

NEW YORK | NEW YORK CITY | DESIGNERS CORNER

These Design Rules Are Meant to be Broken

Go ahead and live a little

BY JENNIFER TZESES | ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED ON DECEMBER 19, 2018 | [MANSION GLOBAL](#)



By painting this small dining room black, designer Donna Mondi changed the perception of space in the room, so that it's hard to tell its size.
NICK NOVELLI

Designer's Corner



Each week Mansion Global tackles a topic with an elite group of designers from around the world who work on luxury properties. This week we look at how to break design "rules."

Stick with the same color palette; don't mix metals; paint small rooms light colors—these age-old design dictums may be drummed into your decorating brain, but these days, they are best left on the cutting room floor.

The moral of this story is, there really are no hard and fast rules when it comes to interior design. So, in the spirit of anarchy, we asked top design pros to tell us their favorite decor rules to break.

Rule: Don't use bright colors

"People are understandably fearful of using color in interiors, but surely grey and beige are not always the answer. In reality, any saturated color that has the merest hint of black or white in it will take the sting out of the pigment [for it to] remain impactful but not jarring."

Rule: Match Your Hues

"It's a myth that a fully coordinated scheme, where everything matches, is the most aesthetically pleasing. While this approach may look considered, it can also look contrived. To really enjoy living in a space, it needs to include things that reflect the life and personality of the occupant.

Rule: Recessed Lighting Should Be in All Rooms

"Stop peppering ceilings with a plethora of downlights. While one or two are effective in spotlighting individual objects, too many of them simply provide a blanket of light which sucks the drama out of the space."

— *Jane Lawrence, head of interior design at London-based Knight Dragon*



A living room designed by Jane Lawrence of Knight Dragon has a curated rather than overly coordinated feel thanks to personalized touches. Credit: Knight Dragon.

Rule: Coordinate Artwork

"A design rule we like to break is artwork that is too matchy-matchy. We've seen that many people typically like to keep the same genre of art together in a space, such as a gallery wall full of modern images and artwork. But, for a more curated and eclectic look, I like to mix styles and mediums when designing a cluster of art on a wall. Mixing frame colors and sizes also adds visual interest and is a great way to incorporate an array of genres, rather than sticking to a homogenous trend."

