

# DECORATING like the **PROS**

by Shane D. Inman

## 10 Insider Tips from the Files of Top Interior Designers

**W**hen you need a quick do-it-yourself solution to a design problem in your house, turn to those who know best – but don't hesitate to hire a professional for the tasks that require perfection!

1. **Small Rooms** – Most people make the mistake of thinking that smaller rooms require lighter paint colors to brighten them up. In fact, it is the opposite! As strange as it may sound, smaller spaces actually appear larger when painted a darker color. This is because darker colors hide ceiling lines and corner shadows. Darker walls and ceilings will appear farther away, thereby making the room seem larger. It is important that you don't paint the room black, of course, but a darker hue of the already chosen color will definitely do the trick.

2. **Little Windows** – To gain the illusion of more windows and to bring more natural light into a room, try adding mirrors. Mirrors create a sense of depth – much like windows – and also reflect other windows in the space, tricking your mind in believing that there are more of them. By placing a mirror across from an existing window, you will create the appearance of having two windows in the space.

3. **Low Ceilings** – Painting low ceilings using the same color as is used on your walls, instead of traditional white, will blend wall and ceiling shadow lines. The eye will not know where the walls end and the ceiling begins.

4. **Flawed Walls** – When you have badly worn or damaged walls, try using a faux finish to cover the dimples, scrapes and mars. A good faux finish will camouflage everything with its many variations of color and random pattern. The eye will not be able to detect the difference between paint and flaws. A word of caution, however: Be careful when choosing and applying your faux finishing technique, because if it is done poorly, it will accentuate the problem rather than camouflage it. A good faux finish can be expensive and should only be done by someone who is experienced. Don't be fooled by the inexpensive kits in the "big box" stores. For this trick, you will need to gauge whether a faux finish is in order or whether you should use that money to repair your existing walls.

5. **Damaged Wood Flooring** – Damaged wood floors that have no sanding life left in them can – and should – be painted to make them look fresh again. You can make a dramatic change in your space by using a very durable garage floor paint that comes in many color variations. Depending on your individual style, you can add a very sophisticated decorative design or borders to pull off a look that echoes many designer rooms found in magazines.

6. **One Good Piece** – Not everyone can afford a room full of expensive furniture. Serious home improvement enthusiasts will want to start off their venture with one really good calculated piece and work around it in future years. Structural integrity, not cost, is the key here – even if the two usually go hand in hand. A room full of inexpensive furniture has no longevity. Once you have your one great piece, you will be pleasantly surprised at how great the salvaged end tables from your local vintage shop will look sitting next to it.

7. **Dark Room** – An inadequately lit space can appear dreary and can make anything placed in it look dull and unattractive. Any good-looking room, no matter the budget, starts with the right combination of general, task and accent lighting to show off color and texture. For exceptional general lighting, add a torchère to reflect light directly off the ceiling onto the whole room. Recessed can lighting located adjacent to walls create a scalloping effect that will provide not only general lighting, but also accent lighting. Table lamps and picture lighting will draw emphasis to surfaces and artwork for that distinguished, warm feeling. Try replacing your conventional surface-mounted ceiling fixture with a chandelier and you will notice not only better lighting, but an instant "wow" from guests.

8. Less Is Always More – As one of the world's most renowned architects, Mies van der Rohe, so eloquently stated, "Less is more!" Put everything you want in the room you are redesigning, and when you are finished, edit yourself by taking 25 percent of it out. A person entering a room for the first time should be able to experience the space as a whole and not be overwhelmed by its contents. Remember, the more you have in a room, the smaller it becomes.

9. Eclectic – Not everyone has to fit into either a traditional or contemporary style – follow your good instincts! Nowadays, pretty much anything goes, as long as you do it with some sense of style. It's not so much what you have in your space, but how it is all pulled together that really counts. Surprisingly enough, a contemporary piece can work very well with a traditional background, and vice versa. What you should always strive for when mixing periods is balance and texture, with the ultimate goal of achieving a sense of harmony and comfort. Remember, you can't buy good taste!

10. The Paint Job – The Home Depot can make even a novice feel like a pro, but a paintbrush in the hands of someone inexperienced can actually be very dangerous. Even the best furniture arrangement and the highest-priced accessories will look awful if their backdrop is a sloppy paint job. Drips and brush marks on windows, moldings and floors are a sign of very bad interior design. Even though paint is known to be the least expensive way to update a space, it pays to hire a professional who knows the correct coat coverage, sheen and application process. Not only will a properly painted interior come off looking like a million bucks, even in the most modest of interiors, it will also have greater durability to stand the test of time in an active household. □

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Shane Inman, president and founder of The Inman Company, an interior design firm that focuses in both commercial and residential markets, earned a B.A. in Interior Design from Michigan State University. His career began in San Francisco, where he specialized in custom kitchen and bathroom design. He later served as director of design for a Fortune 500 company on the East Coast, specializing in luxury homes.

In Traverse City, Inman's resumé includes both residential and commercial projects, among them the Hagerty Insurance Headquarters. He was lead sponsor and event designer for 2007 Traverse Symphony Orchestra Ball and event designer for the 2007 Traverse City Film Festival.

Shane is a certified interior designer by NCIDQ (National Council for Interior Design Qualifications). He is also a member of the American Society of Interior Designers (ASID) and the International Interior Design Association (IIDA).

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