

Home Decorating - Step by Step

Step 1 - Get Organized

For some starting a home decorating project is an exciting prospect and for others the thought provokes feelings of something close to terror. Whatever your viewpoint the first step is to get organized. Being organized will help the enthusiastic decorator stay focused and, for the "less than enthused", good organization will make the project less daunting.

First find a tote bag or big purse. Make sure it is comfortable to carry, as it may get heavy with all of the great samples you will be collecting. Next find some nice file folders. There are lots of decorative folders on the market. Picking one can be your first creative decision. How many folders you need depends on the scope of the project. At a minimum have one for pictures that have inspired you, one for receipts and one to hold a copy of your budget and floor plan. If you are doing a large project you may want to break down the folders even further. For instance you may want separate folders for information on window treatments or flooring.

In addition to file folders, it would be great to keep a measuring tape, pencils, notepad and graph paper in your tote bag. If you keep all these things together they will be right there when you are out shopping and stumble across a great piece of furniture. No need to go home and see if it will fit - you've got the info right at hand!

Step 2 - Set a Home Decorating Budget

Setting a decorating budget is a step that often gets overlooked. Don't fall into this trap. Take a careful assessment of what you hope to accomplish with your project and come up with a reasonable budget that fits in with your family's overall budget. By setting a budget you will avoid the problem of completing half of your decorating scheme only to realize that you cannot finish the project because of a lack of funds. If you do not have the money set aside to do the entire project exactly the way you want you can break up the project into stages and complete each stage as funds become available.

Step 3 - Choose Your Style / Mood

What is your decorating style? What mood are you trying to convey? Do you want a formal space or something more casual? Do you like country decor or are you more traditional? This is the time to pick the style and mood you hope to have in the room so that all of your decisions will work together to create a cohesive look.

If you have been contemplating your home decorating project for a while you probably have purchased magazines and have a few pictures of the "style" and mood you want to convey. If you haven't done that yet go to the bookstore and look over the decorating magazines and pick one or two that appeal to you. Find three or four pictures of rooms that you like and cut them out and put them in your file. They will be helpful when you go shopping or if you decide to hire an interior decorator. You don't have to like every single aspect of the room but the pictures should be a good representation of the overall look and feel you hope to accomplish.

If you would like more information on the many styles available HGTV has a great quick reference of many styles from baroque to French country.

When you are deciding on a style don't forget to take the architectural style of your home into consideration. Stark modern furniture may not be at home in a New England style cape home. Of course this rule, like all rules can be broken or "bent" a little but it takes some amount of skill to pull off. If you have your heart set on Moroccan interiors but live in a traditional home take some of those elements that you love and apply them to a theme that fits in your home. Perhaps some of those beautifully rich colors of the Moroccan style can be incorporated throughout. Often people, including professional designers, mix a little of this and a little of that to create eclectic interiors. In fact Eclectic Style is a category all its own.

Step 4 - Analyze Your Room

In home decorating the first step in analyzing your space is to think about the function of the room. Is this a formal room or casual? Will you be entertaining here or will the family be snuggling up in front of the television. When you determine what the function of the room will be *write it down* this will help you remember to keep the function of the room foremost in your mind as you decorate the room.

Next you need to take a good look at your room. Take measurements of the outside walls noting things like windows, doors, fireplaces etc. Sketch those measurements out on a piece of graph paper. Most people do a floor plan on a 1/4 to 1 scale, which means that every square on the graph paper (1/4") is equal to 1 foot of the actual room. You can also purchase a magnetic furniture planning kit. It will save you time later on when you pick furniture.

Now that you have the floor plan laid out its time to pick a focal point. Every well-dressed room will have a focal point. Is there an architectural element in the room that would make a good focal point? Fireplaces make excellent focal points or maybe your room has a great view. There are lots of ways to create great focal points its up to you - just make sure you do pick one.

This is also the time, if your budget allows, deciding on architectural changes to the room. Perhaps the room could use some crown molding. Moldings make a big impact in a room and if kept simple do not have to break the bank. Any architectural changes should be decided on before you make other decisions for your project.

Step 5 - Lighting

Lighting can have a huge impact on a home decorating scheme and will impact how well tasks can be performed in a room. Careful consideration should go into a lighting scheme. The American Lighting Association has some of the best information I have seen on lighting your interiors.

If you will be installing permanent lighting fixtures those changes should be decided on before you begin implementing your decorating scheme. A licensed electrician should install those fixtures before any painting or other wall treatment work begins. You can hold off on picking floor and table lamps until the time that you accessorize your room but you should know what lighting you will need when that time comes.

Don't forget to install light dimmers as they can set the mood and allow you to use your lighting to set off your home decor quite nicely.

Step 6 - Pick a Color Scheme

This is always my favorite part of the home decorating process but it can be overwhelming for some. It is a good idea to get a basic understanding of color theory.