-Christine Stucker, co-principal of Brooklyn design firm Stewart-Schafer

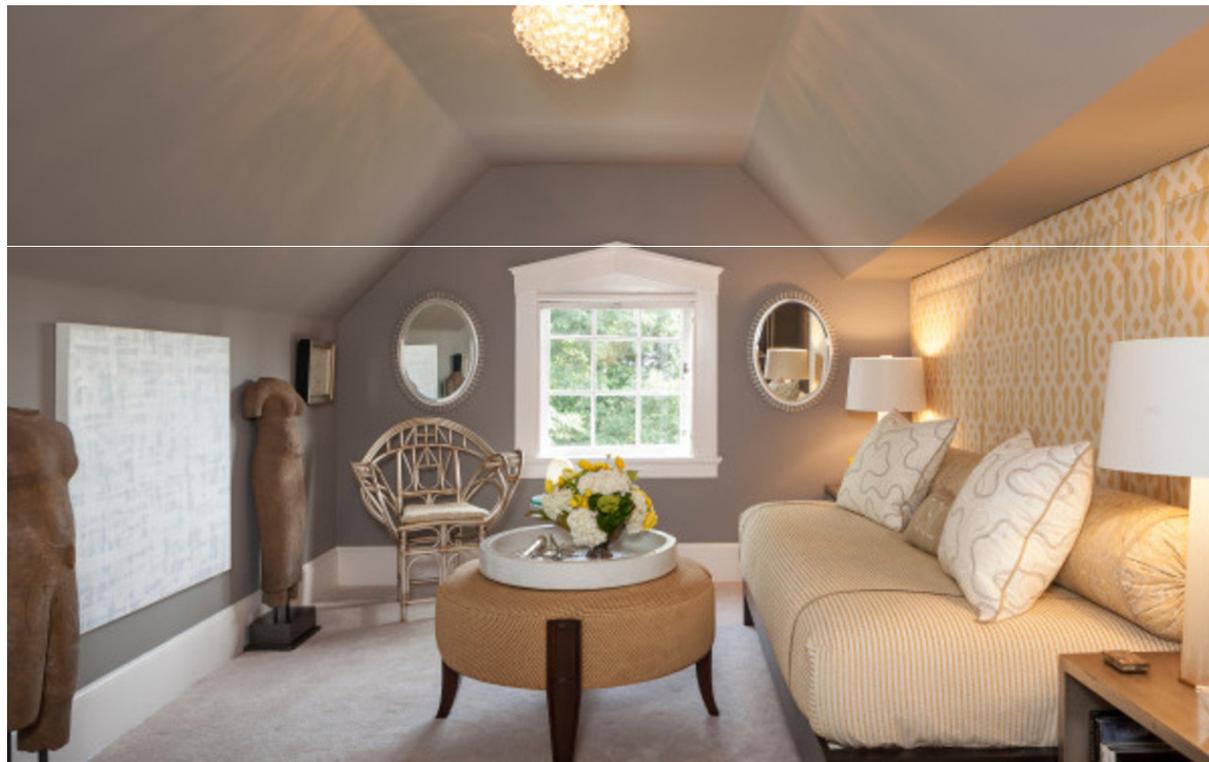
Rule: Ignore Awkward Angles and Spaces

"I embrace the weird angles and shapes of a room and celebrate the nooks by upholstering the walls to create the ideal backdrop."

Rule: Don't Hang Artwork Low

"Even when you only have a low wall to work with, accentuating it with a large modern piece of art and flanking it with statues can give it a place of honor."

-San Francisco-based designer Michael Friedes



Designer Michael Friedes embraced the awkward shape and low walls of this room by upholstering one side and adding a statement piece of art to the other.

Rule: Paint Small Spaces a Light Color So it Makes Them Appear Larger

"I tend to do the opposite and use the opportunity to make a small space have a big impact. Black lacquered walls actually skew your perception of space, making it hard to tell how large the room is. Even painting the ceiling black can trick the eye into thinking it's farther away than it really is. Small powder rooms are the perfect place for a bold and dramatic wallcovering. You'll get lots of drama without spending a fortune."

Rule: Scale Trim to the Size or Height of the Room

"Exaggerating the scale of architectural detailing can make a room more interesting and dynamic. Modest trim draws attention to the height of low ceilings, but oversized crown and base trim makes a statement instead."

Rule: Don't Waste Money on Good Furniture When Your Kids Are Young

"Well-made sofas can withstand impromptu bounce parties or fort making. Good quality fabrics that are designed to wear well and resist stains can extend the life of your upholstered pieces. Fine wool rugs will not only look good but feel great underfoot, in addition to being able to take a beating and resist stains. A qualified interior designer knows how to select frames, fabrics and fibers that will take you through the destructive years without sacrificing on style."

-Donna Mondì , founder and principal, Donna Mondì Interior Design in Chicago

Rule: Decorate According to the Rule of Threes

"The rule of threes is a common design rule related to home accessories. It is thought that odd-numbered groupings create more visual interest than even numbered groupings, and that five or seven pieces can look cluttered. I love the drama of a single statement piece. Displaying a whole collection of similar items is impactful. I recently did a grouping of 12 antique plates in my client's dining room. It was a wonderful way to display her heirloom pieces and became the focal point of the room."

Rule: Form Follows Function

"In most cases, I am a big believer in the golden standard of design that form follows function. However, I occasionally bend this rule for my clients and for myself. I believe it is important that the items around you bring you joy or hold sentimental value. It's ok to have a few pieces that aren't totally practical but that make your heart skip a beat. For example, one of my favorite clients has a beautiful, antique vanity in her bedroom that belonged to her great-grandmother. It's a little too big for the space and has almost no storage, but it reminds her of her late grandparents who gifted her the piece years ago. We decided that the joy that comes from those memories far outweighs her need for storage."

-Richmond, Virginia-based interior designer Natalie Reddell