

Designer's favorite accessories: A list of dos and don'ts

It's a fact that our home surroundings have a strong effect on our sense of well-being. Choosing the right type and quantity of accessories and knowing how and where to place them, has a real effect on the appearance and comfort level of your home.

When shopping for accessories, it helps to first have an idea of what not to buy. Avoid styles that date quickly. Anything that's had a large amount of popularity (such as shabby, peeling furniture) looks very dated after the style has run its course.

Keep novelty items such as wine or golf related decor, Eiffel Towers, fairies, horses and bears to a minimum. If I may be truthful, these types of things are bordering on tacky. I'm also guilty of this to a degree. I love Eiffel Towers and my bird collection is admittedly getting larger. I've kept my collections small and subtle by placing them in a variety of spots throughout my home rather than all in one place.

Plants add warmth and texture and make a room look alive. Since they often come in unattractive containers, you can spruce them up by placing them in specially purchased ceramic pots or jardinière. In my entry, I placed a pair of faux topiary in oversized ecru colored ceramic urns. I really love the vertical line they

provide in this small area and how they call attention to the coved ceiling. If the base of the plant is funky, you can purchase real reindeer moss at many crafts stores as a cover up. I love its chartreuse color.

Throw pillows are great for warming up a bed, chair or sofa, but too many look silly. A maximum of two throw pillows on a bed and three on a sofa is perfect (unless you have a pillow-back sofa which usually requires five pillows). Throw or lap blankets add texture to a room and invite people to lounge a bit. They are also great for covering up tears or spots till they can be repaired or replaced. I updated my mom's bland taupe jacquard loveseats with a beautiful dark green shawl and four custom eighteen inch down-filled throw pillows in a dark blue Ralph Lauren leaf print and matching fringe. They coordinated nicely with her "aging" powder blue wing chairs and updated things tremendously.

In my own living room I have a large wood cabinet filled with books and stereo equipment. I've always been at a loss as to what to put on top to conceal the speakers. I found the solution in a trio of oversized mismatched woven baskets filled with fresh cut manzanita. Because my home has rather masculine architecture, the texture of the baskets and the

manzanita are really pretty together.

One unorthodox bit of decorating I did was in our guest room. It's another small room and, once again, I used vertical lines to utilize the space better and give it visual interest. Beautiful, black wooden *étagère* were pressed into use as book/curio shelves cum night stands. The mercury lamps on the top shelves have switches on the cords instead of near the light bulb making it easier for my guests to turn them on and off from bed. The *étagère* also hold various knick knacks and storage boxes, which give the room a homey appeal. Guest rooms can be impersonal if you don't make an effort to furnish them properly.

I always start accessorizing by first making sure the furniture is placed correctly, then ambient lighting (table and floor lamps). I love lamps in matching pairs. I even stack them on books if they aren't tall enough. Like cocktail tables, lamps are hard to choose well. Stick with clean lines and quality finishes. Where space is limited, use narrow bases or candlestick styles. Ceramic, real bronze and mercury are my favorite materials and I usually prefer clean white linen or silk shades, but the occasional red shade or printed shade is nice too depending on what else is going on in the room. If you shy away from pattern on your furniture

or draperies, a pattern on a lamp shade is a great way to bring in visual interest.

My favorite accessories are lamps with modern shapes; framed family pictures (small quantities in formal areas); stacks of hard-bound books; rustic pottery in trendy colors; faux topiary (perfect for me because I can't keep live topiary healthy and they're so expensive to replace); live plants in quality pots; quality woven baskets; down filled throw pillows; candles; urns and jardinières; fine china plates for hanging on the wall; throw blankets in colors that coordinate with your home; vintage silver, vases and serving pieces; quality framed prints and photography; vases in a variety of shapes, styles and colors; and original oils, especially *plein air* and portraits. If a room seems to be missing something, it's most likely scale, texture, greenery or a strong focal point.

The look in home décor right now is more avant garde, less studied. It ranges from stark to modern, to busy and cozy. Pick up a few magazines such as House Beautiful, Elle Décor Home, Architectural Digest or Traditional Home to see the current trends.

Most importantly, mix styles and eras for a timeless look.