

# 10 ESSENTIALS OF INTERIOR DECORATING



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# INTRODUCTION



## **PUTTING TOGETHER AN AESTHETICALLY PLEASING ROOM IS A FINE ART.**

**Some people come by this skill naturally, automatically recognizing what palettes and décor are complementary, while others need a bit of assistance to train their eye.**

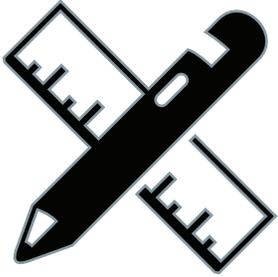
While indulging in the colors, styles, and designs that make you happy is important, following this singular method of interior decorating isn't necessarily enough to complete a room. It's important to please yourself, of course, since you'll be the one living in that space, but you can be even more satisfied when you follow critical design rules and blend them with your own style.

There is more to design than choosing a paint color and a matching set of furniture. Lighting, focal points, functionality, window treatments, textures... the recipe for a solidly designed room is multifaceted and overlapping. In this guide, we'll take a closer look at the 10 essentials of interior decorating so that you can understand the principles behind the art of interior design, take inspiration from them, and apply the logic – and magic – to your own home.

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# 1 DEFINE THE SPACE'S FUNCTIONALITY



To define functionality, in essence, means to determine how your space will be used. In the simplest terms, are you decorating a room that is meant for play, work, rest, entertaining, or otherwise? Being able to answer this basic but essential question means you'll be able to answer every design question that follows.



**“You are not confined to look at a space in one given way. You can really meander around.”**

RENOWNED ARCHITECT  
ZAHA HADID

Say you're finishing your basement and have finally created a wide open space that is meant to serve a purpose for the entire family. You want to be able to lounge there and watch television or enjoy a cozy nook filled with books. You may also want a dedicated area for your children so that they can get as crayon-happy as they want without ruining the room's appeal. Perhaps you hope to use the space as an extra sleeping area when you're hosting house guests.

From this examination of your space's functionality, you know you need family-friendly furniture. Leather is easy to clean, comfortable, and still looks luxe. A sleeper-sofa creates extra space for shut-eye. And some kid-sized tables and chairs positioned next to clever, hidden storage areas on the perimeter of your room allows the smallest folks in your family to claim their own space while you still share the room as a family.

You don't have to sacrifice personality if you live in a busy home with children. Just look up – hang your television from the wall, nix the knick-knacks (unless you're sequestering them to the higher shelves of built-in bookcases), and accessorize with bright area rugs while designating various areas of the room at the same time. Choosing a few pint-sized accessories but versatile storage solutions means your room can grow with you and you need only switch out a few pieces to match the way your home and family inevitably change.

It's easy to get so excited about creating a room's new design that you fail to take the first step and truly define a space's functionality. All it requires is a few minutes of consideration: What furniture and décor do you already have? What can you reuse and what do you need to buy new? Who will be using the room and for what purpose? Fill in the blanks and you'll have a blueprint to work from!



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### **Houzz Kids' Rooms**

playrooms & children's bedrooms galore

### **Home 3D**

make your own floor plan

### **My Measures & Dimensions**

keep track of the measurements,  
take photos & add notes

### **Handy Man DIY**

store room dimensions & shopping lists,  
estimate the cost of a home improvements



## 2 AN ESTABLISHED COLOR SCHEME



Choosing a color scheme should never be an afterthought. From carpeting to cabinetry, every element in a room contributes to your color scheme. You may discover that your favorite color isn't necessarily the best one for your space. Know this: Color can make or break a design, so before you impulsively buy that fuchsia couch or slather eggplant paint on your walls, consult a color wheel and brush up on the psychology of color to get the perfect shades for your space.



Warm colors (reds, oranges, yellows) appear closer and cool ones (blues, greens, purples) further away.

Color is a powerful thing. It can enhance feelings of health and well-being, modify the perceived temperature of a room, make your space feel larger or cozier, illuminate dark areas, energize static areas, and even create mystery and romance in dull areas.

The psychology of color has always been important in interior design. While many people make generalizations about color – red is energizing, green is relaxing, yellow is cheerful, etc. – this is a shortsighted view of the millions of colors out there. A neon green, for instance, would be anything but relaxing.

