YOUR GUIDE TO HOME IMPROVEMENT

FALL 2022

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Creative Tips for Displaying Wall Art and Mirrors

BY AMANDA KNOLES

How often have you walked into a home or an office building and noticed a painting or a mirror that seems out of place? The truth is many people donít have a clue how to balance artwork within a wall space.

Before you hang artwork keep in mind the scale of your furniture and the size of the wall. In most cases, artwork should be hung about 60 inches off the floor. Lay the art on the floor in front of the wall where it will be placed so you can determine the lighting as well as the placement.

Some people get confused about symmetrical and asymmetrical arrangements. While symmetrical placements are easiest to manage visually, an asymmetrical arrangement is more interesting if you have several pieces of different sizes, colors or shapes. For example, grouping three or five frames creates a more pleasing arrangement than trying to balance four or six.

Experts say you should scale your artwork to your furniture. The art should be half as wide but not wider than the furniture below it, and the bottom of the frame should be eight to 10 inches from the top of the furniture. Otherwise, one can end up overpowering the other.

The frame you choose is equally as important as where you hang the painting. If you were trying to create an elegant mood, you would choose a much different frame than you would for a more casual room. Try to match the style and color of the frame to the artwork. Adding a mat chosen from colors or textures in the picture can also enhance the overall look. Be careful about matching the style of the frame to the dÈcor of the room. For example an Art Deco frame around a Renoir print might look odd in a beach casual room. On the other hand, a rustic pine frame could be the perfect complement for a landscape painting in a mountain cabin.

Many people make the mistake of trying to fit art into available space rather than trying to showcase the art in the best possible setting. Hang

art where is will be seen. It shouldnít be too high or too low to be enjoyed comfortably at eye level. Concentrate on finishing one wall area at a time. By trying to spread art throughout a room just to cover wall space, the effect can be too busy with no focal point.

If you would like to draw attention to a high ceiling or light fixture, hanging two horizontal pictures above each other will draw the eye upward.

Frames in a grouping donít all have to be alike. It can be more visually appealing to use three metal frames and two wood frames, for example.

Sometimes an object like a clock or a lamp placed near a painting or mirror can make it even more dramatic. Experiment with different placements until you achieve a look you like.

Interior designers often use mirrors to add elegance to a room or to help give the illusion that the room is larger than it really is. Mirrors are particularly effective in vertical spaces where a painting would seem cramped. They can also help open up dark corners when placed strategically.

When you are choosing a spot for a mirror pay close attention to what will be reflected. A mirror that reflects a beautiful vase and flower arrangement is more appealing than a reflection of the coat closet door. Placing a mirror in a hallway can make it seem more spacious, just be careful it doesnít reflect something you would prefer not to see such as dirty dishes in the kitchen.

Donít limit yourself to only using large mirrors. A grouping of small mirrors in different shapes or pretty frames can add sparkle to an otherwise boring alcove.

Placing mirrors between windows will help add depth to a room, while floor-to-ceiling mirrors on either side of a fireplace can also be quite dramatic.

Small tabletop mirrors are an effective way to showcase other interesting objects. When a sculpture or beautiful candle is reflected in a nearby mirror the effect is more interesting than simply viewing the object alone.

Placing a mirror on the ceiling isnít just for Vegas hotels. This decorator trick imparts the feeling of a skylight without having to actually cut a hole in the ceiling.

Mirrors can be a wonderful option to enhance the natural light in a room or play up a stunning view. Simply hang a large sized mirror across from a big window and enjoy the landscape.

Donít complain that you have no money in your budget for artwork. Gorgeous paintings, mirrors and frames can often be bought for next to nothing at flea markets, garage sales and antique shops.

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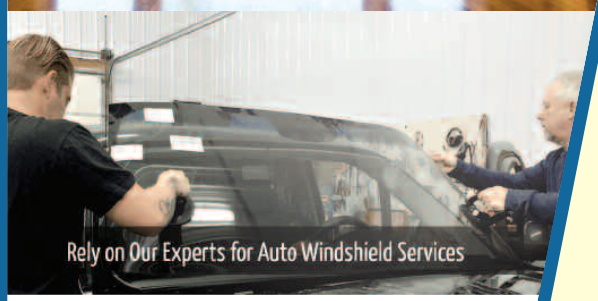

