



Interior Designers Reveal The Most Common Design Mistakes

Fixing these issues can give any room an instant boost.

By [Jessica Booth](#) Apr 22, 2020



ANDREAS VON EINSIEDEL / GETTY IMAGES

Decorating your own home is a lot harder than it seems. Putting together a cohesive design among various rooms can be a struggle, and even just making one room look photo-ready can take longer than you'd think. Between choosing the right furniture pieces, the perfect paint colors, the best decor accessories for the space, the ideal lighting, and nailing the proportions, there are a lot of mistakes to be made.

Interior designers have seen it all, so they're more than familiar with the common design mistakes people frequently make. Quick fixes are available most of the time...and these small tweaks can make a huge difference in how a room looks. Make your space more aesthetically pleasing by identifying any of the mistakes you may have made yourself and then adjusting them. Here's what interior designers have to say:



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CHOOSING THE WRONG LIGHTING

Lighting is one of the most important parts of a space. You want to avoid it being either too bright or too dim. "Your room or home can look perfect, but the moment you add harsh lighting, it can be ruined almost instantaneously," says [Gina Daniel](#),

interior designer and blogger. "I always recommend choosing warmer tones for rooms with earthy tones, and lights that are whiter for bold and metallic themed rooms."

Not adding enough light is also a big issue. "Most rooms don't have enough light for different periods of the day," says [Darla DeMorrow](#), interior designer, certified professional organizer, and owner of HeartWork Organizing. "Bring in at least three lighting sources to provide for ambient and task lighting. Try your lighting at different times of the day. Switch out your bulbs to dimmable LEDs. Pro tip: we haven't used CFLs for years. Get rid of them now!"



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PUSHING ALL THE FURNITURE UP AGAINST THE WALLS

Your instinct may be to add couches and dressers to a room, and automatically push everything against the wall. Sometimes that works, especially if a room is very small. But it's also a very common design mistake most people don't even realize

they're making. DeMorrow suggests, "Create some interest in the room with a floating couch or a couple of conversation areas."

You should strive to create intimate seating areas instead of keeping everything apart, which invites people to mingle. Julie Assenberg of [Julie Assenberg Interior Design, LLC](#), says, "Group furniture in front of a focal point such as a fireplace. In a large or long skinny room, try breaking up the space with a couple of separate seating areas."



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ADDING TOO MUCH STUFF

Adding too many decor accessories (both large and small) can easily make a room look cluttered and messy, which probably isn't what you're going for. "It weighs the eye down to have to 'keep stopping' to take in a room which is overpopulated,"

says Sam Jernigan, interior designer, IFDA, of Renaissance Design Consultations. "The credo in design, 'form follows function,' translates to breathable spaces where what needs to be housed is considered first and accommodated accordingly." In other words, it's better to have a few well thought out pieces than a ton of little things.

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BEING AFRAID OF COLOR

Sure, there's something to be said for a gorgeous, minimalist, all-white room. But pops of color (even in a mostly neutral room) always brighten things up and make a space look better. Many people just feel too intimidated to try it. "I definitely do not mean every room needs to be 'bold,' per se, but all white or all beige spaces typically do not inspire. A well-considered and tasteful use of color - even if just on a focal wall - really enlivens a room," says Jernigan.

Interior designer Mark Cutler of [Mark Cutler DESIGN Inc](#) agrees. "Color can take a lot of forms, you do not need to go crazy with it, but its addition can totally change how a room feels." He says that if you're feeling shy about trying it, paint the ceiling as a subtle way to add some color. "One of my favorite colors for a ceiling is pink or lavender, both of them will give the room a warm neutral glow that makes skin tones look amazing...which makes it a great tool for livening up a bedroom."