**MONOCHROMATIC**—All the colors of a single hue.

- Vary a color's lightness or saturation by the addition of black or white.
- Always balanced and visually appealing.
- Easy to manage but lacks contrast and vibrancy.

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Choose if... you want subtle energy and a clean, elegant color scheme.

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**COMPLEMENTARY**—Two colors opposite each other on the color wheel.

- High-contrast, but tough to balance.
- Select a dominant color and use the complementary color for accents.
- Side-by-side, the colors make each other appear brighter.

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Choose if... you want to make a statement and draw maximum attention.

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**TRIADIC**—three colors equally spaced around the color wheel.

- High-contrast while retaining balance, harmony, and color richness.
- Allow one color to dominate and the other two to serve as accents.

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Choose if... you want to make an artistic statement and draw maximum attention.

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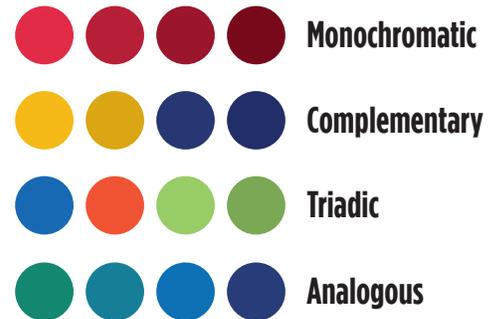
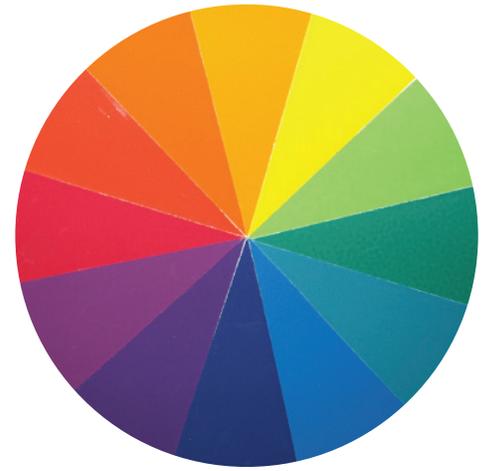
**ANALOGOUS**—Groups of colors adjacent on the color wheel, one being dominant and two on either side to enrich the palette.

- Rich, monochromatic look, but with more nuances.
- Best used with only warm or only cool colors.
- Less vibrant than complementary schemes.

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Choose if... you want a serene, comfortable design.

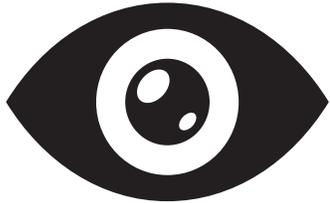
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**Mix & Match Colors**  
**IN THE PALM OF**  
**YOUR HAND**  
**with these apps:**

**Behr's ColorSmart**  
**Benjamin Moore's Color Capture**  
**ColorSchemer**

# 3 FIND A FOCAL POINT



A room's focal point is the first thing you notice when you walk into a room. It is literally the point where the lines of a room meet - and since our eyes naturally follow lines, this is why your attention is drawn in a specific direction. Perhaps the focal point is the fireplace, the television, the giant pile of clutter in the corner - not all focal points are good, but with some savvy interior design, they can be.

“Contrary to what some may assume, the focal point of a room does not have to be anything grandiose or large in size. Yes, a baby grand piano can definitely provide a wonderful focal point. But so can a decently crafted ocean-blue globe. It is the quality of the focal point's visual display that is impressive; not the mass of the room it takes up.”

FRESHOME.COM



A well-designed room should always have one focal point that is dominant enough to draw someone's attention and interesting enough to encourage a closer look. You want your room's focal point to leave an impression and be integrated into the design as a whole by scale, style, color, or theme.

Without a focal point, your room can feel cluttered, unbalanced, or empty. The good news: You can easily create a focal point by highlighting a particular piece of furniture or artwork, or painting one wall a contrasting color. A focal point also allows for a little interior design magic, drawing attention away from less appealing features of a room.

