

7 MISTAKES TO AVOID

WHEN DESIGNING YOUR HOME



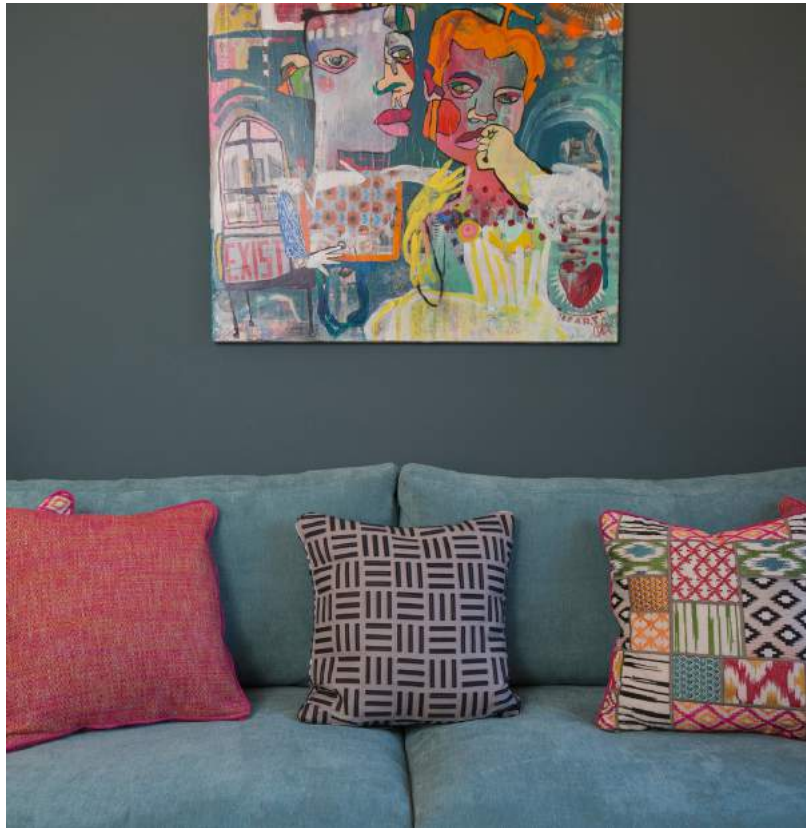
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7 MISTAKES TO AVOID WHEN DESIGNING YOUR HOME

Whether you are building your own home, moving into a new place or updating a space you've lived in for years, you will be keen to avoid expensive mistakes.

The purchases you make for your home; sofas, kitchens, flooring, bathrooms, cost fair sums of money, and often cause disruption and time to install.

They're not mistakes you are in a hurry to make. And neither are the simpler elements - paint colours, rugs or even cushions. You want to get it right the first time around.

I've been a professional interior designer in the home counties for ten years and have seen and yes, made, some mistakes.

Here are seven to avoid.



01. LAYOUT

We always start our schemes with a layout. It's important to see how best to use the space. We like to do two or three variations on the layout to explore the options in full, this is particularly important when extending or building a home.

LAYOUT MISTAKES

- Not making the most of the sun spot. We (humans) are attracted to light and maximizing natural light is a must. Do not put your utility room in this space, or the downstairs bathroom (I've seen this many times!) The kitchen should go there or a seating area so you can enjoy a morning coffee and a read of the papers/iPhone.
- The same can be said for views. Make sure your windows are placed to capture any beautiful views you have – this could be a tree, or a path to follow in your mind, or of course your garden or the sky. Look out from your house and frame the view. With a window.
- Make sure every room has a source of natural light. Even a sun tunnel. Feeling enclosed can be claustrophobic. Toilets are frequently located in the middle of the house, sadly.
- Make the layout as efficient as possible – don't waste a lot of space on transition space. Lots of corridors and gallery landings are wasteful. Of course, don't make the hall scrumpy either, it's a careful balance.
- Interior layout mistakes generally involve lack of flow, where congestion and pinch points make a room feel squashed and unpleasant to work or move in.

BEFORE



AFTER



LET THERE BE LIGHT!

PROBLEM

**LACK OF NATURAL LIGHT AND AN
UNDER-APPRECIATION OF THE VIEW
INTO THE STUNNING GARDEN**

SOLUTION

1. Bifolds that bring maximum natural light into the room.
2. Linking the indoors with the outdoors.
3. We changed the flooring and changed the colour scheme.
4. Light bounces off the floor making the room feel fresh.
5. We changed the radiators giving a designer more contemporary feel.
6. We painted the coving white.
7. Removed the dark line around the ceiling which had an oppressive room-shortening feel.



