

Ten top interior design tips to help you create your perfect home

Interior Designer Clair Strong shares her top ten interior design tips to help you create your perfect home

There is so much interior design inspiration today - from gorgeous images on Pinterest and Instagram, to beautifully curated shops and boutique hotels. Everyone wants their house to look unique and reflect their personality, but creating a beautiful home is not just a matter of copying a look you've seen on social media or buying the latest cushions and lampshades; there are some key interior design rules that will help you create a beautifully curated space. My biggest tip, however, is to engage an interior designer with lots of experience and a little black book of suppliers to help with your project!



Decide on your interior design style

Part of my job is helping people not just find, but actively define, their own personal interior design style. The aim is to be able to describe it in as few words as possible, for example: minimalist, neutral, vintage infused, Scandi, maximalist. Being able to quickly define your personal style makes it much easier to communicate what you're looking for to designers, retailers and craftsmen. It also helps with Google, Pinterest and Instagram searches.

Personal style is intrinsically linked to the way we live our lives. Decide what you need (or want) from your home. Should it be a cosy haven from the outside world? Or do you want to frequently throw parties and entertain friends? Do you work from home? Have hobbies or interests you need to make room for? All these things have an influence on our personal style so it's important to consider how you want to live in your home.

Create a mood board

For interior designers a mood board is the go-to tool for the initial planning phase of a space. It helps me visually ensure my choices of furniture, paints and fabrics work well together.

To create a mood board, you need to gather all your decorating ideas together. I think the easiest way to figure out what you are drawn to and create a mood board is to use Pinterest.

First, create a board for your home and then start pinning any images you love. Don't worry if it seems like you're drawn to all different styles right now. What a mood board does is provide a great overview of everything you like. Then you can pick out common themes (such as colour palettes or furniture styles) and use these as jumping off points for defining your own style.

Once you have all your ideas and inspiration together in one place, you can see what you love, what works together and your personal style with clarity.

Plan your colour scheme

As an interior designer, the consideration of colour is an important part of my job. I work with my clients to choose hues that help create the right atmosphere or mood in their home, are practical for their use, and complement their furnishings. Of course, our attitude to colour is subjective, and everyone has likes and dislikes. This can make home design a balance between picking colours for their visual appeal or style status and choosing colours for their potential benefits.

When choosing colours remember that colours create a mood:

- Cool colours like blues and lilac create a sense of calm, so these hues are ideal in bedrooms and bathrooms or any space where relaxation is required. Green is the colour we associate with nature, energy and the Great Outdoors. It is a quiet restful colour that can help you feel less anxious.
- Warm and delicate, pink adds softness to a scheme, making a room feel comfortable and welcoming.
- Yellow is a subtly optimistic, happy colour and is perfect for playrooms and nurseries.
- White has long been a symbol of purity and cleanliness.
- Grey is a calm colour which makes us feel safe and secure.
- Earthy shades like terracotta, red and brown make your home feel warm and welcoming.

You should always consider the shape of the space, the quality of light and the function of the space when deciding which colour is best. If you aren't confident about choosing colours, working with an interior designer will help you visualise the finished look and avoid expensive mistakes.



Plan your lighting

Lighting is one of the most important features in modern interior design. It's practical, of course, but when done right it also creates atmosphere and enhances the look and feel of a room.

There are hundreds of ways to light a room and thousands of different fixtures and fittings. The type of lighting you choose depends on the mood you want to create, and the purpose of the light; for example, is it for illuminating a work surface, for reading, or for mood? Do you want a cosy glow, a strong, focused illumination or a quirky lamp that serves as an accent as well as a source of light?

Think about storage

Too much stuff and too little space is a common household complaint. But there are a wealth of simple and creative ways to make what storage space you do have work for you.