## Accentuate an Already-Strong Space: 5 EXISTING FOCAL POINTS

- High ceilings
- Attractive light fixtures
- Large window or group of windows
- Exposed brick wall
- Unusual staircase

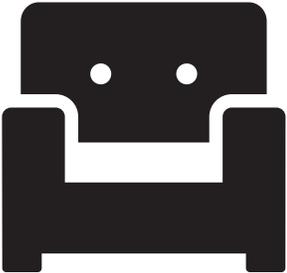


## 3 Ways to MAKE YOUR OWN FOCAL POINTS

1. Create a feature wall with paint, wallpaper, a large mirror, or wall decals.
2. Cover unattractive windows with bold, printed curtains.
3. Add an unusual or brightly colored piece of furniture.

# 4

## FURNITURE THAT FITS



Bedrooms have beds, family rooms have couches, offices have desks... but there are pieces of furniture within each of these categories that will fit better in your space than others. For the purposes of interior design, “fit” doesn’t always mean “size.” Having furniture that fits your space - literally and figuratively - is integral to good design.



Jumbo room? Designate zones for activities like sitting and socializing, watching television, or reading. Make use of an impressive anchor piece (which could also serve as a focal point) to keep a room balanced.

For a piece of furniture to blend seamlessly with your room's design, it's necessary to consider the size and shape of the room. **Oversized rooms** might accommodate more furniture, but that doesn't mean you should fill it to bursting. **Oddly shaped spaces** need very smart furniture decisions. **Smaller rooms** have their limitations, but there are clever ways to include all of the seating and storage you need.

Consider studio apartments, which typically have living, eating, and sleeping areas in one room. It may feel like a dorm room, but your space doesn't have to reflect that. For instance, glass furniture automatically elevates the sophistication level of a space while making it look modern and minimalistic. The transparency of glass gives the illusion of space – and small rooms are all about fooling the eye.

### FURNITURE: RIGHT VS. WRONG

Just because you like a piece of furniture, that doesn't mean it's suitable for your space. Size, function, and appearance all matter when it comes to choosing furniture. You don't want a couch so big it makes a room feel smaller than it actually is. You don't want to fill a tiny room with dozens of little pieces because you think that's all it can handle. Several wisely chosen larger pieces may do the same job, but better.

So how do you know what fits and what doesn't? You can use a tape measure, a handy app, or try out life-size furniture templates that are adjustable in length and width for easy customization. Don't guesstimate – know for sure what your room dimensions are and the maximum and minimum sizes for furniture for your space. Take measurements with you when furniture shopping.

Think about the versatility of your furniture. Sleeper sofas, nesting tables, ottomans – each of these items serves more than one purpose. That's a good thing, no matter how big or small your space.



The **FURNISH APP** lets you browse items from stores like Crate & Barrel, IKEA, Pottery Barn, and Herman Miller, then superimpose the furniture over photos of your living space.



The **HOME DEPOT APP** offers similar options – you can even test out light fixtures!



# 5

## THE RIGHT FURNITURE ARRANGEMENT



Furniture arranging is an art that's about more than just getting the couch, chair, or table in the "right" place. It's about creating a welcoming environment, configuring comfortable and sensible pathways, and providing places to easily put down a glass or put your feet up.



## 9 RULES OF FURNITURE ARRANGING

### 1. KEEP AREA RUGS UNDER FURNITURE

A large area rug will unify a seating group in a larger space. Undersized rugs will make a small room smaller and a large room look disconnected.

### 2. ARRANGE PIECES FOR FACE-TO-FACE CONVERSATION

While a cozy recliner or oversized chair may be inviting for solo reading, it's a good idea to have at least two seats near each other to allow for easy conversation.

### 3. SIZE MATTERS

Varying the sizes and volumes of your furnishings (height, depth, width) will create an energetic space and visual interest.

### 4. MIMIC AN ARTIST'S TECHNIQUES

Create the appearance of depth with triangulation (e.g., the placement of two end tables on either side of a sofa with a painting centered above).

### 5. AIM FOR SYMMETRY

Create order with symmetry by pairing matching lamps, side tables, or chairs on either side of your focal point.

