

MIX and match

EXPERT TIPS FOR BLENDING STYLES IN YOUR LIVING SPACE

Jeanine Matlow Special to The Detroit News | USA TODAY NETWORK

With a little repetition, various elements can be combined to create a harmonious space in your home. Here are some ways to blend distinct pieces and features for a seamless feel. • Christopher Nelsen, interior designer and store manager for Gorman's Home Furnishings & Interior Design in Troy, Michigan, likes a more curated look. "I try to duplicate things in a room, so there is a connection the eye can make," he says. "I repeat multiple colors, patterns and materials, so the eye sees things cohesively."

Guidelines can also be helpful. "If you repeat materials like marble, there's a connection when you do it at least three times," the designer explains. "And you can certainly mix patterns. I try to find a common ground, like all blues and golds and taupes. You want to keep scale in mind as well."

For a Designer Room concept space, Nelsen matched the walls – Needlepoint Navy from Sherwin-Williams – to the blues in the rug. "The sectional came with blue pillows, and I also wanted to play with textures like fur and cut velvet," he says.

Varied artwork includes a sophisticated diptych. "I wanted a painting that looked like a person collected it from their travels," adds Nelsen.

Other walls feature a mirror and an abstract painting. "Not everything has to be the same style," he says. "You can have more contemporary with transitional and traditional when you repeat the color palette."

Nelsen spreads that repetition throughout, like the wood elements that include a table in one corner and a floor lamp in another. "The eye can travel around the room, so it makes sense," the designer says.

Cohesion also comes from the stone cocktail table and end table that are a set. "It's OK to have some matching pieces," adds Nelsen. Sconces with alabaster circles relate to the tables.

For those who want to mix a little more, the designer has some advice. "Start small," he says. "For example, in your bedroom, if you have a matching set, you can switch out your nightstands or go from a wood bed to an upholstered bed. That can give you the confidence to switch out other items."

Complementary blend

Art installations can be another fun place to start. For instance, Metro Detroit-based Liz McGuffin, the content creator behind With Wonder and Whimsy, says plate walls have seen a resurgence due to the grandmillennial trend. "Millennials inherit pieces, and some are not food-safe, so using them as decor makes sense," she says.

Her plates that adorn a dining room wall share some common traits. "All of them are round and they have gold trim and pink and cream in them," says McGuffin. "Then, I play with contrast to counter that with different sizes and colors. They have the same motif, but different flowers."

The content creator recently added more plates to her lovely arrangement. "When I'm out sourcing and I want to replace one or add to it, I can. It's an organic piece of art that can evolve over time," she says. "I believe a house is never done and a plate wall is a tangible representation of that."

McGuffin shops thrift stores, estate sales and more for these finds. "Some are family heirlooms, and I will work in some from big-box stores like Home Goods," she adds.

Another well-put-together vignette embellishes a dark wood dresser. "I used a variety of heights, shapes and finishes for visual interest, but also for balance," says McGuffin. "I layered tall and skinny with different heights and soft and hard elements like the lamp base that has cut glass with brass and the fabric shade that plays against it."

Ceramic pieces include a vase filled with faux flowers that repeats the floral pattern. "They are unified by their color and their feminine vibe," she says. A tray consolidates various items.

As McGuffin demonstrates, the hues you choose can make your home more cohesive. "The whole house is pink and green and blue, but different colors are more prevalent in each room," she explains. For instance, the family room features green on the walls and the rug, while other colors appear in smaller doses like the pillows that introduce some pink and blue. "I try to spread it across the entire space," she adds.

Neutral shades on the furniture and accents echo the wood floors. "I create balance with light and dark," says McGuffin. "The house came with cream trim and dark floors and we wanted to keep it that way."

For a collected-over-time feel, McGuffin offers some suggestions. "With a new house, it's so tempting to go to a store and buy the showroom models, but it takes more time than that," she says. "You should shop different places for each room, and ideally from different eras with hand-me-downs from family, some splurges from antiques stores or thrifted pieces that you paint, and some IKEA to fill in the gaps."

At the other end of the spectrum, she says your home can look like a mishmash when nothing is intentional. "You should have unifying elements," says McGuffin, who repeats stripes on the wallpaper and the pillows in her living room, where the cream trim leaves some breathing room. "When you have a neutral spot, that gives the eye a break."