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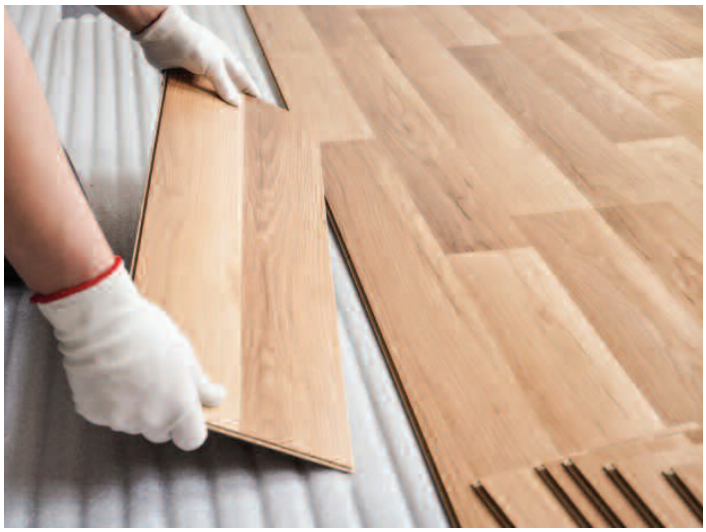
Buyer's Guide to Wood Flooring

BY AMANDA KNOLES



More families are turning to wood as an ecologically friendly flooring choice for their homes. Wood is a natural resource that does not collect dust and other allergens, and it is both renewable and recyclable. Todayís wood floors are also more affordable and maintain their value over time. While some flooring options get tired and worn over the years, wood seems to get even better with age.

There are more styles, colors and species of wood flooring to choose from than ever before. Whether you are looking for maple, birch, traditional oak or exotic bamboo, there is a style and color that will complement your decor. Selecting the right style depends on a variety of factors including where you live, your lifestyle, decorating scheme, and how much you are willing to pay. Many homeowners choose wood flooring because it offers improved shock absorption over other surfaces and it provides high resilience while maintaining a lustrous appearance. Surface finishes containing urethane in various gloss levels provide a protective coating for wood flooring making it durable, water-resistant and easy to care for.

There are more than 50 species of domestic and exotic woods to choose from in a variety of color options, hardness values and price ranges. It is also possible to achieve unique looks with custom stains and finishes or decorator patterns using several types and colors of wood.

Oak and maple seem to be the most popular woods but cherry and bamboo are also becoming big sellers. If your furniture is dark itís better to select a medium-toned wood floor. Dark wood stains look best with fabrics that have warmer gold or cooler blue tones. Lighter wood stains work well with colors like burgundy, hunter green or brown.

Solid wood flooring is constructed of one piece of wood and offers a choice of species, stains and finishes. It works well in most homes at ground level or above. Acrylic impregnated floors are extremely durable. Acrylics are injected into the wood to create an extra-hard flooring surface. They are a good choice for a family room, hallway, or kitchen.

When shopping for wood flooring you will notice different grades. Grade is determined by the appearance of the wood. Clear wood is considered free of defects even though it may have minor imperfections. Select wood is close to clear but many have some natural knots and color variations. Common wood (labeled number one and number two) has more natural variations such as knots and color differences. Many designers and consumers find the imperfections desirable since they give the floor more character and uniqueness. Number one common typically has a variegated appearance, light and dark colors, flags, knots and wormholes. Number two common is more rustic in appearance.

First grade wood is prized for its natural color variations and limited character marks while second grade wood is more variegated and third grade wood is best used for a rustic dÈcor. The angle at which wood is cut also determines its final appearance.

Strip flooring is linear in design and helps create the illusion of a larger space. It comes in 2-1/4-inch, 1-1/2-inch and 3-1/4-inch widths. Plank flooring is wider in width than linear. It usually comes in widths ranging from three to six inches wide. Parquet flooring is constructed from several pieces of wood to create a geometric design.

Some designers used stained patterns on hardwood floors to make them look older while others use stain to create faux inlays. Diamond designs popular in homes decades ago are being applied to new wood floors and trimmed with borders. Inlaid designs are sometimes applied to hardwoods like walnut, maple, hickory, cherry and pecan.

Other families prefer a vintage look, which can be achieved through distressing new floorboards or notching and grinding older floors with a variety of aging techniques. Distressed floors and faux finishes blend particularly well with French and Tuscan style walls and crackle finishes.

A popular design trend is mixing hardwoods. Different hardwoods used on the floor and cabinets can make a room look larger or add warmth. For example a darker floor can make a small room appear larger when teamed with lighter woods at eye level.

Consumers value wood flooring for its warmth, timeless beauty and its ability to complement the dÈcor of any room. If you are on the fence about whether to invest in wood flooring for your home, consider the fact that a recent national survey of real estate agents revealed that homes with wood flooring sell faster and at higher prices. Caring for wood floors is also easier than ever. With new technology in stains and finishes, most wood floors need little more than sweeping or vacuuming and occasional use of a wood floor cleaning product recommended by the manufacturer.

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Design Your Children's Rooms for Future Adaptability

BY AMANDA KNOLES

Many parents have a tendency to go way overboard when decorating childrenís rooms. To please little Tommy they give him a red and yellow room with a racecar theme including a car-shaped bed and a huge mural painted on the wall. The problem is as Tommy gets older he may find the car bed increasingly uncomfortable to sleep in and wish that he could change the roomís theme to reflect his new interest in surfing.