### 6. DIVIDE THE ROOM WITH FURNITURE

Large spaces become intimate when separated into two conversation areas with a path between them. Throw down area rugs to underscore the separation.

### 7. REMEMBER YOUR FOCAL POINT

Orient the room's main seating area around your focal point, whatever that may be.

### 8. GET OFF THE STRAIGHT AND NARROW

You can enlarge a boxy space by placing furniture diagonally, which also creates a welcoming pathway into a seating area.

### 9. CREATE UNCLUTTERED PATHWAYS

Your furniture arrangement should not only be welcoming, but easy to maneuver around as well. Clear pathways are essential to the successful vibe of a room.

## 5 Free Online ROOM DESIGN APPS

1. Floorplanner
2. Better Homes & Gardens' Arrange-a-Room
3. 3Dream
4. Plan Your Room
5. Homestyler

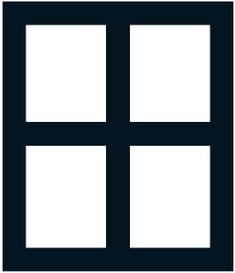


## 4 Pieces of Furniture 4 RULES:

1. **DINING ROOM TABLES** should be placed under overhead lights in a classic placement in the center of the room. But if your light is off-center, don't try to force it.
2. **DRESSERS** are not stand-alone pieces. Center a dresser on a wall between two accents. If off-center, place another piece of furniture beside the dresser for balance.
3. **COFFEE TABLES** should be big. If your room is narrow, then opt for skinny but long coffee table.
4. **COUCHES** need space. Create a few inches of breathing room between the wall and the couch to make a space seem larger.

# 6

## WINDOW TREATMENTS



One major element of a room's design is easily and often overlooked - windows. These glimpses to the outside world beg to be highlighted by blinds, curtains, drapes, or panels... though sometimes they just want to go naked. The key to doing windows right is highlighting the prettiest panes and disguising the awkwardly placed or oddly shaped windows.



Window treatments can reflect your personal style just like a piece of art.

Window treatments can reflect your personal style just like a piece of art. Maybe you have a minimalist approach and aim for uncluttered rooms with clean lines – white solar shades can keep that theme. Perhaps you're going Victorian – layers of cascading floral panels will reinforce your point of view. Window treatments can make a space cozy with soft layers or more impersonal with basic blinds.

### 5 TIPS FOR COVERING WINDOWS

- 1. Focus on high-use areas.** Cover the windows in the rooms you really live in first.
- 2. Don't slack.** Set a schedule for covering the windows in the rest of your rooms so you're not stuck with the cheap shades you threw up there for privacy.
- 3. Do you need durability?** If you entertain a lot, you have kids, or your window treatments are in high-traffic areas, opt for durable materials like nylon, acrylic, or cotton.
- 4. Be practical when it matters.** Kitchens are full of odors and cooking splatters. Avoid delicate window treatment fabrics in this room.
- 5. Consider function.** Do you want privacy from your window treatments? Insulation against noise and cold? A frame for a stunning view?

### BASIC TYPES OF WINDOW TREATMENTS

- **Blinds:** Blinds offer great light control. Honeycomb blinds trap hot or cold air in their cells, cooling and warming to accommodate the season while offering energy efficiency.
- **Shutters:** Offering light and privacy control, shutters aren't only for the outside of your home. They are especially flattering when hung below an arched-top window.
- **Panels:** Pleated panels, cascading panels, panels on a rod, tab-top panels, flat fabric panels –these are what most people think of when they hear the word “curtains.”
- **Shades:** Pleated, roller, or Roman, shades offer major privacy and let the sun shine in at your beck and call (unless you opt for blackout shades).

## Window Treatment TRENDS:

- Metallics
- Geometric patterns
- Organic materials
- Neutrals
- Mixing and matching



## Create an ILLUSION:

The higher the curtains, the bigger your room will seem. Hang drapes from ceiling to floor to make the ceilings seem higher and expand the space. When possible, hang curtains 1 to 2 feet beyond the end of the casement to make the window look wider.

# 7 PERFECT ACCENTS



Room accents are where many people feel true freedom about letting their personal aesthetic shine through. From pillows to artwork, you can choose inexpensive decorative accents with no commitment. You can change your mind regularly about how you want your room to look.



