



Design Lesson:

Add the “WOW” factor into your space without breaking the bank

As a decorating and design professional, many clients have asked: “How can we take our small dark space and create a “wow” interest, while making it look bigger without actually going through a major renovation?”

Along with the appropriate use of materials, the most influential steps to making any room appear larger are the blending and continuity of colours and lighting, and selecting the right scale furnishings appropriate for the size of the space. Combining those factors with interesting textures, patterns and accessories will give it that “wow” factor you are after.

Let’s look at “Mr. and Mrs. Smith’s” current dining room and give it the “wow” transformation. Mr. and Mrs. Smith are empty-nesters who want to maximize a space that seems confined, dark and boring. They want the decorating scheme in their dining room to have a warm and inviting ambience that better reflects their lifestyle and love of entertaining.

Space Analysis: The 12-by-12-ft. square dining room has a north-facing window. The entrance from the kitchen is on the west wall. The existing colour scheme consists of a dark forest green wall, damask fabric pinch pleat drapery that is almost the same green as the walls, and heavy cut pile dark brown chair seat upholstery. The mahogany classic-style wood dining furniture was inherited. It is large in scale, a table with six chairs and a fairly large china cabinet, reaching almost to the eight-ft. ceiling and stretching to six ft. in width. The floor, which is in fairly good condition, is a dark brown stained oak strip wood. The lighting is a pendant fixture with a single incandescent light bulb and is quite dated.

Solution

Get Inspired: Choosing a colour scheme that creates the ambience Mr. and Mrs. Smith are looking for can be inspired by nostalgia, wonderful art work, natural outdoor environment, etc. A warm and inviting colour palette can be tranquil pale yellow, soft orange, cream, and camel. The brown tone flooring and furniture colour can act as accents.

Get rid of all that darkness: Colour is the most powerful design element there is. Once you understand the

effect of colour on your mood, the selection process becomes simplified. Warm colours intensify emotions. Meanwhile, cold colours turn down the emotional intensity. Colour also has the power to alter your perception of a space, making walls appear to recede or advance. Whatever colour scheme is decided upon, you must realize the effect of light available in a particular space on the colours.

Layer the lighting: Natural light creates shadows and highlights objects, and incandescent artificial light warms colours with a yellowish tone. Most spaces incorporate natural and artificial lighting, and work together to light the room. General lighting is the home’s basic replacement for sunlight, produced by ceiling or wall mounted fixtures. Task lighting illuminates an area to assist in conducting certain tasks. Accent lighting is used for visual interest and used to spotlight accessories such as artwork or emphasize texture. Light, as is colour, is a powerful design tool. The type and amounts vary the mood of a room. As certain light is either reflected or absorbed by the different textural elements in a space, it also varies the visual perception of colours. Therefore, layered lighting is critical in determining the specific function and mood of a room.

Colour and light can be utilized in this space by:

- **Repainting the walls:** Paint colours should be selected by matching colours directly from your inspiration source, for instance a fabric and/or upholstery pattern. Which colour you use is dependent upon whether you want the room to appear larger or smaller, the mood you are trying to create and the design theme. In this dining room, by selecting a light tinted paint colour from our established palette, light will be reflected from surfaces rather than absorbed, and will therefore give the appearance that the walls are receding.

- **Replacing the light fixture and adding additional lighting:** The pendant light fixture should have several bulbs, for instance, a formal chandelier, with polished metal, glass/crystal to further reflect light. For additional lighting, wall sconces act as task lighting when needed, or just lit on their own for ambience.

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first impressions décor

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- Hanging a mirror between the sconces will also give the illusion of a larger space because of the light reflection.

So far, the look of the room has been altered with the change in colour and lighting. However, we're not done yet. Room-size illusion also depends on how much and how large the objects are in the space, as well as a change in texture and patterns.

Textures and patterns stimulate emotions and add depth, movement, visual and tactile impact. Every element in a room brings texture. Visual texture is created by various finishes on walls, furniture, floors, patterns on fabrics, weaves of textiles and accessories. Tactile textures such as fabrics/upholstery, area rugs, old plaster walls, wood, glass, and polished metals stimulate your sense of touch. Texture and pattern affect the perception of colours as light reflects off or is absorbed by rough or smooth surfaces. Texture and pattern can be put to use in this space by:

- Reupholstering the dining chair seat covers in a plain woven textile with a motif pattern in a colour from our palette.
- Replacing the heavy window treatment with a light-weight fabric, either cotton or silk, that coordinates with the chair upholstery. Patterns add another dimension. The motif pattern upholstery can be coordinated with a plain, large floral or stripe textile.
- Adding an area rug, whether it contains a pattern or not, also adds tactile and visual interest. In this case, by selecting an area rug that is fairly light in colour and includes colours in the palette, it will also help to reduce the light absorption by the dark oak flooring.

Scale and proportion are the two defining principles behind designing an interior and bringing a room together to form a whole. Scale relates to the size of a room and its objects. The function of an object will determine its scale and how large or small it should be. Proportion pertains to the overall form of an object rather than to its size. Scale and proportion go hand-in-hand, all objects have both and that influences their

visual effect. Also to be kept in mind is the scale and proportion of a room's architecture, while at the same time considering the scale and proportion of the furnishings in order to create a balance. There are three forms of balance that apply to room design: symmetrical, asymmetrical and radial balance. Symmetrical balance is achieved by placing the identical type and size furniture or objects on each side of a focal point. Asymmetrical balance is achieved either by arranging equal visual weights that are not identical equidistant from the centre of a focal point or by placing unlike pieces at unequal distances from the focal point, placing the visually larger/heavier object closer to the centre of the focal point. Radial balance is circular balancing of objects around a centre point.

The final steps taken to complete the look of this space are:

- Replacing the large china cabinet with a smaller-scaled open storage/display cabinet.
- Adding a sideboard positioned on the opposite end of the room will balance the space (both visually and in weight).
- Adding a cornice moulding will add an architectural element and draw the eye upward.
- Adding various reflective (glass or shiny) accessories, appropriate art work and greenery.

Result: The use of lighter wall paint colour visually expanding the walls, smaller scale furnishings, appropriate lighting, lighter weight fabrics, use of different textile patterns, the addition of an area rug, and overall balance in the room creates the illusion of more space and will make you stop and say "wow."



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