Rather than painting a difficult-to-remove mural on the wall, consider using easy-to-apply wall borders instead. Borders allow you to change a childís room quickly and easily. Try using them on lampshades, wastebaskets and other accessories for a more coordinated look. Many manufacturers offer bedding ensembles including comforter, pillow shams, matching curtains and rugs, making it easy to coordinate a look or theme. By using linens and accessories to convey a theme, you make it much easier to redecorate later on as your childís tastes change.

Donít be afraid to stray from conventional decorating themes. A girlís room can be blue instead of pink and she may prefer more grown-up animal prints to a fairy princess theme. Using neutral or tasteful pastel colors on the walls and floor will allow you to redecorate the room without having to redo the walls and flooring.

Avoid buying inexpensive child-size furniture. Invest in a well-made bed frame and mattress that can grow with the child such as a twin bed with a trundle underneath (for sleep-over guests) or a full size bed if space allows.

Buy furniture that is multi-functional. A bed frame with built-in storage drawers or a table with drawers can provide extra storage space for small rooms. Many furniture manufacturers offer childrenís collections that are adaptable to growing childrenís needs. Some offer furniture pieces that can work together or separately such as a hutch that fits atop either a desk or chest and beds that can sit side-by-side or stacked as bunk beds.

Some baby cribs are designed with modular sections so they can continue to be used by toddlers and preschool children. You may also find that baby furniture like changing tables and storage hutches can be reconfigured for other uses as the child grows.

Loft beds are a popular choice for preteens and teens since they allow space underneath for a desk and storage. Some loft beds with finished edges offer the option of placing the bed on casters for floor use later on.

When you can't afford to buy new furniture, try shopping at flea markets and thrift shops. Old dressers, bookshelves and tables can be given new life with a coat of paint and creative decoupage or stenciling. Look for dual use pieces such as an old trunk that can be used as table and for storing blankets or toys.

Since many kids spend a great deal of time playing on the floor, accessorize with oversized pillows and comfy area rugs. You'll find whimsical area rugs shaped like frogs, surfboards, and dinosaurs, among other designs.

Consider using shutters or shades instead of traditional window curtains. White wooden shutters are a great complement to a headboard constructed to resemble a picket fence. Shades are available in a wide variety of colors, patterns and textures from plain beige or brown to floral and striped. A plain shade can also be transformed using stencils, stickers or paints.

Provide a bulletin board and shelves where your children can display their collections, favorite photos and other treasures. Offer plenty of bins, storage cubes and racks so they have lots of places to store toys and sports equipment. If space is at a premium, get creative by using hooks on the wall, hammock-like nets for stuffed animals and under bed storage drawers.

Allow your children to have some input in decorating the room. Talk to them about colors and styles they like and allow them to express their interests as you choose bedding, accessories, etc. If your son or daughter wants all jet-black walls with white carpeting, try to reach a compromise by painting one wall a dark color and buying a fluffy throw rug instead.

Some model homes now feature what builders call teen suites or childrenís playrooms. It may be a room located above the garage or a room somewhat like mother-in-law suites of the past with a separate entryway, mini-kitchen and bath. If you have a large room that could double as a childís bedroom and play area, you can use screens or bookcases to partition off the sleeping and study area from the rest of the room. Later on the room can be rearranged to accommodate two children with bunk beds or reconfigured with a divider, furniture and accessories to offer each child separate space within one large room.

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Making Your Home More Energy Efficient

BY JOE TALENT

If you open your utility bill with a sense of dread, maybe it's time to find ways to make your home more energy efficient.

The whole family must pitch in. Remind them to turn off the lights, close doors and shut down electronic equipment when not in use.

When it's time to replace your appliances look for Energy Star rated models that reduce energy consumption. Using energy-efficient appliances helps protect the environment and reduces your energy consumption costs. Make sure you use energy-saving settings on washing machines, dryers, refrigerators and dishwashers.

In the laundry room, try to wash only full loads of laundry and wash and rinse clothes in cold or warm water. Using the cooler settings decreases the energy needed to heat the water. Dry loads of clothes consecutively. Drying new loads while the dryer is still warm helps save energy. Always clean out the dryer filter between loads to maintain good airflow and boost drying efficiency. Choose the minimum drying time needed to dry each load.

By opening windows and using portable or ceiling fans instead of an air conditioner, you can stay cool and save energy. When you must use the air conditioner, avoid placing heat-generating appliances near its thermostat because the heat can cause your air conditioner to run longer. Use your air conditionerís programmable thermostat to adjust settings at night and when no one is home.

When it's time to replace your appliances look for Energy Star rated models that reduce energy consumption.