Fashion forward? Translate style rules to your décor!

**“Forgo over-accessorizing and focus on pieces in fabrics and shapes that speak for themselves.”**

NINA GARCIA, MARIE CLAIRE  
CREATIVE DIRECTOR

Room accents are the ideal way to bring a color palette together. If your palette is blue and grey, now's your opportunity to wield your proverbial brush with some orange accents. This can be done with an area rug, a repurposed and refurbished end table, window treatments, pillows, or lamps. Room accents don't have to be huge to make an impact. If subtlety is your preference, add pops of color minimally but still to great effect with the trim on a lampshade, piping on a cushion, light switch covers, or drawer pulls.

The accents in a space are not throwaway details. The littlest additions to a room can truly tie the bow on the whole package when the space may have otherwise felt not quite complete. Give accents as much thought as any other element of the room. Remember how color can affect the mood or atmosphere of an area. The goal is to enhance the overall feel of the room.



## Are You Ready to Put a PUNCH OF YOU in Your Space?



**FOR BOOK LOVERS:**  
Squat end “tables” constructed of picture books.



**FOR MUSICIANS:**  
Framed record albums or a coffee table collaged with guitar picks.



**FOR WORLD TRAVELERS:**  
A display of globes, flags or a stack of vintage luggage.

## MIRRORS CAN MAKE A SMALLER SPACE LOOK BIGGER.

Hang them opposite something you want to see more of, like windows, to bring in more light.



## TRIPLE-DUTY ACCENT:

Show off your personality, emphasize your palette, and separate your space simultaneously with a carefully selected room divider.



# 8

## LIGHTING



**Overhead lighting, track lighting, recessed lighting, table lamps, fluorescents... the options for light are multifaceted and plentiful. Choosing the right illumination for your space can seem like a geometry problem with no clear answer. But here's the secret: balance.**



Without good lighting, all of your other carefully selected details, from flooring to furnishings, will be lost. Lighting is one of the most important elements of a space, setting the tone and atmosphere of your entire room.

Mixing light sources at different levels will create a flattering ambiance in your space. If you have recessed lights through your entire family room, being able to turn half of them off and illuminate part of the space with table lamps will offer appropriate task lighting for reading or craft projects

## LIGHTING TIPS FOR 5 MAIN ROOMS

- **Kitchen:** Overhead lighting is a must in a kitchen, just make sure your fixture isn't too small. Dimmer lights allow you to crank up the illumination when cooking or tone it down for an intimate meal. Illuminate work surfaces with under-cabinet lights.
- **Family Room:** Light three of the four corners of your family room using a combo of table and floor lamps, some of which shine up and others that offer a downward glow. Focus one of these on an object you'd like to highlight - a piece of art or a striking piece of furniture.
- **Bedroom:** The goal for a bedroom is nearly always to be calm and cozy. Position reading lamps or sconces by the bed. Whatever illumination you choose, do not point it directly at the bed.
- **Dining Room:** Highlight the main element of your room - the dining table - with a chandelier or pendant hung directly above. Aim for all other lighting to be indirect - it's more flattering and relaxing.
- **Bathroom:** Pair sidelights with overhead light to avoid shadows. The overhead light also offers full room illumination which keeps the shower from becoming a dark space and helps during cleaning time.

## Rule of THUMB:

Don't use light as "filler." If every light you install does not have a specific task, eliminate it from your overall scheme.

## Feeling SQUISHED?

Choose a taller lamp to create the sense of a high ceiling.



✓ **QUICK TIP:** Paint is one of the tools in your lighting arsenal. Lighter wall colors will reflect light while darker colors will absorb light.

# 9 WALL TREATMENTS



Beyond selecting a paint color or wallpaper pattern, many people consider the walls of the room they're decorating as an afterthought, a background for their pictures and favorite artwork. Think beyond the walls... to wall treatments that are surprising, stunning, and downright fun, to treatments that can actually be the art that defines and transforms your space.



There is more to walls than paint or wallpaper. We're talking texture-rich, shape-shifting, three-dimensional, magnificent, creative installations – many of which seem complicated, but don't have to be.