02. DESIGNING FOR THE RIGHT PEOPLE

It's important to recognise who will be using the space and understand their individual needs.

CONTEXT MISTAKES

- Not having enough adult space. When children arrive in your life and your home, they tend to take over and the invasion of plastic begins. We frequently find family homes filled with toys to the detriment of those paying the mortgage.
- Create storage solutions (see if you can teach your children to use them! They understand the principle at school, they can do so at home. Colour systems and coding help).
- Design a 'me space' even if it's only an armchair in the sunshine.
- Open plan living for teenagers.
- By the time they hit their teens, they won't be watching the same things as you. They'll be playing games and living on their tablets. Having a space that's for them is a better option than having space for all. Time to put those walls back in.
- The wrong choice of materials.
- Stone or wooden staircases (slip hazards) when old people live in the house.
- Glass, stone and metal (acoustic issues) when dogs live in the house. Woof!
- Carpets in the bathroom when young boys live in the house (say no more).
- Wooden floors in the kitchen where spillages and leaks occur.
- The work/life balance.
- If you work from home, make sure you can put away your work at the end of the day. Ideally keep your work out of the main living area (kitchen/dining). Are you able to build a posh shed in your garden? A guest bedroom is better than the dining room, as you can close the door behind you.

A family room, with lots of pattern, fun and full of light. Ideal for the dogs to relax in too



A grown-up living room using a neutral base with dark red touches in the art, cushions, curtains and lights. A beautiful antique Chinese cabinet completed the room.



03. BE BRAVE

Dull rooms are lowest common denominator rooms. They're safe. Nothing has won, nothing stands out, everything is 'vanilla' (in essence not necessarily colour) and there is no focus or feature to be appreciated.

Design doesn't work this way. There has to be a focus – this could be a feature wall or a focal piece of furniture, it could be a chandelier, or it could be a window with a view.

On entering a room it's important to know where to look. This does not have to be an expensive wow piece, it could be well coordinated or pop cushions. As the room's designer, you have to guide the person's eyes around the room; where to start, where to journey to and what to look at along the way.

Bland rooms have no feature wall or focal point. A brown sofa, or three, spread among cream or (more modern) grey walls might be comfy to watch the TV in but it's a boring room.

- A room of a single colour is not boring. As long as it has multiple textures or patterns.
- A room of brown leather sofas does not have to be boring. Bring them properly into the scheme.
- A room painted magnolia is not boring. Just make sure it's the neutral background to the interesting fabrics and furnishings.

Say NO to boring!

Boring comes about when no one is brave enough to state what they REALLY like. Yes, it may take time and a few persuasive words to encourage the whole family to appreciate the big blousy bloomed wallpaper – but maybe try it in the WC or the guest bedroom rather than the living room.

At the very least, find a fabric you're really passionate about and make a cushion or two!





04. WINDOW AWARENESS

LIGHT

We all love the idea of light and bright rooms (especially here in the UK where every ray of sunshine is appreciated) and we fill new extensions with glass walls and roof lanterns but there are definitely times when there is too much light.

Excess light can cause glare on screens (making viewing the TV awkward), it can be uncomfortable to sit in and impossible to work in a room with light directly in your eyes. If you are squinting in the room, it is too light and causing discomfort.

Blinds are the solution but it's important to think about them while the build is taking place, this means they can be incorporated into the door frames or the architecture of the room.

They also need to be considered from a budget perspective as covering all the glass with fabric can be pricey.



When we worked on this beautiful oak beamed extension we used pinoleum blinds (which matched the characteristic of the oak beams) to stop the glare on to the media screen opposite. We also installed automated roller blinds on all the doors.

SHAPE.

Fun shaped windows are interesting and can be stunning architecturally but finding ways to cover them can be tricky. Make sure you have this conversation before you start building.

BLACK OUT.

Sometimes we don't want any light at all yet bedroom windows with poles will let light in through the cracks from the early hours in the summer mornings.

Use a pelmet instead of a pole and block all the light from creeping in. Also use black out lining.

In nurseries we often use both a black out roller blind within the recess of the window and then curtains to cover the window.



HEAT & NOISE

Windows (especially old windows) can be a source of heat loss, they can also do very little to stop noise coming in from busy streets (or flights overhead). Double glazing isn't always the answer as it may be prohibited in case of certain listed buildings.

Window treatments can help substantially with heat loss and noise reduction through the right choice of fabric (wool is particularly warm) and the use of inter-liners.