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MATCHING THINGS TOO PERFECTLY

While you don't want to throw random objects and furniture pieces in a room and call it a day...you also don't want to get so focused on matching things and creating symmetry that you end up making the room look too matchy-matchy. "Real homes are more organic than you typically see in a showroom. Instead of symmetry, seek balance," says DeMorrow. "Instead of matching candlesticks on each side of the mantle, create a layered art gallery or a flowing montage of seasonal accessories."

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NOT MEASURING THE SPACE BEFORE ADDING FURNITURE

Almost every interior designer agrees that a lot of people aren't considering the proportions and size of a room before adding various furniture pieces. Taking measurements of a room is imperative before buying anything. "We've all seen those rooms that look cramped and crowded because they are filled with a bulky furniture set. Or we have seen a large overstuffed sofa in a room with a petite piece of art placed above it that looks completely out of place," says interior designer Anita Madhav of [Anita Madhav Design](#).

She adds, "These homeowners have ignored the rule of scale and proportion – how items fit into and relate to other things in the space. This mistake is easy enough to fix, but you need to evaluate each décor item first separately and then as part of the overall design in the room. The key to mastering scale and proportion is to make sure you have included items that are of different heights, sizes and shapes to keep the eye moving while making sure to give it some places to rest." Madhav says that you can usually fix these issues by rearranging or moving pieces from room to room.

You also need to think about the clearance around an item as well. "A new coffee table might fit between a couch and wall, but only leaves 24" of walking space. Ideally there would be at least 36" for a lesser-traveled path," says licensed architect Colin Haentjens. "These clearances will vary based on size of the furniture and its use."

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HANGING THE DRAPES TOO LOW

Most people fall into the trap of hanging their drapes too low...a mistake that can easily change the entire potential look of a window and/or wall. "I think for a lot of people, it makes sense to hang a drapery rod just above the top of the window," says Cutler. "The problem with this is that it actually makes the window feel shorter and the ceiling feel lower, these are generally not good things. The solution is to raise the rod almost to the ceiling."

Hanging the drapes higher can make a room look larger. "The longer drape will make the windows taller and it will magically make the ceiling feel higher too," says Cutler. "If there is a lot of space between the top of the window and the ceiling you can add a matchstick shade to fill that space and it will amplify the effect."

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HANGING ART TOO HIGH

Almost all interior designers noted that most people out there hang their artwork or picture frames way too high, an issue you won't really notice until you fix it. "The rule of thumb should be that your eye height is about aligned with the top third of the piece you are hanging," says Cutler.

Interior designer, design coach, and author [Pamela Durkin](#), ASID, LEED AP ID+C, goes into it in a little more detail saying, "I like art to be visually connected to a piece of furniture or fill up a wall space. If placing art above a sofa, I like it to start about 8-10" above the back so that it is close enough to feel like it is part of the scheme but far enough so you won't bump it when sitting on the sofa. I like to hang bigger pieces on a wall in the middle, so there is an even amount of space from top to bottom. Smaller pieces need to be grouped closer together (so they read as one element), about 2" apart and I like the middle of the piece to be at about 5'-5"-6" off the floor." Keep these rules in mind when hanging new pieces.

CATHERINE FALLS COMMERCIAL / GETTY IMAGES

ADDING AREA RUGS THAT ARE TOO SMALL

An area rug that is too small is going to throw the design of an entire room off, and it can also make the room appear smaller than it is. "A larger rug will anchor the space and offer unity for all the pieces within the space," says Jennifer B. Meyer, Allied ASID, of [Art Advisory & Interiors](#).

If you've already purchased and love a smaller rug, don't worry: it's not a lost cause. "Add another rug of a larger size for the smaller one to sit on," says Cutler. "In these situations, I like to use a simple rug underneath, like natural fiber one. It is a really great look and an ideal solution. The other approach is to add a collection of small rugs scattered about or layered like a mosaic, this is a more boho kind of feel."

