

Does designing your home have you confused? Elements of Design's Owner & Lead Interior Designer Lina Quintero answers your questions each month.

Question: I am thinking about installing a backsplash in my kitchen. Should I spend more money on the materials or labor?



Due to the wide range of potential configurations and material options, kitchen backsplashes are an excellent means of personalizing your kitchen. Kitchen backsplashes offer depth, texture, and an elevated touch of sophistication.

Above all, my suggestion is to always invest in quality reputable labor sources. An accomplished laborer maintains the proper skill-set to install conventional materials in unconventional ways. They can execute creative non-traditional layouts and applications that will give common materials an extraordinary appearance.

In almost every case, labor ends up representing the most expensive portion of a project. It is always better to select a less expensive material and move forward with a better quality labor source. Don't short change the value of quality labor. Cut your costs in other areas.

Question: I just purchased my first home and I am overwhelmed by the idea of having to furnish the entire house. Do you have any suggestions?



Congratulations on the purchase of your first home! This is a very exciting time but, it can also be a very nerve wracking and overwhelming period. In order to make your new space livable, there are many subsequent decisions that have to be made.

With that being said, there is no need to feel like the moment you move into your new home, it must be completely furnished and accessorized. This is your first home, take your time and have fun with the design and furnishing of your new space. Instead of running out and purchasing the first set of chairs you see, be methodical and wait until you find furnishings that you love and can't live without.

Rather than purchasing an entire home full of run-of-the-mill furniture and accessories, take your time. As your budget allows for it, acquire individual high quality durable items that are expressive of your personality. In the long run, you are more likely to end up with a truly personalized space filled with furniture and accessories that reflect your end vision. Take a room-by-room approach and enjoy the process.

Question: My Mother just gave me a set of lamps that remind me of my childhood. However, the style of the lamps does not fit into the overall décor scheme in my home. Should I keep the lamps or try to incorporate them into my design?



More often than not, family heirlooms tend to stand out as forced design items because they are more traditional than the rest of the décor in a home. There are several approaches to cleverly incorporating heirlooms into an existing design plan.

A can of spray paint is a great way to revitalize and update the lamps so that they appear to blend with the rest of the décor. When selecting a color for the base of the lamp, consider a subtle metallic sheen which will add depth and help to reflect light.

Consider changing the shade on the lamps to a shape and style that better suits your home. You can customize lamp shades by recovering them in a custom or designer fabric. Adding trim to the shade will help to enhance the level of sophistication of the lamps.

Written by Arizona Foothills Magazine

Question: I hired a painter to paint my house and he is asking me what type of finish I want for the walls, ceiling, and trim. What is the best finish for my ceiling, walls, and trim?



When selecting a paint finish, it is important to factor your lifestyle and how durable you need your walls to be. For example, if you have children at home, you want to be able to clean your walls without leaving a mark. The higher the gloss content in the paint, the more durable and easier it is to clean. On the other hand, a flat finish is better for disguising flaws in a wall. However, if you have to clean a wall that has a flat finish, a rag or cloth tends to leave a mark behind. In most cases, I suggest selecting a satin sheen. A satin sheen incorporates the best qualities of a high gloss finish and many of the aesthetic properties of a flat paint.

For the trim, I suggest a semi-gloss or high-gloss finish. Trim tends to collect the most dust and debris. As a result, it is usually best to select the finish option that is the easiest to clean.

Question: My Husband and I are downsizing and my furniture does not fit. How do I incorporate my existing furnishings?



As the old saying goes, “don’t try to force a square peg into a round hole.” If you are downsizing, it is likely that the scale and proportion of the individual rooms are going to be smaller than their respective predecessors. Thinking that you will be able to incorporate every piece of furniture from the previous home into the new home is typically not a realistic approach. It is important to consider the balance of furniture within a room. Oversized furniture will appear bulky, diminish the size of the space, and create an unbalanced, Claustrophobic feeling.

Isolate any items that will work in the new space. Then, consider if any simple alterations can be made to the remaining pieces of furniture that would allow them to work in the new space. For instance, if a sofa or sectional is too high and the item has legs, swap out the legs of the item with smaller legs. Conversely, it might be possible to add height or lift to legs and/or the cushions. If the color scheme of an upholstered item does not fit within the new environment, reupholster the item with an elegant fabric with rich texture such as velvet.

Question: How should I display accessories?



There are a few basic principles that should be applied to placing accessories in a home. Firstly, accessorize in groups of three. This principle will add balance and harmony. Secondly, in order to add depth and dimension, incorporate accessories with varying shapes, sizes, textures. Thirdly, do not over-accessorize. Otherwise known as “The Cluttering Effect,” over-accessorizing is the most commonly fractured rule of design and décor. You do not need to display everything you own. Don’t be afraid to put some accessories in the garage for a couple of months.

On a seasonal basis, accessories should be moved, replaced, and updated. Following this design principle will keep your home looking perpetually fresh and creative. As a rule of thumb, the accessories you display can be updated based on the change in season or around the holidays.

Question: I am moving in with my boyfriend and he refuses to get rid of his hideous old recliner. He watches all of his sporting events from the recliner and he claims it is the most comfortable chair in the world. Is there anything I can do to encourage him to get rid of this eyesore? Help!



Fortunately, I think there is a reasonable compromise to your common dilemma. You are concerned with the appearance of the chair and he seems to be concerned with the comfort and positioning in front of the television. There are several designer furniture manufacturers that make very attractive, comfortable recliners that should satisfy your mutual requirements. Leathercraft and Kravet are two companies that offer a variety of options for streamlined stylish recliners and chaises. Good luck.

Send your design questions to Lina at feedback@mediathatdelivers.com and visit Elements of Design at www.elementsofdesign.com.