Wherever you live, you can use your windows to help cut down on heating and cooling costs. If you live in the South, install heat-reflective film on all west- and east-facing windows that receive direct sun in summer. Using white window shades, drapes or blinds can also help reflect heat away from your home. Trees, a trellis or a fence can be used to shade west-facing windows. For those in the North, install insulating window treatments on all west, north, and east-facing windows.

Attic fans are investments that can be well worth the money in long-term energy savings. An attic fan pulls air through open windows and exhausts it through the roof, which lowers the inside temperature and reduces energy use by as much as a third compared to an air conditioner.

One of the best ways to make your home more energy efficient is to upgrade your heating system. Gas furnaces without electronic ignition and old coal burners that were switched to oil or gas are prime candidates for replacement. Most heating systems are built to last about 25 years. Check with a heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) technician to help you determine if replacing or repairing your existing system is a good idea.

Cleaning and replacing your furnace filters will keep your furnace operating at maximum efficiency. Set your heating thermostat below 70 degrees in winter or above 74 in summer to reduce heating and cooling bills by as much as 10 percent a year.

Improving your home's insulation is one of the smartest ways to reduce energy usage. If you have less than 12 inches of insulation in your attic area, it's a good idea to add more.

Check the weather-stripping between doors and door frames. Sealing air leaks can reduce lost energy by 10 percent or more. Take the time to make sure air ducts are sealed and insulated with mastic or duct sealant, then wrapped with fiberglass or rigid foam insulation.

Did you know that lighting is responsible for about 10 percent of your electric bill? Energy efficient fluorescent light bulbs use 72 percent less energy than standard 60-watt incandescent bulbs.

Heating water is the third largest energy expense in most households and accounts for 15 percent of your utility bill. If your gas water heater is more than 10 years old you should consider replacing it with a newer, more energy efficient model. Turn down your water heater's temperature setting to 120 degrees Fahrenheit or lower until you find a temperature that is comfortable. Low-flow showerheads and water-saving toilets are quick ways to make your bathroom more energy efficient.

There are many other simple things your family can do to save energy. For example, take showers instead of baths to reduce hot water usage. Allow dishes to air-dry instead of using your dishwasher's drying cycle. Take a look around your home to find where energy is being wasted and take some common sense steps to reduce such waste. Eventually, that utility bill will become a much lesser cause of dread.

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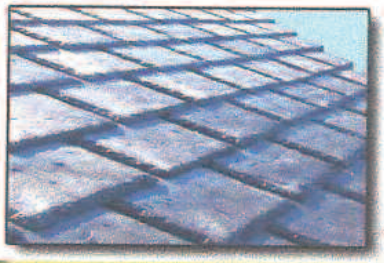

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Choose the Righ

BY AMANDA KNOLES

Before you head to the home improvement store, take a few moments to study the area you will be painting. A lighter color paint can make a small room seem larger, and a darker color can make a huge room seem cozier. Architectural details like molding and columns often look best in a contrasting color. A cooler color helps provide a restful atmosphere in a bedroom or study, while a warm shade can make a family room or kitchen seem lively and inviting.

Where the room is located makes a difference. Flat paint is the best choice for ceilings, walls, and anywhere a low-reflecting surface is needed. Satin, low luster and eggshell paint are good choices for areas where sheen is desired. They are suitable for high traffic areas like kitchens, hallways, family rooms and childrenís rooms because they withstand wear and tear and theyíre easier to clean.

Semi-gloss and high-gloss paint and enamel are used for railings, cabinetry, furniture and many other surfaces. Remember that higher gloss paint makes surface imperfections more visible.

When you visit a home improvement or paint store, you may choose from hundreds of paint chips on display or ask for help in matching a fabric swatch. Some stores offer computerized assistance to help you find a perfect color match. It helps to be familiar with various types when you choose paint for your project.

Acrylic paint is water-based and most often used for smaller painting projects and crafts. It is a good choice for painting details on furniture and accessories.

Latex paint is a big seller because it is easy to use, water-based and cleans up with liquid soap and water. Another benefit is that it emits lower fumes. It is available in interior and exterior versions and works well in bathrooms and kitchens since it offers some water-resistance.

Oil-based paint emits a strong odor and itís more diffi-

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cult to work with since it has a thick and sticky consistency. When working with this type of paint, you must keep the room well ventilated and use products like paint thinner for cleanup. Most people opt for latex paint for its ease of use, but if you seek a high sheen, an oil gloss paint can help you achieve a shinier look. Oil-based paint is highly durable and water-resistant making it a good choice for window trims, kitchens and bathrooms.

Spray paint is oil-based and used for a variety of projects such as painting a small end table or garden furniture. If you are painting over tile or porcelain and want to simulate a ceramic finish, an oil-based spray paint is a good option. For smaller projects spray paint is easier to use and doesnít require a lot of prep work. However, applying a rustproof primer on metal will assure better coverage with a spray paint.