RELYING EXCLUSIVELY ON OVERHEAD LIGHTING

Using only overhead lighting can make a room feel cold and clinical. Adding ambient lighting is going to give a much cozier and personal feel to a space. "To really create ambiance, comfort and appeal, lighting should be layered in a room," says Madhav. "It should come from a combination of lighting sources, different heights, and varying intensities. For example, overhead lighting combined with table lamps and sconces on dimmers can help create the environment you desire - from bright and well-illuminated for family game night to cozy and intimate for when you enjoy a glass of wine with your partner."

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CHOOSING THE PAINT COLOR BEFORE ANYTHING ELSE

Most interior designers agree that the paint color should not be the first thing you pick and settle on. Before you choose the color you want on your walls, get an idea of the color furniture and accent pieces you want. "It's the classic argument of putting the cart before the horse. In this case you're not trying to get a horse to push a cart, but you're setting yourself up to struggle with too many choices," explains interior designer [Michael Helwig](#). "When you choose the paint color before you have the accents like area rugs, window treatments and upholstery picked, you'll have a much harder time finding those things to complete the project."

Helwig recommends picking at least one inspiration piece, like an area rug or wallpaper pattern, and working around that. "It may sound counter intuitive, but having fewer choices actually makes for easier and better wall color choices."

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NOT ADDING PERSONAL TOUCHES

You want your home to look beautiful and well-designed, but you also want it to look like, well, *your* home. Only purchasing the furniture and decor pieces you see in the store may leave your home looking a little cold, like something is missing. Adding personal touches is the way to make a space stand out. "There is a way to make your home stylish and incorporate details and touches that reflect your personality or the people that inhabit that space," says interior designer [Diana Weinstein](#). "I like to do this by adding books, art or accessories that reflect the home owner. I ask clients what they are interested in, maybe they love the beach, or nature, so I might add beautiful coffee table books on nature or the outdoors, photography, and plants."

Basically, you want to feel happy and comfortable when you walk into a room. "The takeaway: it isn't how much you have to spend, it's instead all about your imagination, and feeling free to create an environment that nurtures and makes you feel happy each time you enter it," says Jernigan. "Found objects, DIY projects, and upcycling often lead to the most memorable of spaces...and most satisfying for their occupants."

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NOT TESTING OUT PAINT COLORS FIRST

There's no beating around the bush here: picking the wrong paint color is a pretty big mistake. It's also one that often happens because people choose a color in a store without testing it out in the room first. "I *never* choose a color out from the paint wheel and paint on wall without testing the color on the wall first. I put it in different spot, look at it in different times a day," says Weinstein. "Paint is so much harder than you think, and in order to avoid being stuck with a color you don't like or having to re-paint an entire room I spend the money on samples and take the time to try them. You can never just assume a color you used in one room will look the same in another."

Durkin recommends picking three paint colors that you like and then buying the samples to do swatches on the wall. She adds, "Look at the colors at all times of the day because it will change from morning to night. Colors have cool undertones (blue) or warm undertones (yellow). See what other pieces you are working with and keep the undertone consistent."

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OPTING FOR DESIGN OVER FUNCTION

Having a home that looks like it belongs in an interior design magazine is great... living in that home may be a whole different story. "The most common design mistake people make is forgetting to be honest with themselves about how they live and function in a space," says Sarah Latham, owner and founder of [Latham Interiors](#) in Sun Valley, Idaho. "We can all look at a pretty picture in a magazine of a home and say, 'Yes, that's what I want my space to look like,' but does that take into account a homeowner's lifestyle, family/pets, and livelihood? It's important to be realistic with your expectations, and be honest with how a pretty picture in a magazine or social feeds will withstand your functional needs or uphold the experiences you want from interior spaces over time."

In other words: function has to be your number one priority. That certainly doesn't mean a room can't still be beautiful, it just means you need to make the functional stuff look good.

