



DECORATING QUANDARIES

With so many factors to consider when planning a room scheme, mistakes can be easy to make. Here, selected interior designers and decorating experts share the most common errors clients make, and their advice on how to get it right, every time



AVOID HARSH WOODWORK

"The combination of colours used on walls and woodwork is an area many people make mistakes with. Traditionally most people use a colour on the walls and white gloss on woodwork, often the same white as that on the ceiling. This is a very clean, but sometimes hard look. By using a sympathetic white, as shown in the picture (above), you can soften this look and make the transition between walls and woodwork more gradual.

Increasingly there is a trend towards using a darker colour on the woodwork with a lighter colour on the walls. Using the lighter colour on the larger surface is a great way to create light and space in a room. This works particularly well if you are using a neutral scheme and gives a more 'decorated' feel. The use of a dark colour on skirting boards not only makes the walls appear lighter in contrast, it also creates a strong contemporary look

making everything above it feel lighter in contrast, and therefore the overall feel of the room is lighter, too.

Another elegant solution is using one colour on both the walls and woodwork, which is very popular in contemporary settings as it creates a very strong, clean look. Yet this look can also feel extremely calm and make a room feel much bigger, as there are no contrasts to draw the eye.

Preparation is also key. Another mistake people often make when decorating is not preparing the surface properly. Whether you're painting a wall, door, ceiling, floor or any other surface, it is important to make sure the surface is properly prepared by filling and sanding where necessary, before applying even the first coat of paint; this will ensure the best, most durable finish. Farrow & Ball water-based paints can be applied to surfaces previously painted in an oil-based finish."

Sarah Cole, director, Farrow & Ball

LEFT Using a soft white, rather than stark white gloss, creates a gradual transition between woodwork and walls. Walls in Slipper Satin; woodwork in Pointing, both Farrow & Ball.

RIGHT Antonia Stewart's careful scheduling ensured the fireplace went in first, followed by the painting of the walls and woodwork. The bespoke Rug Company carpet was then fitted, before the furniture arrived and the mirror and artwork hung.

BELOW Always opt for the largest rug you can so that it can be anchored to the space by furniture. Madeleine Rug designed by William Yeoward for The Rug Company.

FAR RIGHT Henrietta Spencer-Churchill advises to carefully consider paint colours. Here, she has chosen a shade that enhances the artwork.



SCALE RUGS APPROPRIATELY

"Most rooms need a rug, particularly in our chilly climate – a room without a rug can appear unwelcoming and unfinished. Even in a carpeted room, a large rug brings a sense of luxury particularly if it is of good quality and a high standard of workmanship. Some people make the mistake of buying cheap when they want quality. I would always opt for good quality handmade rugs over tufted ones because not only do they look so much better, but they will also last for generations. Always try a rug at home first: a rug can look very different at home than it did in the shop, and you will want to make sure you really love it before you invest.

There are no concrete rules for buying a rug, but from our experience there are a few common mistakes. Sometimes people get the sizes wrong, usually choosing a rug that is too small which will make the rug look lost, and the room feel disjointed and uncomfortable. Another common mistake is to have a rug floating in the middle of a room with furniture around the edge. It is important to anchor the rug to the space by always opting for the largest size you can. This gives a generous, calming effect and will allow you to place furniture, such as sofas, half on it. Furniture such as cupboards, tables and side tables are best either entirely on or entirely off the rug (being half on makes them look slightly unbalanced). Another thing to remember is that where there are doors that open into the space, it is important to check that they will be able to do so without coming into contact with the rug."

Suzanne Sharp, co-founder and creative director, The Rug Company



KEEP IT ON SCHEDULE

"To ensure the smooth running of a contract it is essential that decisions are made in good time, orders

for any required items are placed taking into account their delivery times and that the relevant trades are then booked in in plenty of time to ensure their availability. The key to good scheduling is realising that a building project progresses on a step by step basis with everything happening in a specific order – the kitchen can't be installed until the floor is down and the floor can't go in until the services are in. Draw up a schedule early on detailing what needs to happen when; then, as the project progresses prepare to be flexible. If the installation of the services takes longer than anticipated then contractors will need to be contacted and delayed. Having people on site with nothing to do leads to project delays and therefore ultimately a higher cost."

Antonia Stewart, interior designer



CHOOSE PAINT LAST

"As a designer I am often asked by clients and friends "What colour should I paint my walls?" – well, how long is a piece of string? With literally thousands of

paint colours on the market, available in many types, from numerous manufacturers it is an impossible questions to answer or give advice on without more information. Many people make the mistake of selecting the paint colour before choosing the fabric, or before really thinking how and when the room will be used. Light plays a large part, and I always recommend trying the colour in situ first and looking at in all times of the day and at night with artificial light. I am not a great advocate of using the entire colour spectrum throughout the house just because you happen to like the colour or you saw it looking good in your friends' house. Colours should flow from one room to another and it is best to keep general spaces such as staircases and halls fairly neutral as many other rooms will lead off them. The same applies to wallpaper. Don't select a very busy heavily patterned wallpaper if you want to hang a set of beautiful prints; they will fight and detract from one another. Choose the colour to best enhance your works of art. Always pick the curtain fabric first and then select the paint colour or wallpaper, the exception being when the wallpaper is to be the feature in which case the fabrics should be fairly plain or a direct match such as a Toile de Jouy print."