Primer is applied to prepare drywall to accept paint. It is also used when changing from a dark to a light color. If you are painting beige or off-white walls, you probably wonít need a primer. A paint mixer can create a tinted primer for you that is close to the topcoat color so that you will need to apply fewer coats of paint. Primer is essential if you are painting over an oil-based paint with latex paint.

Choosing a color should be the fun part of purchasing paint but for many people itís extremely confusing. With so many paint chips and brands to choose from, it can be a little overwhelming. Think about the design scheme and overall effect you hope to achieve in a room. Selecting a color from a fabric or highlighting a piece or artwork or furniture can give a room an instant decorator look.

If you donít know where to begin when choosing a color, take a peek inside your closet. The clothes you wear most often should give you a clue that your favorite colors fall within a certain range. It makes sense to paint your home with colors you like rather than trying to copy a sophisticated color palette youíve seen in a model home.

Donít be afraid to try bolder colors in larger rooms like family rooms and kitchens. A bold color on one wall of a bedroom or bathroom can also be visually pleasing.

Avoid penny-pinching when buying paint. High quality paint performs better and holds up over time. It is less prone to yellow and wonít leave brush marks like a lower quality paint.

If you are uncertain if the color is right for a particular room, buy a test quart and paint a portion of the wall or a piece of poster board to evaluate how the paint looks under different lighting in your home.

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Choosing an HVAC Contractor

BY JOE TALENT

Itís wintertime, so youíre probably sitting cuddled in your favorite blanket in front of a fireplace with a nice mug of hot cocoa. While that may be a romantic picture, the last thing you want is to be stuck there all winter. Thatís why a properly functioning HVAC system is essential. HVAC is short for heating, ventilation, and air conditioning. Since climate control is essential for your well being, it is important to choose wisely when selecting a contractor for such a system.

A professional recognizes that each home is unique, so the initial estimate should consist of a home visit. The contractor should be open and explain each step of the assessment process as well as asking you questions. Heating and air conditioning systems are installed out of sight. A little education about the basic functions and needs of the system mixed with open dialog can insure you get the best system for your home.

Fortunately, the laws of capitalism are in your favor. HVAC is a busy field, so there are plenty of professionals competing for your dollars. So make sure you shop around using the advertising in this paper, Internet, telephone book and of course recommendations from friends.

One way to screen is to look for documented qualifications. Most states and municipalities have licensing requirements for local contractors. Make sure they have the necessary licenses. Ask to see the licenses along with any insurance and workers compensation documents.

Some municipalities require contractors who do work in their towns to register at city hall, so they can make sure residents work with reputable professionals. Also call your local Better Business Bureau to find out about any complaints.

There are various professional organizations such as the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAC) or North American Technician Excellence (NATE).

The longer a business has been around and more experience the contractor has, the easier it will be to gauge their reputation, so always ask for references.

What to look for

Go over the intended system with the contractor piece by piece. Since the HVAC is a large unit, contractors can charge a total price and then skimp on the components.

A properly installed, high quality system can run soundlessly or with minimal noise levels. If the equipment is inferior, noise levels will be high. If the ducts are improperly fitted to the system, that can be a source of noise.

A good contractor will measure what is known as the load calculation, which determines the size of the unit, and the size and placement of the ducts, and supply registers. The ducts are the tubes that connect the unit with the room. The supply registers are the vents where the heated or cooled air enters the room.

Each room should have itís own load calculation. The load calculation determines the size of the equipment. Equipment that is too small may be ineffective, having to work overtime to keep your temperature where you want it, which results in higher bills. If the cooling equipment is too small, it will cool the air adequately, but not effectively dehumidify the air.

The registers control the airflow into the room, and they should be adjustable. Registers are adjusted with a handle that opens and closes the opening to control the flow, thereby helping to control the temperature. Ask the contractor what kind of registers he is going to install, because some contractors substitute cheaper registers that are not adjustable.

The grilles and ducts should be placed in a position that allows for maximum airflow because air needs to circulate. Enough air needs to come back to the unit to avoid overworking the compressor, which could cause malfunctions.

For maximum efficiency, the system should be sealed. This may be an extra expense, but in the long run, you will save money.

Finally, remember that your HVAC system may need to be repaired either way. Ask if there is a service agreement. The contractor should be able to explain the maintenance basics. You should also make ask about the contractorís availability for repairs and routine service ñ you may want to get the system looked at the beginning of each season.

At any rate, armed with enough questions, shopping around should get you the HVAC contractor that is right for you. The more educated questions you have, the easier it will be for the most competent and customer friendly professional to find his way to you.