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10'000 HOURS / GETTY IMAGES

IGNORING THE LITTLE DETAILS

A big part of making a functional room look great is to add lots of little details that pull the space and design together. "With so much attention placed on getting the perfect aesthetic, furniture and lighting, it's easy for the average homeowner to start running out of steam when it comes to the small touches. These small touches are the benchmark of what separates an average final design from an extraordinary one," says [Chip Wade](#), HGTV host and interior designer.

He adds, "Small touches like quality hardware and handles, the perfect molding and casing scale, and even the right light switches and outlets are the attainable details that often get overlooked. In a single afternoon, you can replace most of the switches and outlets throughout your home. Swapping out the standard, and likely builder grade switches and outlets with high quality options like the ones from Legrand's [adorne](#) or [radiant](#) collections, which even include smart lighting options, will most certainly catch your guests' eye and have them delight in the improved user experience."

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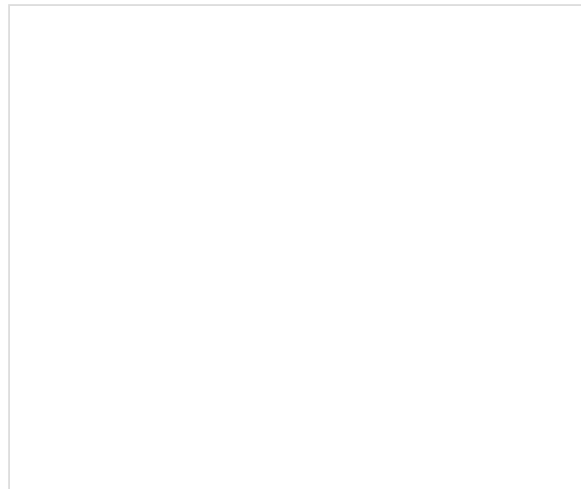


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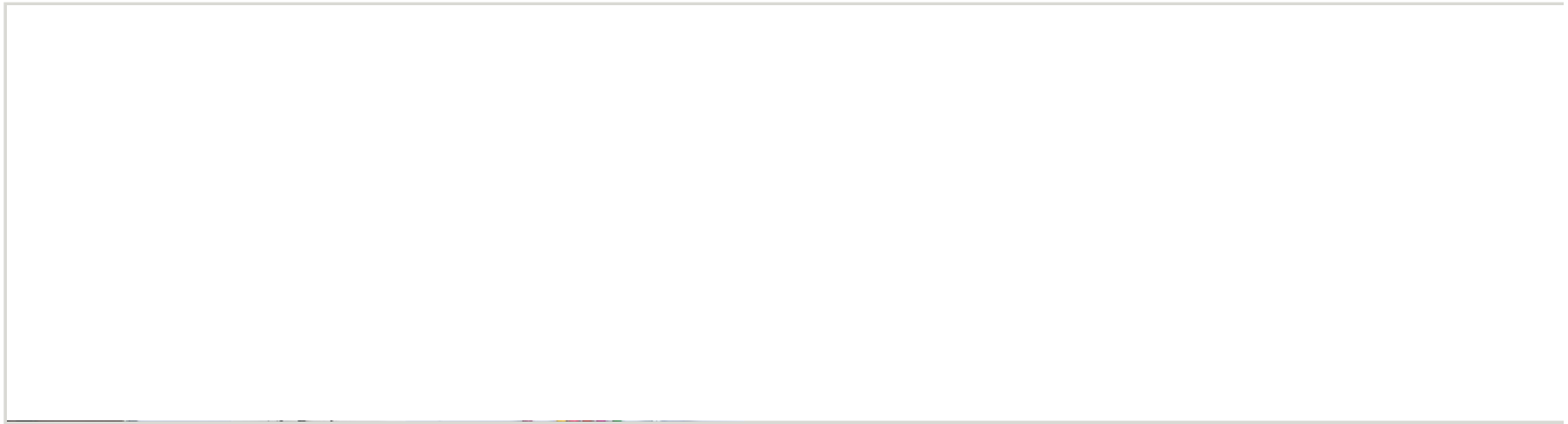
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