



The Wheel of Decorating

BY KAREN POWELL -- When it comes to decorating, most people get overwhelmed before they even get started. They run wildly from room to room with dozens of paint chips in their hands and wind up getting nowhere but frustrated.

Maybe you're the person that starts out shopping. Next thing you know, paint, couches, and carpets roll in, and then you realize that it's not turning out very well. Perhaps you're someone that has watched a handful of the compelling do-it-yourself shows and you start ripping into a total remodel, quickly finding that there is a lot more going on behind the scenes in order to successfully complete a project.

So what's the right approach? While these shows provide motivation, paint chips give some concrete possibilities and furnishings make a change real – these different elements need to fall within a strategically planned course of action and approach.

As an author and consultant of the Styleprint Design System approach, a lot of what you need to complete a successful design project can be boiled down to three areas – function, look and feel. I call this the Wheel of Decorating – each playing an equally important part of the whole project.

What Do You Want the Room to Do?

Function. It's such a crucial piece of the decorating process, and yet so often it can be skipped to get to the look of a space. Look and feel are extremely important, but imagine a pretty room that doesn't provide the functionality you need. Without understanding what you want your room/space to do for you when you're in it, you are setting yourself up for frustration, even if it looks nice.

For example, some big family rooms need to be decorated in sections. There may be a seating area in front of the TV and fireplace, a game table with chairs in another part of the room, and a desk or armoire in another section. Someone could be doing homework on a computer at the desk while others play cards or do puzzles at the game table. Similarly, when decorating bedrooms, all activities need to be considered. Is there a need of a desk in addition to your child's bed? If they are doing homework at the desk, you'll want to make sure the lighting is conducive for that.

Ultimately, you need to think about your day-to-day activities in the spaces you are redecorating and how you're going to make sure the room can support those activities. What are the pieces that need to be included, and how many? Where do they need to be? And how will you get power to electronics if you have them? Sitting down and mapping out your space and listing what you need is always a smart place to start.

How Do You Want It to Feel?

Once you've figured out the basic function needed in your space, you can move on to the next step that can be somewhat rushed over in the planning process: really figuring out what you want to feel in the room you are working on. Do you want it to feel spacious or cozy? Should it be a calming respite from life or an energizing room with character? Take a moment to jot down three to four descriptors of what you want to feel in your room. Based on those answers there are four specific areas that will help you achieve this feel: lighting, color, arrangement/furnishings and details.

Light is a crucial place to begin - it affects everything. If there is no light, we can't see or do anything. Light is the foundation of everything in the space. When a client does not like a room, I like to stand in it with them and have them tell me what they don't like about it. Many of their concerns trace back to the lighting. You'll want to assess how much natural light is available. If there's a lot, does it need to be controlled? If there's hardly any, how much light is needed for general activities? What about your task-related actions or what about mood lighting?

The next huge element is color. Colors are the outward expression of feelings – so understanding the psychology associated with colors and the effect they create in a room is important. I reference this more in my book and there are numerous resources that describe the different emotions that colors evoke. Color is also a critically important aspect of the “look” portion of the Wheel

of Decorating, ultimately you want to not only go for a particular feel, but you'll want to like looking at it too.

Arrangement and furnishings are going to touch on the work you did in determining the functionality of your space. Based on what you need from your space, visualizing the layout and needed pieces to achieve that will begin to make you feel any number of things. Again think about the feelings/descriptors you jotted down and think about how the layout can help support those feelings.

Details are the “pops” of character and the finishing touches that can solidify the “wow” factor in your room. Take art for instance, it can have the most impact simply because its selection is totally a matter of personal taste and style. In addition, wall accessories have a dramatic impact on a room's balance. Without something on the walls, the furniture in a room looks unfinished. The subject of the art you select will elicit certain feelings when you enter the room, and you want to be sure to align the piece with the feelings you want your room to create – always refer back to those descriptors.

How Do You Want It to Look?

Ok, now for the aspect everyone rushes to – the look of your space. Once you have figured out what you need the room to provide in the way of function, and the feeling you want it to have, you'll have greater focus when considering the look of each piece. There can still be a little uncertainty however, in knowing where to start. The key to good design is to look at your space differently than you've ever looked at it before. You want to think about things that you may have previously written off—“Oh no, I'm not going to do that.” But at least consider alternatives - you don't have to do them, but at least consider them.

One tip I give clients is to pick two to three things to put in the room that you love; everything else builds on and complements those items. If you feel that you have to love everything in the room, you will end up frustrated. It won't make sense, it won't function, look or feel good, and it won't accomplish your goal of absolutely loving the room. This is where decorating is counterintuitive. If you love everything, your eye doesn't know where to settle. It jumps between all of the things that you love. You are much better advised to pick two to three things that you love and have the rest of the room support them. This is an important concept for people who are decorating on their own for the first time. Usually, this is a big aha moment. It's counterintuitive; it does not seem logical.

The details that create the look of your room are extensions of your style. Personal style boils down to what you like. So for instance, if you like detail, you might want a camelback sofa with carved-wood legs or items that are a bit more on the traditional side. Or if you like sleeker, cleaner lines, you will lean toward contemporary style, which has less intricate detail. Your style tendencies will have an impact on what you ultimately select and reject for your decor.

The most important takeaway? Match yourself to a decor that will suit the needed function, desired feel and preferred look/style. If you do that, you will be extremely happy with the result!