# Five design goofs to avoid

Impractical upholstery, wall paint that's too bright—we've all made a misstep or two when it comes to finishing our living spaces. Here, designers dish on five things homeowners often get wrong and offer tips on how to get them right. —M. BRUNNER

## 1 BUYING EVERYTHING FROM ONE STORE

Perusing your favorite catalog, it's tempting to buy everything you see. "Stores make it easy by setting up vignettes that create a mood," says Robin Colton, an Austin, Texas–based interior designer. The upside: Everything goes together. The downside: Matchy-matchy decor can feel a little soulless. "A mix of styles, scale, and proportion is key to a room's feeling layered and comfortable. You want a space that's uniquely you and not the image a store is selling," says Colton.

## 2 LINING THE WALLS WITH YOUR FURNITURE

You'd think pushing everything against the walls would make your room seem bigger and more open, but putting too much space between pieces makes a room feel uninviting. "When you move things away from the wall, you create intimate spaces that allow for interaction and comfort," says Colton. If your living room is on the small side, anchor some of the furniture on just one wall—for example, the sofa and end tables—as a solution.



## 3 DESIGNING FOR THE LIFESTYLE YOU WANT VS. THE ONE YOU HAVE

Sure, that pristine white sofa looks appealing in the showroom, but if you've got kids or pets or you just like to eat chips and salsa in front of the TV, think twice. "You're not going to change human behavior, so you need to be realistic about mess and clutter," says Nicole Sassaman, a Los Angeles–based interior designer. With seating, opt for stain-resistant indoor/outdoor fabric. Another problem: not enough storage. Many people fall in love with, say, a leggy console table, then complain that they have nowhere to stash throws or board games. Look for storage ottomans or pieces with doors to keep clutter out of sight.



## 4 TOO-SMALL RUGS

Besides being a cozy cushion for your feet at the end of a long day, a rug helps define a space and add color, texture, and pattern. If a rug is too small, it looks skimpy. "Either all of your furnishings should be completely on the rug, or the front two legs of sofas or chairs should sit on it," says Colton. Since larger rugs can be pricey, one solution is to lay two identical smaller ones side by side. A carpet repair pro can even stitch them together for a more permanent fix.

## 5 SELECTING PAINT COLORS BEFORE FURNITURE

Flip through any paint deck and you'll see a dizzying number of shades. It's much harder to find the right home furnishings, draperies, and rugs, which is why Colton recommends making paint the last thing you choose for a space. To preview a color, paint adhesive-backed sample boards (Small Wall boards, $5.69 for a two-pack; mysmallwall.com for retailers); they can be repositioned, so you can move them around the room at different times of day. One more tip: Don't count on a store to match a paint color from another company. Says Colton, "It's a surefire way to get a color that's not what you were expecting."