,000, we wouldn't have had any problems," said Rachel, "but we had many."

Though their three personalities meshed nicely, as did their blended menagerie of five dogs and two cats, their combined furniture — not so much.

"Believe me, deciding whose furniture, and decorations would go where — or just go — was a challenge," Sherry agreed.

Michael, who's gunning for son-in-law of the year, wisely left those discussions to the women. "I had no strong feelings about any of it," he said. Well, except for the dining room table ...

The new house, which they had custom built, has a 450-square-foot mother-in-law suite, which Sherry has furnished completely with her things. Some of her other furnishings, they agreed, would go in the main house.

Therein lay the rub. For example, the contemporary bar-height dining table was a favorite of Michael's. "We'd just bought it, and it was non-negotiable," said Rachel.

Sherry argued that a high table would be harder when children came along. Besides, it wasn't her style. She preferred her dining room table.

"That's when I pulled my card," said Rachel, "and said, 'Well, it won't be going in



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your area."

"I gave in a little more," said Sherry, "because I had my area where could do what I wanted."

But both sides made sacrifices.

Sherry also wanted to keep her retro Formica diner-style kitchen table with red vinyl chairs. "I really, really liked that table and chairs, and, though I knew it didn't

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fit the new décor, if it had been just me, I would have made it work."

Sherry held firm, however, to her open-shelved, pine hutch. "It was one of my favorite things and was coming no matter what," she said. Today, the hutch resides by the family room fireplace.

Once they'd hashed out what would go where, they held a garage sale, where Sherry sold "probably 60 to 70 percent of my stuff," including her well-used sectional, the retro kitchen table and chairs, her dresser and queen-size bed. She bought a double that fits better.

If you ask Sherry, the house today has 60 percent of Rachel and Michael's belongings, and 40 percent of hers. Rachel, however, claims it's the reverse.

"We still have discussions," Sherry added.

"Like the wagon wheel," said Rachel.

"You have a wagon wheel?" I asked.



Better together — Sherry Lopatic, left, pictured with her daughter and son-in-law, Rachel and Michael Tidwell, three of their five dogs — Kit, the yellow Lab; Sadie, the black Lab; Grace, the Shih Tzu — and Harley, the cat. Photo courtesy of Sherry Lopatic

"No," said Sherry, "she wants to get one to put in the front yard, but I've put my foot down."

"It fits with the neighborhood," Rachel insisted.

"We're not putting a wagon wheel out front," said Sherry.

"Merging households isn't for everyone, but it works for us," said Rachel, who with her mom, offers the following advice for anyone considering blending households:

### Sync your style

Sherry and Rachel share a similar taste in décor, which helped a lot. "If I had a chrome-and-glass, modern daughter, we wouldn't have even tried," said Sherry.

### Head arguments off at the door

The women created a scaled floor plan and cut out furniture pieces to scale to decide what would go where long before the movers came. Thus, most

arguments were waged and resolved beforehand.

### Veto power

Besides letting each party claim a few non-negotiable items to keep, both sides also had a limited number of vetoes. Each person has a right to say, "That absolutely is not going in," they said.

### Compromise

"One of our main disagreements was over blinds," said Sherry, who wanted them on every window. Rachel was adamant about not having blinds. They settled. Sherry has them in her area, but the rest of the house has none.

### Sometimes the answer is neither

Because neither party had furniture that fit the main living area, they sold their sofas and sectionals, and Rachel and Michael bought a new sofa, loveseat and oversized chair that

finished the room.

### Keep your perspective

"Ask yourself," said Sherry, "how important, in the scheme of things, getting your way really is. Is it worth having tension in the house because the other person's furnishings bother you? Any time you decide to live together or blend households, you need to be willing to bend."

Looking back on their year of transition, Sherry sums it up like this: "All in all, this was a good idea. We still have discussions, like, when holidays come around and we need to decide on that seasons' decorations, but no blood has been shed, and we are living peacefully and happily — together."

Syndicated columnist Marni Jameson is the author of three home and lifestyle books, including "Downsizing the Family Home — What to Save, What to Let Go" (Sterling Publishing). You can reach her at [www.marnijameson.com](http://www.marnijameson.com)