

A Beautiful Décor v. Kids & Pets: *How to Have Them All*

Contrary to practical thinking, you don't you have to wait until the kids are in college and the pets are gone to have a beautiful décor. Many homeowners adopt this practice and tolerate the threadbare rugs and stained couches for years until they have an empty nest. But you don't have to sacrifice style and beauty for functional living. You can have it all: kids, pets AND a classic décor—one that suits both your taste and robust lifestyle. Here are 10 ideas for homeowners who don't know where to begin.

1. Paint. Painting walls is the easiest way to transform a room. Choose rich, jewel toned wall paint to do a great job of hiding fingerprints and smudges. Don't be afraid of darker colors: they provide an elegant backdrop for all your framed pictures and wall decorations and accentuate wood trims. Keep a quart can with small paint brush handy for touchups once or twice a year. Some paint companies like Duron® make a "velvet flat" acrylic latex that can be wiped easily without looking like it has a glossy sheen.

2. Chairs and couches. Buy comfortable, upholstered sofas and chairs with elaborate patterned prints (such as tapestry) or dark, solid colors on heavy, tightly woven fabric to withstand wear and tear and hide stains. Spray the fabric yourself with Scotch Guard® and save the \$35 to \$75 furniture stores charge. If your couch has become you pet's favorite napping spot, drape it with an inexpensive, washable throw in a complementary color.

3. Rugs. You still may not want to invest in that ten thousand dollar Oriental rug just yet, but there are many machine or man made wool rugs with a classic or antique look that aren't expensive and add depth to a room. Patterned rugs with a dark background are ideal to hide dirt and dark colored pet hair.

4. Window treatments. Window treatments add warmth and character to a room, but they don't have to be fussy and hard to care for. Avoid drapes or sheers that puddle or come near to the ground which can tempt cats to climb. A simple valence covering the upper third of a window goes a long way to adding drama. Combining the valence with a window covering, such as an Austrian or roman shade, will soften the look, add privacy, and allow you to raise it out of harm's way.

5. Antique furniture. You can create a classic look by combining new furniture with a few interesting antique furnishings, like side or coffee tables, magazine racks, plant stands, etc. (An antique coffee table is more than likely cheaper than a new one and more of a conversation piece.) Even just a few items will add a lot of interest and charm to your room. Protect any flat wood surface by

having a piece of glass cut for the top. You can safely display Grandma's handmade doilies or a collage of your child's artwork underneath.

6. Pillows. Pillows add charm and personality to a room and can draw attention away from a worn couch. Different sizes, shapes, colors and motifs are things to look for, but always try to get a pair. Buy large, coordinating pillows for the kids to use when they watch TV and avoid pillows with fringes for now. In general, if you have a solid-colored fabric on your couch or chair, choose floral or patterned coordinating pillows and vice versa. Needlepoint and aubusson pillows hold up quite well to wear and tear and can be used on almost all kinds of fabrics, solids or patterned. Spray them with Scotch Guard for protection.

7. New and antique accessories. A few, well-chosen accessories can add the finishing touches to any room. Put large artful objects like an old wheel barrow or painted chest in front of low windows and it will serve the additional purpose of keeping the dog's nose from leaving prints. Hang a collection of similar items, such as antique shoe molds, trivets, keys, or framed silhouettes in an interesting design on the wall. Wall cabinets are ideal to display breakable china or statuary, but don't hang them where the kids might knock into them. Keep table top objects to a minimum and have your children make coasters; they tend to use them more if they've made them.

8. Indoor plants. Indoor plants are an easy way to break up a blank visual space and add warmth, whether they're living or not. Some silk plants look so lifelike that even up close you couldn't tell the difference and have the added benefit of being low maintenance. Real plants can get dug up by pets or used as sand boxes by young kids. Choose tall, leafy plants to fill a dark corner or offset a long couch. Buy or arrange a leaf and floral display in a non-breakable container such as a metal urn to place in front of a fireplace when it's not in use. The most interesting arrangements use a combination of tall, thin sprigs; medium, bushy flowers; and low, dripping ivy. To keep silk plants dust-free, spray them occasionally with a silk flower cleaner you can buy at craft stores.

9. Lighting. The right lighting can accentuate the positives in every room and keep attention away from the negative. To achieve this, avoid illuminating rooms with a single overhead light and instead use strategically placed ceiling spots and floor and table lamps. When you entertain, you can create a more appealing atmosphere by turning on the lights around your "good" spots and turning off lights in areas you'd rather your guests didn't notice. For example, if your rug is a little worn but you love the way a bookcase is arranged, direct a spotlight to the bookcase and attention will be drawn upward. If a chair is a little worn, turn on an attractive table lamp nearby to highlight some interesting collectables. Table and floor lamps may pose a bit of a challenge for young kids to turn on, so use extension cords that have a push button on/off switch they can step on.

10. Clutter. One of the most daunting tasks for homeowners with families is how to stay on top of the clutter and still have a nice décor. The trick is not to eliminate the trappings of everyday family life, just to make them look like they belong. The easiest way to do that is to find attractive containers for all the things that tend to accumulate on floors and tables. For example, keep a large attractive basket for shoes and boots by the door. Buy another floor basket with low sides for pet toys. Store videos on a large antique chest (make sure you install a child safety hinge on the inside). Put books that kids are reading in an attractive magazine rack. Buy matching baskets, hat boxes, trays or attractive collectable containers with your kid's name on them and place them on the stair case. Your kids can then carry their daily "clutter" to their rooms at the end of the day.

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