But now I am going to tell you something scandalous - throw out the color wheel! There are tons of people who have professional level knowledge of color theory and will give you color schemes for free. These people are fabric designers. The easiest way to choose a color scheme is to pick out a fabric with a print whose colors really speak to you and convey the feeling you hope to accomplish in your room. Remember, you do not have to like the print of the fabric you choose just be in love with the colors.

Now that you picked a print, pick two or three of the colors that speak to you - for now ignore neutrals (black, whites, grays and beiges). Now decide how bold you want to be - if you are feeling daring use the lightest color as your main color in the room - for those who want a more harmonious calming color scheme pick a neutral tone for your main color. The neutral does not have to be in the fabric but pick something that looks pleasing with the colors you have picked so far.

Voila - now you have a color scheme.

Your main color should dominate in the room. It should cover the walls and be incorporated into window treatments and large upholstered pieces. Next pick your second color - it should be one with a medium tone and should be found in window treatments, upholstered pieces, and rugs. The remaining darkest colors you chose can be used in small quantities as accents in the room

Just remember your main color should take up a large portion of your room - about 60% - while your secondary and accent colors take up 30% and 10% respectively.

Now that you have the colors you would like in your home decorating project run off to your local paint store and pick up paint chips that match the colors you have chosen. They usually come on a card with three or four other colors. Cut out the colors you've picked and put them in your file so that you can take them out when shopping.

Step 7 - Decide on Flooring

If you plan on using a plain carpet or wood floors you can come back to this step. There are so many great carpet colors that it will be easy to pick one based on the final color scheme you pick. And wood? Well wood goes with everything.

If you want to use a beautiful area rug or patterned carpet this is the best time to pick them. They can make a great foundation for the room. Take your paint chips with you and find the flooring that ties in well with your scheme.

If you like a more neutral scheme a good idea is to pick a patterned carpet that has a neutral background with a light or tone on tone pattern. If you have great wood or tile floors and want an area rug you can have the carpet cut down and bounded to any size you desire.

Step 8 - Choose Furniture Pieces

Use your floor plan to plan furniture for the room. Don't forget your notes on the function of the room. It is very helpful to use furniture templates to layout the room. If you didn't purchase a floor plan kit you can get furniture templates at an office supply store in the section where they have rulers and graph paper - just make sure its 1/4" to 1" scale like your drawing. Simply trace the furniture you want to use on paper and then cut it out and place on your drawing. This will allow you to experiment with sizes and see what fits the best in the room. You will avoid costly mistakes by doing this - and its fun to consider the possibilities.

Pick large pieces of furniture for your home decorating project first. This includes entertainment units, armoire, large upholstered pieces etc. Make sure you have created balance and incorporated your focal point with the placement of the furniture pieces.

When choosing home decorating fabrics for large upholstery pieces it is best to stick to solid rather than a print. Hopefully, if you choose wisely, you will have these pieces for many years and it would be costly to have them reupholstered if you decide to change your decor. If you want to create more interest find a fabric with a interesting texture. You can incorporate a beautiful print into smaller upholstered pieces and accessories, which can be changed without the hefty cost.

The most cost effective way to select fabrics for upholstered pieces is to use fabrics that the retailer carries for the particular manufacturer you have chosen. If you do not like any of the fabrics available from a certain manufacturer you can try to find similar pieces from a different manufacturer that may have a fabric you love. In many cases manufacturers will allow you to supply your own fabric or C.O.M (customers own fabric). Ask your retailer if this option is given. Keep in mind that C.O.M. is a more expensive option - for a sofa you can expect to pay about

\$600 more. A great compromise is to put the manufacturers fabric on large pieces and use C.O.M for smaller accent pieces.

Now, its time to pick accent furniture. This includes coffee tables, side tables, sofa tables and occasional seating. If you have picked a solid fabric for your large pieces - go ahead and have fun and pick a beautiful print for smaller chairs.

When you pick the fabric for your upholstered pieces ask the retailer for a swatch of fabric to put into your design file and use them with your paint chips when you shop for the remaining items and fabric for your room.

Step 9 - Choose Additional Fabrics

You now have a color scheme and perhaps a couple of fabrics for your upholstered pieces picked out so you can begin to choose additional fabrics to use for your home decorating project. These additional fabrics will be used in window treatments, accent pillows and accessories.

Step 10 - Home Decorating - Accessorize

Here is where you can let your individuality shine through. The things you choose to accent your room can show your own personality and give uniqueness to your home decorating project.

Accessorizing can include window treatments, lighting fixtures, decorative pillows and throws, art and other objects you love.

Here are some helpful guidelines when choosing home decorating accessories;

- group similar objects - either by color, shape, material or theme,
- vary the size and height of objects'
- don't put objects in a straight line - create interest by placing objects in front or behind other objects to create depth,
- coordinate frames for artwork - they don't have to be the same but they should coordinate and match the style of your room,
- hang artwork about 9 inches above a sofa or at eye level,
- make sure groupings of art are balanced on your wall. It is a good idea to lay out the grouping on the floor and work with it until you are pleased before you make holes in the wall
- don't over do and make the room look cluttered - in home decorating remember - if isn't functional or beautiful on its own toss it out.