Perfect pairings

At Kitty & Company in Chelsea, Michigan, principal designer and owner Kitty Golding compares cohesive spaces to meal prep. "Sometimes I make soup and I pull out a lot of ingredients," she says. "With a room, that would be finishes, fabrics and tones. I start playing and mixing them to see how they go together. Eventually, you end up in a great place."

For a lake house where blue, orange and green appear throughout, a cheerful loft bedroom provides a fun space for the grandchildren. Off-white built-ins, light gray walls and a brighter white trim add a neutral backdrop for colorful accents like pillows and comforters. "You want to be able to have focal points and also have a place for the eye to rest," says Golding. "It could be done in reverse with a darker paint color."

In the kitchen, white cabinets on the perimeter complement a custom island in a warm gray. "I like to bring in natural elements like the old barnwood beams and the stone on the wall around the oven," she adds.



Soft greens and neutral browns are repeated throughout this family room that also incorporates some pink and blue. PROVIDED BY WITH WONDER AND WHIMSY

A cheerful loft bedroom in a lake house features various colors and patterns that pop against the neutral walls and built-ins. PHOTO PROVIDED BY ANGELA BROWN PHOTOGRAPHY/ KITTY & COMPANY; ILLUSTRATION BY HIEN TRUONG/USA TODAY NETWORK; AND GETTY IMAGES

Consider these factors as you plan to finish your basement

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The space beneath your feet offers the easiest, and usually most cost-effective, path to expand your living area without building an addition. Finishing a basement turns underused square footage into a family room, home office or playroom while keeping your home's footprint intact. However, basements present unique challenges, including moisture, low ceilings, heating, lighting and insulation. Consider the following factors before you start framing the walls.

First, evaluate. Not all basements are created equal. Before planning a renovation, confirm that the space can support a living area, starting with moisture control. Inspect the space for mold, water damage and other signs of dampness, and resolve those issues before construction.

Next, inspect structural components – including support columns, the floor joists of the ceiling above and framing around windows and doors – for rot or structural damage. Have an electrician evaluate the main electrical panel and confirm it can handle new outlets and lighting.

At that point, evaluate mechanical equipment, plumbing, heating and ventilation alongside ceiling height, as these elements dictate your layout and project scope.

You also need to make sure you understand your local building codes. Although finishing a basement keeps a home's footprint intact, substantial modifications require building permits. Code requirements depend heavily on how you intend to use the space and how much you change it. Framing new walls, running electrical or plumbing lines, altering HVAC ductwork or adding a bedroom triggers permits and inspections, whereas constructing a simple storage room may not. Check with your local building department before starting work to identify required permits and applicable codes.

Be especially careful with bedrooms: While requirements vary by location, most jurisdictions require a basement bedroom to include an emergency egress route, through either a specialized window or an exterior door.

Tip: Treat a contractor's suggestion to avoid permits as a warning sign that they might cut corners elsewhere.

Then, think about insulation and comfort. A plush sofa and large TV cannot compensate for a damp, cold or stuffy basement.

Because below-grade spaces hold moisture, install an appropriately sized dehumidifier with an automatic drain line to control humidity and eliminate musty odors. Use moisture-resistant drywall on walls and ceilings to prevent mold growth, and insulate foundation walls with rigid foam panels to maintain consistent indoor temperatures. Placing fiberglass batts between ceiling joists dampens sound transmission from the floor above. Install an energy recovery ventilator to supply fresh air without wasting conditioned air.

Finally, look at improving light and overhead space. Basements rarely offer abundant natural light or generous headroom, so plan for both early. Check local building codes, as most jurisdictions require a minimum ceiling height of 7 ½ feet. Digging out and repouring a concrete slab to gain headroom usually breaks project budgets, so instead, reclaim vertical space by relocating plumbing pipes and HVAC ductwork. A drop ceiling can conceal mechanical systems while minimizing lost height.

Where possible, enlarge existing basement windows or cut in new openings, and install tubular skylights where traditional windows are impractical. Painting walls and ceilings in light tones brightens a space and creates an open feel.