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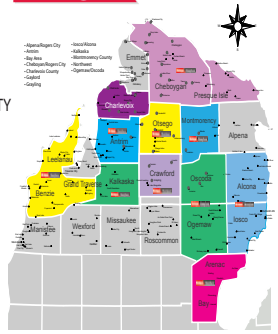

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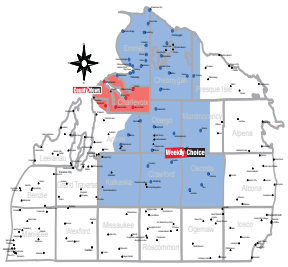

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Turn Wasted Space into a Hobby Area or Office

BY AMANDA KNOLES

Does your family have a dining room that is rarely used, or do you have a small room that seems to end up the catchall spot for things that wonít fit into the closet? Reclaim that wasted space and turn it into a multipurpose room that can be used as a home office, hobby area and guest room when needed.

A daybed with a trundle, a convertible sofa, or loveseat can provide seating while also functioning as a guest bed when the need arises. If the room is really small, some stores offer convertible chairs that fold out to make a twin bed, or you can opt for a space-saving futon. Stack lots of pillows on the sofa/bed to make it an inviting spot for lounging or reading.

Whether you plan to use the area for an office or hobbies, a worktable is a must. If you have a desktop computer, look for a stand or desk that wonít take up a lot of space while still providing storage shelves. For working on hobbies, you may prefer a wider work surface or even a drafting style table that can lie flat or tilt. To save space in a multi-purpose room a table that folds out from the wall is convenient. Just be sure you find a chair that puts you at the right height for using it. Filing cabinets or storage units with lots of shelves will help you keep your supplies and projects organized. Once your hobby area is set up it can also serve as a gift-wrapping station during the holidays. Keep a basket with tape, scissors, ribbons, bows, and gift-wrap in a closet or tucked in a corner for easy access.

While spare bedrooms are often the most logical choice for a home office or hobby room, if you have a large family or frequent guests, youíll have to find an alternative. Look around your home for possibilities. If you have lots of kitchen cabinets for storage, you might be able to turn the walk-in pantry into a workspace. A large kitchen or great room can usually accommodate a small desk, chair and a few shelves or a storage cabinet.

Take a look at hallways, stair landings, nooks beneath the stairs, attics and basements for spaces that can be transformed. Many manufacturers offer armoires and cabinetry that simulate the look of built-ins without the need for reconstruction of walls.

Basements can work well as a home office or hobby area, but you will need to make sure the area is dry, well-ventilated and adequate for your electrical and telephone needs. Partitions and room dividers can be used to separate part of the basement for a work area and the rest for a guest room or recreation area if you like. Work at home moms and dads might consider setting up a childrenís play area in the basement with a home office area nearby. Cover exposed pipes and utilitarian areas as much as possible for a more pleasant setting.

Attics are great for a home office or hobby area depending on how accessible they are, ceiling height, and whether existing joists can handle the weight of people and furniture. Headroom is also important, though it can be increased through the use of dormers. If your attic is unfinished, you should consult a qualified contractor for advice on how to make it suitable for occupancy.

An underutilized closet is another possibility for creating a work or hobby area. First, try to find adequate storage space elsewhere for the contents of the closet. Once itís clear, youíll be able to see how much space you have to work with. Removing the door and clothes rods may provide just enough space for a desk and chair with room on the walls for shelving. Consult an electrician about installing an additional outlet in the closet and assess your lighting needs. You may want to install a folding door or drape over the doorway to provide more privacy after the original door is removed.

If you have an attached garage, you may be able to steal some space in a corner thatís perfect for working on hobbies. Install a table that folds out from the wall if space is very limited. Depending on your particular hobby, a long narrow shelf attached to a wall works well with a comfortable high-backed stool and additional shelving and bins attached to the wall for storage.

Once youíve found a spot for your work area, dress it up with rugs, wall art, curtains and a few accessories. Along with making the space functional, you want it to be comfortable and aesthetically pleasing. Donít forget to install proper lighting so you wonít strain your eyes while working.

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Tips for Buying New Carpeting

BY AMY KENNEDY

With so many styles, colors and textures to choose from, buying new carpeting can be confusing. Before you shop for carpet there are several important things you should take into consideration.

First of all, think about how each room is used. It may be better to choose carpet with high soil and stain resistance for heavier traffic areas like hallways and family rooms, and install a more expensive, plusher style in the master bedroom and living room. While you may save money initially buying one carpet type for the whole house, it wonít be such a bargain if you select a style that shows wear quicker than you would like.

Talk to the salesperson about your familyís needs and lifestyle. If you entertain frequently or have small children and pets, a carpet that offers greater soil resistance will be easier to live with.

Before you visit the carpet showroom, gather paint chips and color swatches plus the dimensions of the rooms you plan to carpet. The dimensions will help the salesperson give you a ballpark estimate of the cost. Many stores measure on-site to be certain measurements are correct before installing the carpet. If you donít have swatches you can take to the store, ask for carpet samples you can take home to see how the carpet will look with your furnishings and lighting.