Tactile walls aren't just for kids. Wall treatments can mimic the coolest museum designs or your grandest never-thought-I-could-have-that daydreams. Serve up an unexpected wall treatment on just one small nook, the back of bookshelves, or around a doorway or window.

## LET YOUR WALLS SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES

For some of these exciting ideas, bigger is better, so dare to be different and design boldly:

**WALL DECALS:** For people who may be nervous about any permanent wall treatment, wall decals are a great place to test the waters. From miniature to jumbo-sized, stretching across several walls and even onto ceilings, wall decals allow you to experiment without committing to a major artistic statement.

**MOLDINGS:** Moldings are now used for far more than just streamlining walls and ceiling. Use narrow strips of molding to create a suggestion of panels with a treatment known as picture framing. Paint the interior of each “frame” different shades, hang artwork inside of the molding, or allow the wood to speak for itself on stairwells or wherever you have a blank wall screaming to be noticed.

**WOOD:** Go rustic with upcycled wood from your grandfather's barn, forage for branches, or recycle wood from old pictures frames. Paint, stain, or use as-is. Go horizontal, vertical, or diagonal. A wood wall treatment makes a statement in a big, beautiful way.

**FABRIC:** Carpet tiles, quilting squares, tapestries, and even leather inserts enable you to fashion fabric walls for your eclectic space. If it can be hung, it can be a wall treatment, so keep your eyes open for the texture that speaks volumes about your room's style.

## Fun with PAINT:

Paint doesn't have to be flat, satin, or glossy. Go faux with a bucket of texture paint and easy-to-master techniques like stippling, sponging, flogging, and washing. Or create your own texture through trial and error, giving your walls a slight 3D effect.



## Go Old School— LITERALLY:

Use chalkboard paint to cover an entire wall, or even to highlight one small section. You don't even need to have kids in the house to enjoy this embellishment which comes in virtually any color.

# 10 TEXTURES



From smooth to rough, plush to woven, rugs to furniture, the textures in a space can be as subtle or extreme as you like. Varying textures, however, should always be the goal, as this interior design method gives a room character, dimension, and energy.



Simply layering a few textures can add warmth to a room. For example, a plush area rug over a hardwood floor can cozy up what might be an otherwise chilly space. A vibrant quilt will add interest to a leather couch.

Besides varying and layering the textures within a room, consider employing the following techniques to put the spotlight on textures – while keeping in mind that texture isn't just about fabric.

**CHOOSE OPPOSING TEXTURES:** Mix smooth and coarse textures or plush and flat textures to create an appealing contrast both visually and tactilely, such as a carefully painted wall covered by a thickly painted selection of modern art.

**LOOK UP:** Emphasize the ceiling. The “fifth wall” of your room deserves a little attention too, and it’s an ideal location to experiment with texture and color. Add an intricate molding design or paint it a contrasting color.

**INCORPORATE VISUAL TEXTURE:** Patterned fabrics add visual texture – think pillows, upholstery, curtains. Wood grains add natural patterns and blend well with solid colors.

**GO MONOCHROMATIC:** If you’re perfectly happy with your neutral space, don’t feel forced to use color just to make the room look interesting. Use texture to amp up the warmth.

**TEXTURIZE ONE WALL:** Using texture paint, suede, textured wallpaper, or any other material that strikes your fancy, highlight one wall of your space to peak visual interest.

**GET REPETITIVE:** If you love corduroy, increase and decrease its size and usage within the space to maintain cohesiveness while still adding texture.

**OR DON'T GET REPETITIVE:** Put several pillows on the sofa that live in the same color family and vary the textures – satin, linen, leather.

## Accents that Add TEXTURE:

Faceted glass door pulls or knobs, wooden napkin rings, coral chandelier, rattan placemats, a chenille stuffed animal, a paper cone pendant light, bubble wallpaper, a wooden mantel on a stone or brick fireplace.



✓ **QUICK TIP:** Consider repetition, progression, transition, and contrast throughout your design to impart a sense of movement and life to your space.

✓ **QUICK TIP:** The wrong lighting can wash out the entire design of your room, no matter how many interesting textures you’ve incorporated.

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