Henrietta Spencer-Churchill, interior designer



DON'T PLAY IT SAFE

"In my opinion it is better to be brave and experiment, rather than choose a dull, bland scheme in fear. It is a good idea to create a mood board where you can amass ideas such as fabric swatches, photographs or postcards - this will really help you to understand what you feel

passionate about, and to discover what colours and patterns you are naturally drawn to. If you are fearful then try a sample on the wall and see how you feel living with it before you commit to the whole room. Or try introducing colour and pattern in smaller, less permanent ways such as cushions, a blanket or two, or a rug.

When using lots of colour and pattern in a space I would suggest combining it with masses of white as this will help to maintain a sense of balance. Keeping floors and ceilings neutral or white will prevent a space from becoming overwhelmed. Above all, don't think that there are set rules that you have to follow. Some say that if you have smaller space you have to keep it neutral and plain, but I think that if you use a large-scale wallpaper on one wall this can in fact create a trompe l'oeil, drawing the eye and actually extending the space."

Tricia Guild OBE, creative director and founder, Designers Guild



BANISH BLAND NEUTRALS

"The important thing to remember when decorating with neutrals is that there will be little differentiation in the colour palette so depth and interest must be achieved using beautiful textures and contrasting finishes. To ensure that decorating with a neutral palette does not look bland, it is important to apply rich and exquisite finishes such as bronzes inlays, hand-embroidered fabrics, silks and exotic woods to help lift the space and add interest. Punctuating the space with interesting accessories and artwork personal to the client's interests and experiences creates a homely and personal space. It is also important to ensure that every piece is decorative, no matter how simple; it could still be adorned with eye-catching subtle detailing. Beautiful semi-precious handles, onyx curtain tie backs, hand-pleated silk cushion detailing, hand painted wallpaper, are all ways of ensuring the simplest furniture or wall is special and transforms a subtle palette into a scheme with depth."

Katharine Pooley, interior designer



SIZE FURNITURE TO FIT

"It sounds obvious, but remember to check how much space a piece of furniture will take up before buying, especially if you are fitting the piece into a specific space such as a window or corner. We've all fallen victim to guessing whether something will fit and there is nothing more frustrating when it doesn't. A great tip to avoid this problem, which our Design Service use and tell our clients about, is to make a template of the item from paper. Place the paper on the floor and fix with masking tape, you can then rearrange any existing furniture you have around the template, allowing you to see the size of the piece and how it will fit in to the surrounding space.

In smaller rooms don't be afraid to use statement pieces. You can be clever and use large lamps on a side table or a standing lamp to highlight focal points within the room, and the use of mirrors can give the illusion of space and light."

Lucinda Waterhouse, founding director of Oka ▶



TOP Using plenty of white and keeping floors neutral stops a playful blend of eclectic patterns overwhelming a room. Fabrics from Designers Guild.

MIDDLE Rich, contrasting textures and personal accessories add depth and interest to a neutral palette in this room by Katharine Pooley.

LEFT A compact space can still include large pieces but ensure the space has been measured properly and the layout is well proportioned. Furniture, all Oka.

Trade Secrets



CONSIDER LIGHTING EARLY

"The most common mistake that people make with lighting is to only think about it at the end of the project. By this point, decoration has started or finished and you might realise that the single central pendant you have installed for instance, is not enough. Lighting needs to be

considered at the earliest stage, i.e. when the plumbing is done, which does mean a bit of thought is required early on in the project so you can consider furniture layouts and where key artwork may be positioned.

Just as an interior designer plays with textures and fabrics, the lighting designer plays with lighting effects. For example, take a living room; the central pendant or chandelier may provide the style and focus, but if this were the sum total of the lighting in the room, the result may be a cold, dull, unflattering light. If it can be dimmed, then other forms of lighting such as table and picture lamps can create other points of focus and the mood of the room is dramatically changed. Lamps provide a soft background glow to a room and artwork can either be lit in a traditional way with picture lights or from discreet spots in the ceiling. Bookcases can also look wonderful with integrated light. A Square Highlight can uplight cornices or even uplight a fireplace to create a focus in the summer."

Sally Storey, design director, John Cullen Lighting



ABOVE The layered lighting here allows different focal points and highlights features such as the fireplace. By John Cullen Lighting.

LEFT A beautiful vista should not be obscured by blinds or nets. Simply frame with heavy curtains. Fabrics from Colefax and Fowler.



COMMON PITFALLS

"There are a number of mistakes that people make, that are actually quite simple things, but make such a difference when carefully considered. Here are a few of the things I teach to my students..

The view from windows can be all important, either as a feature or to be played down. Heavy curtains on a brilliant vista should not be accompanied by nets or blinds – in my own country bedroom I have opted for louver drapes and very fine voile so that the all round vista of the garden is permanently enjoyable and the translucency merges interior and garden views.

Big blocks of storage look dreadful so spend time and money on making sure that this imperative is dealt with sympathetically and in accord with the interior architecture.

Analyse the balance of the room – a space with large windows might, for example, suffer from a lack of wall space. This will affect your furniture proposals and inhibit your choices – irritating if you have treasured possessions. It should also influence the style of heating you choose.

Further to the above, radiators need very careful placing in any room. Don't just take the advice of the heating engineer; check your desired furniture layout before deciding where the radiators should go, and remember that good furniture does not benefit from close proximity to heat.

Planning electrical points is another trap. It is wise to make a diagram of switches and points. All too often points are installed where they serve the vacuum cleaner but not the lamp, or vice versa."

Jacqueline Turner, principal, Inchbald School of Design ■

FEATURE KATY GREEN