05. BATHROOMS

We've all used poorly designed bathrooms and I'm sure we all have our personal bug bears. Here are a few of ours:

- The WC as the main feature as you walk in the room
- Small sinks
- Sinks with taps which splash back water on to the user
- Hot and cold taps rather than mixer taps
- Black tiles or basins without a house water filter, leaving ugly limescale residue
- Showers where the controls are directly under the flow of water
- Cranky shower doors that don't open smoothly or close properly
- Towel heaters on the opposite side of the room from where needed
- Insufficient storage
- Insufficient shelving
- Mirrors that steam up
- No loo roll holder or positioned incorrectly
- Soil pipes that circumnavigate the room and create an ugly boxed perimeter
- No natural lighting (this could be a sun tunnel if a window isn't possible)
- Insufficient lighting for tasks (shaving)
- Insufficient lighting in showers
- Insufficient ventilation
- Poorly laid tiles in 'wet rooms' so puddles are created or water flows the wrong way
- Use of thick floor tiles creating a step (tripping hazard) into the room
- Carpets!



06. SCRIMPING NOT SAVING

Updating your home can be expensive and it's necessary to consider where to spend (whatever your budgets may be). Here are our top tips on when to invest and when you can save.

BUILD

- While it's tempting to do it by yourself, we'd strongly advise you run plans past a professional. We have years of experience and will be able to foresee issues that you might miss. It's worth a small investment in the long run.
- Never scrimp on the first fix – if your electrics or the plumbing goes wrong, you have to rip out and start again. This is especially true for under floor heating. Get it right first time around.
- Aluminium doors and windows look sleek and will definitely allow more light in due to their less bulky frames. However, UPvC frames are generally half the price. Try aluminium doors and UPvC windows if you want to stretch your budget.

FLOORING

- Never choose a cheap stone – they tend to be porous and in no time, you'll find small holes in your floor. Always get a full guarantee so these issues can be fixed. Ideally with a replacement rather than a filler.
- A cheap carpet on a good underlay will feel good. An expensive carpet on a cheap underlay will not. A good quality carpet on a top-quality underlay is your best bet.

KITCHEN.

- There is a distinct look and feel about a hand-made kitchen, but if you're feeling the pinch then use standard carcasses and add higher quality doors and handles.
- Invest in a style that's going to see you through 5-10 years. We've had our fill of fixing lime or purple kitchen choices!

LIGHTING & ELECTRICS

- Always invest in sufficient sockets and dimmable lighting.
- If you envision a spectacular chandelier over the staircase but your budget is eaten up with extra build costs, buy something in a much cheaper material (paper, for example) that looks stunning and will last you until you've saved for the one your heart has been set on.

WINDOW TREATMENTS

- Don't use a cheaper curtain maker – the quality of a room can be changed with well-dressed windows.
- Don't scrimp on cheap curtain poles – they'll buckle.
- Don't waste money on silk at the windows – it'll fade or even rot in strong sunlight.

FURNITURE

- You can save money in built-in wardrobes by avoiding drawers.
- Don't scrimp on cheap handles – they can make a plain door look a million dollars. Same with hinges.

TRADE

Invest in a decorator who knows how much prep work is required. A scruffy finish can undo all your hard design work!



07. MEANING

These last 7 tips are based on the system I created in my book ‘Creating Space’ a guide to entwine wellbeing and happiness into the design process.

1. Outer Space

Create a welcoming atmosphere about your home – this is more than kerb appeal to help sell your home, this is a principle that welcomes you back to your home every day. Start with a mown lawn, a warm light and a good-looking door.

2. Me Space

Make sure you find a style that suits you and your life, not one you find in a magazine or Pinterest board. Take note when your heart flutters at a fabric or a piece of furniture. Collect things that speak to you and mean something to you.

3. Head Space

Find the time to design your house properly. It’s a time-consuming project so find the head space to do it right. A rushed house will take longer to become a home.

4. Thinking Space

We all have different ways of thinking, some are visual, others hear the world, some feel it and the final group put it into order. If you are sharing a family home, it’s best to take into consideration how others approach their space. Does it need to be orderly and symmetrical? Does it have to feel cosy? Or should it just look the part?

5. Dream Space

Your bedroom is your escape and it needs to feel as idyllic and relaxing as it can. We live in hectic times; we need a calm space to sleep. And dream.

6. Breathing Space

The living spaces in the house need to work very hard – sometimes they're social and quite public spaces, other times they're private and reclusive. Make sure your spaces 'breathe' – allow them to be flexible and move between their roles.

7. Heart Space

The final space is the kitchen and eating space – this is an area where we share food and hopefully, we share our thoughts. Create a space here that encourages conversation, that keeps the family together for as long as possible so we can support one another.

You can find more about the principles shared here in my book via Amazon:

Creating Space – How to Design your calm, sane, outrageously gorgeous home and family life. Niki Schäfer, 2013

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