Choosing quality cushioning can add years of wear to your carpet. Depending on the carpet type you select, cushioning should be at least º-inch thick and no more than 7/16-inches thick with six pounds per cubic square foot of density or the equivalent. A cushion of 3/8-inch thickness with eight pounds per cubic foot of density is recommended for Berber styles.

Carpets today offer a variety of options as far as patterns, textures and colors. Loop pile and cut pile are the most common carpet types, but with new advances in technology, manufacturers are combining the two methods to offer softer and even more durable styles. Cut pile carpet is generally more durable than loop pile and can be cut a variety of ways to achieve different textures. Velvet or plush carpet has a smooth, elegant look that is most often used for formal areas like a dining room or living room. A drawback is that it shows every footprint, and stains may be more difficult to disguise. Saxony carpet has a similar look to velvets but it is not as smooth. It also has a tendency to retain footprints and vacuum marks.

Textured cut pile is popular for its multi-colored look that is twisted to help hide footprints while retaining a soft feel. It works well in casual spaces with moderate to heavy foot traffic. Shag carpeting, popular in the 60s and 70s has a longer tuft and thicker yarn that gives it a more casual look. Although interesting to look at, it can be difficult to clean. Frieze is constructed using tightly twisted short, curly fibers. A good choice for high traffic areas, it often is used for creating geometric patterns.

Loop pile carpets are exceptionally durable and easy to clean. Level loop pile is short and densely packed so that it helps repel dirt. Berber styles have thick yarns with a characteristic flecked look that is also excellent for high traffic areas. Cable uses heavy yarns with lots of twist for a casual look that is sturdy yet soft. Sisal is constructed with twisted synthetic yarns to give it a woven grass feel that is stiffer than Berbers. Often used in high traffic areas, itís available in solid and flecked tones.

Multi-level loop pile carpets use a mixture of different loop heights to create patterns and geometric styles. They work well in casual rooms with lots of traffic. Cut and loop pile carpets combine different types and cuts of pile to construct sculptured effects or combine different colors. They are good for hiding footprints and can work well in almost any room.

Once youíve decided on a style and texture, color selection is very important since the floor color can help set the mood of the room. Rooms without sunlight will seem brighter with colors like gold, peach or warm yellow, while colors like blues and greens can give a cooler ambiance to a room with lots of sun.

Keep in mind that dark colors show stains and soil less, but light colors show fewer footprints. Shiny yarns show more highlights and accents while dull yarns show fewer footprints. Multicolored carpets are easier to maintain since they show everyday stains and soil less than solid colors. Lighter colored carpets are not a wise choice for most families, but if you insist on a light color, choose a texture and pile type that will be easier to clean.

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Preparing Your Windows for Winter

BY JOE TALENT

Windows can be your best friend or worst enemy during the cold dark months of winter. On the one hand, they allow light and warmth from the sun into your home and are your portals to the outside world. On the other hand, they can allow heat to escape, driving up energy costs, and costing hundreds of dollars per year. It is estimated that as a whole, homeowners in the United States waste $25 billion in heating air that eventually leaks through improperly insulated windows.

Proper preparation can save you a significant amount of money in heating costs and keep you warmer this winter.

Sunlight can be a natural source of heat, even in the winter. Some glass has a thin coat on one side which allows the sun to penetrate from one direction but is tinted in such a way that the thermal energy remains inside. This type of tinting is generally found in double-glazed glass ñ windows with more than one layer of glass ñ because it is delicate.

Even without special tinting, it is important to keep your windows clean to maximize the amount of sunlight penetrating your home.

The type of frame you use is significant, too. Frames made out of aluminum are susceptible to expanding in the hot weather, causing leakage. In addition, metal such as aluminum conducts heat making it easier for heat to escape. Vinyl frames are low cost and mold well to any shape, but are liable to warp or twist. Wooden frames are more reliable and arenít as affected by temperature extremes, but may crack or warp from moisture. Fiberglass frames are fairly new, and donít shrink or warp. Wooden frames are generally considered more attractive.

Different styles include fixed pane, casement, double and single hung, horizontal sliding, hopper, and awning. Fixed pane windows are weather efficient because they cannot be opened, and are less susceptible to drafts. Casement, awning, and hopper windows can have compression seals and are reliably airtight. Double and single hung windows are most susceptible to leaks.

Regardless of what kind of materials and styles are used, the actual condition of the windows is a key factor in minimizing heat loss. Look at the frames of your windows. Different kinds of window frames are susceptible to a varying amount of leakage. The quality of the frame is also a concern. In order to minimize heat lost through a leaky frame, you may want to use caulk to close any holes, or add weather stripping around the areas where leakage is more likely.

The best way to reduce energy wasted through old windows is to replace them with new energy efficient windows. The quality of newer windows far exceeds even the finest quality windows that are 20 years old or more. This is an investment that pays for itself in comfort and savings on heat and electric bills in both winter and summer months.