Make every inch of each room work hard with clever and space-saving storage solutions and you will create a harmonious home. When planning any design think about where you are going to put your belongings and plan the right storage solution. Shelving in alcoves, built in wardrobes, dressing rooms and cubbyholes in bathrooms will all create space in your home. Design a new kitchen with storage solutions in mind. Build cupboards up to the ceiling and think about creating a bespoke utility area or larder cupboard. Hallways collect clutter and are great places to build floor to ceiling cupboards or storage benches. Under stair cupboards are also great places to store ugly things like ironing boards and vacuum cleaners.

Create a focal point in every room

Creating a focal point in a room is at the very heart of interior design. The term focal point simply means "main point of interest," and is the element that commands your attention when you walk into a room. It is not necessarily the centre of a room but just the first thing you notice.

Typical focal points are fireplaces, mirrors, artwork, windows or the TV! Focal points tend to be at eye level to attract the attention of the viewer so make sure you have something interesting there. If all your sofas are facing the TV, move them around to face a stunning fireplace. If you have a beautiful garden, make sure your furniture is arranged to appreciate the view.

If a room doesn't have a focal point, create one! A wonderful, upholstered headboard in the bedroom, a beautiful painting in the hallway or a gorgeous washbasin in the bathroom can all be beautiful focal points that give your room drama and style.

Mix old and new to add character

A room decorated with pieces from one shop will look bland and boring. Use an eclectic approach to decorating to create a home that is stylish and unique.

Mix vintage or antique furniture with modern pieces. If you have a strong sense of personal style, you'll probably find everything you like works together. Vintage furniture is a short-cut to a lived-in look, but don't forget lots of rugs, books and accessories.

Don't be afraid to mix periods, so you have some old and some new things, and a few surprising things. Add personality to your space by adding something surprising to give a pop of interest. A piece of designer furniture, an oversized light or a dramatic wallpaper can turn a room from bland to boring.

If you are looking to revamp your space, working with an interior designer will really help you use your budget wisely and create a look that feels cohesive, pulled together and will stand the test of time.

We are a friendly, boutique business based in Bath, providing a range of interior design services for residential and commercial projects. With over 15 years experience, we work with a trusted network of professionals and trades offering complete design and refurbishment. From city centre apartments and retail units to large Georgian houses, our portfolio includes projects of all sizes. Our ethos is to take a collaborative approach with our clients, working with them to create spaces that meet their needs, improve their lives, and exceed their expectations.

You can see many of the projects I have worked on since 2006 on my website at www.clairstrong.co.uk or click the buttons below.

Measure up

Know the size of the space you are working with. Before you do anything, measure the length, width and ceiling height of every room. Make sure you account for any alcoves, window openings and doorways. If you have architect's drawings or estate agent's measurements, these are also great to work with. Having the measurements of your home to hand will help you with everything from how much paint to buy, to fabric requirements for window dressings, and ordering things like flooring and radiators. It will also make sure you never buy furniture that's too big (or small) for your space or that won't fit through doorways.

Draw a floorplan

Once you have your measurements it can really help to transfer them onto a floorplan. Interior designers use specialist Computer Aided Design programmes to draw plans. We can then produce 2D furniture layouts, room elevations and 3D perspective drawings so you can see exactly what your home will look like once we've designed it. You can use a computer programme or simply transfer your measurements onto some graph paper with a pen and ruler. Draw furniture to match the scale of your floorplan and you can move it around to experiment with different placements. It's old school, but it works!



Use the 60-30-10 rule

The 60-30-10 rule is a timeless rule to use to make sure your colour palette stays balanced. The numbers refer to the percentage of each colour you use. It is a rule that helps create a colour palette for a space that will work time and time again.

The 60% is the main colour in a room and is usually the walls or floors. This colour anchors the space and acts as a backdrop for the other colours in the scheme.

The secondary colour takes up about 30% of the space and is a bit bolder. You use half as much of this colour as your main colour. It could be your curtains or sofas, for instance.

This secondary colour supports the main colour but is different enough to give the room interest.

The accent colour is the boldest shade and takes up 10% of the space. For a living room, this could be your cushions or in a bedroom the lampshades.

Focal points tend to be at eye level to attract the attention of the viewer so move things around to create the most interesting effect.