Before applying caulk, remove old caulk and paint residue from the window with a brush, putty knife, or fluid designed to dissolve the residue. Apply the caulk to all joints of the frame, including where the frame meets the wall. Caulk should be applied during dry, warm weather to set properly.

Weather stripping seals the movable part of the window where it comes in contact with the frame or fixed part of the window. It is generally made of rubber, felt, vinyl, foam, or metal.

Storm windows will also help keep energy costs down by providing an extra layer of protection from the wind and helping to contain condensation. They can reduce heat loss by 25 to 50 percent.

Another way to retain heat comes from your choice of window treatments. No matter what you use to cover your windows, keeping the covering open during the day will allow the sunís rays to contribute to the heating of your house, and closing them at night will keep some of the heat in. Treatments that let heat into the house include drapes, roller shades, Venetian or vertical blinds. Be aware of any external shading devices that may block sunlight, such as awnings, roof overhangs, or shutters.

Just a small bit of knowledge and preparation can save you a couple of bucks in heating over the winter, and over time, it can add to quite a penny.

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Give Your Bathroom a Makeover in a Weekend

BY AMY KENNEDY

Though many people would love to have one of the spacious dream bathrooms builders showcase in model homes, most of us are stuck with considerably smaller spaces. Instead of griping about your outdated bath, take a few tips from designers and spruce it up over a weekend.

Look through decorating magazines or visit your home improvement store for ideas. Replace items like worn toilet seat covers and switch plates, and consider installing new cabinets and mirrors if your budget allows. If you have the space, add extra towel bars and robe hooks.

Create the illusion of more space by installing a curved shower rod. The unique curved design of the decorative rod instantly provides six extra inches of space, making your shower area seem much roomier.

Hanging a mirror directly above the bathroom sink will reflect light in the room and show the color and pattern of the walls. The right mirror can help a small space seem larger. Choose from finishes like chrome, brushed nickel or black wrought iron to achieve the look that best complements other bathroom accessories.

A quick and easy way to update your bathroom is to replace outdated faucets. Whether you want your bathroom to have a contemporary, nostalgic, or art deco look there is a faucet style and finish to give the room more style. Choose from elegant diamond-shaped handles and unique mid arc spouts or romantic scalloped designs. When shopping for a new faucet, consider the size and style of your sink. A center set style is easiest to install and fits any four-inch spread but if your sink has one hole or an eight-inch spread, choose a faucet designed for that configuration.

Careful selection of complementary items like showerheads, cabinet hardware and light fixtures can help you achieve a modern, coordinated room.

Replacing the showerhead takes minutes and can transform your shower experience from ho-hum to exhilarating. Choose from massaging and rain shower models to enjoy a more spa-like experience.

If your sink is worn and dingy, you may want to replace it with one of the modern, bowl type sinks. Visit your home improvement store to check out the various designs available and for tips on installation. If you donít feel comfortable removing the old sink and installing the new one, you can arrange for professional installation at the time you purchase the new sink.

Create the illusion of a taller ceiling by painting a lattice design around the ceiling edge or by installing crown molding. Paint the crown molding the same color as the ceiling. A contrasting color will achieve the opposite effect and make the room seem smaller.

If you are repainting the bathroom keep in mind that the high-humidity environment calls for a primer designed specifically for wet areas. For the topcoat use semi-gloss or paint designed specifically for use in bathrooms. There are many types of paint and caulks that have mildew-resistant finishes.

Repainting the walls in a light neutral or pastel color can open up a small space, while a darker color can add warmth and drama to a larger space. Try to achieve a balance of color with the walls and accessories. Too much color can make the room seem cluttered, while too little is boring. Remember you can always change your towels, bath mats and curtains when you long for a new look.

Lighting can also make a big difference. Look for light fixtures that coordinate with the style of the faucet and cabinet hardware. Consider installing soft diffused lighting or recessed lights if you donít have a bathroom window. Halogen lighting also offers more direct light than using fluorescent bulbs. If you have enough counter space, a decorative lamp provides a touch of elegance. Just be sure to choose a lamp base that wonít rust from exposure to moisture.

Worn flooring can also make a bathroom look ugly and unappealing. Installing new floor tiles in colors that coordinate with your design scheme can be done in a weekend. Home improvement stores and flooring centers also offer exciting vinyl flooring styles that simulate the look of water, stones and bamboo for a more exotic decorating theme.

Consider installing a shelf to hold items that clutter up counter space. If space is at a premium, decorative baskets or flower vases can also be used to hold washcloths, bottles, etc.

Finish off the room with a new shower curtain and plush towels. Donít be afraid to give a neutral colored room a punch of color with boldly colored soft goods. For example, a bathroom painted a soft cream color looks beautiful with bold teal or purple towels. If you prefer a less dramatic contrast choose pastels in blues and greens or darker neutrals like gold and tan.

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