

HOUSE RULES

t h e p o d c a s t

Episode 3: The Lamp Episode

I'm Myquillyn Smith and this is House Rules:
Welcome to Episode 3.

Every morning I wake up, feed the cats, walk downstairs and make my iced coffee. Then I walk the same path through the house and turn on most of my downstairs lamps. At night it's the opposite, I grab my glass of ice water, walk through the downstairs and turn off the lamps and herd our two cats back up the stairs for the night.

This ritual involves the lamps on our first floor and I work at home, so I'm here to enjoy and use the light all day. There are other lamps that we only turn on if we need to use them, but for our house, these lamps are the foundational, first layer of light and the most functional light in our entire home, just as important as our sofa, breakfast table and the toilet.

By the end of this episode you'll be able to evaluate if you need more lamp light and you'll understand a few ways to look for lamps that are both functional and beautiful.

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It was the first Sunday of November last year and we woke up fully rested to a bright bedroom. Daylight savings time had ended and we got an extra hour of sleep. I love most everything about the changing seasons even when the clocks fall back and it gets a little lighter earlier in the morning and darker earlier at night.

We had moved into our home six months earlier and I think it's so fun to get to experience the very first year in a new-to-us home. You get to learn what plants bloom where, and which rooms you are drawn to in which seasons and which windows get the coziest light in every single month of the year.

As five o'clock drew near that evening, this house had taught me a lesson.

We moved from a house less than half the size of this, it was a house with only one public room where we'd all hang out at night. And all of a sudden we were in a big house with large rooms and hours to go until bedtime and my entire family was drawn to the one lamp we had in the family room.

This old house is not wired for overhead lights in many rooms, so as much as I don't believe an overhead light should be used as an everyday light in rooms like the family room or the bedroom, we couldn't even resort to using them because they didn't exist. We were in the dark. Literally.

From the outside, our house looked sad and empty, and like no one lived here. And inside it was the same. The overhead can lights were on in the kitchen, one pocket of warm light lit the corner of the family room, and thankfully, I had a lamp in the hallway. But it wasn't near enough.

This was my house telling me that I needed lamps.

I made it my mission to pay attention to all the places I'd like to be able to see at night. The chairs where we sat in the day, could we also sit there at night and see? I took note. With actual pen and paper, I wrote down the types of lights that I wanted and where, along with what surfaces the lights needed to be paired with. I even took photos of the places where I needed to add light.

Table lamps with light colored shades help light up a room as a whole. Those are the foundational lights in a room to me. I believe every room needs a few lamps in different forms. A table lamp sits on a surface of some sort and one paired with a light shade will create a glow of inviting, beautiful light in any room. No lamps in a room can feel kind of sad. One is a start. But something magical happens when you begin to layer different types of lamps and lighting in a room, especially this time of year as we're approaching shorter days.

I learned the power of lamps years ago, but I made a mistake. Although I knew not to buy a lamp I thought was ugly, I didn't know how to choose a lamp that actually added to the look and style of my house. I would just grab what I saw and hope for the best.

I'd run to Target or see a lamp at a thrift store, and if it was the right price and if I didn't hate it, I would get it. At home I'd add it to the surface and then wonder why I didn't like it. I guess I wasn't good at buying lamps. Maybe I don't like lamps. Maybe I don't need lamps.

The problem was me, not the lamp.

You see, I didn't prepare myself before I went looking for a lamp. It didn't occur to me to consider the height or the scale of the surface where I needed to add a lamp. If you are sitting on the sofa and you want a lamp next to you so you can read a book, but your table next to your

sofa is only 18 inches high and then you add in a twelve inch tall lamp on top of that, do you know what happens?

I will tell you what happens, you turn on your lamp next to you and you suddenly feel like a giant because your sofa cushion also sits at 18 inches off the ground and when you sit on it, you're suddenly looking down into the top of your tiny little lamp on your tiny table. The glaring bulb is mocking you because the top of the lampshade is open, as lamp shades are meant to be, but your table and lamp combination are so short that you are sitting above them when you sit down. So instead of your book being gently lit so you can read, you're being slowly blinded by the naked bulb exposed at the top of your lamp.

The problem is that your light is too low. And the solutions, lucky for you and me, the solutions are many.

You can shop your house for a taller table to use with the shorter lamp and see if that's a better height. You can use the same table and maybe switch out the lamp for a taller lamp. You can find a taller lamp *and* a taller table.

The rule of thumb to remember when it comes to choosing a functional lamp is that when you're doing whatever activity you plan to do around said lamp, you never have to look or see the exposed light bulb inside the lamp, especially when it is turned on. But instead the light bulb is covered and softened by the shade. So, let's say you are sitting up in your bed next to your lamp at night, you just want to make sure that your lamp isn't so high that when you look over you see the exposed light bulb underneath the shade, or too low that you see it from the top. That's simply your lamp communicating with you that it's not the right height.

So if that happens, it doesn't mean you're bad at lamps or that lamps are bad. It means lamps are meant to be both functional and beautiful and if it doesn't function correctly without blinding you, it doesn't matter how pretty it is, it's just not in the right place yet. You get to find a better place for the lamp.

When you add the right height lamp to a surface where there was none, it changes everything about the room. Especially at night. And especially in the darker months of the year.

Now, of course there are table lamps that have metal or dark shades – I love and have those, too. And once you get your one or two lamps in that have the light white shades in the room, those are your foundational pieces, then dark shades can add another layer of light and interest to mix your lamp styles. Dark or metal shades are bossier with where they allow the light to be directed so you can control the beam of light, so they don't add as much light to the room itself. And I think of those lights with metal or dark shades as secondary types of lamp light.

Floor lamps are another category of lamps that I'm a huge fan of. Sometimes you don't have a surface available and a lamp that can stand by itself on the floor is a wonderful choice. My family room and living room have a combination of floor lamps and table lamps. But I had to

work and give myself time to find the right combination. You can get a floor lamp with a dark shade or with a metal shade or a light shade. Or no shade at all. The combinations are endless and each type is suited to a different function, style and location in your home. You get to be the detective and choose the best size, scale, style and type of lamp for every place you need one, it's actually really fun!

There's one more thing I want to tell you about lamps that I feel like is often overlooked, but it's so obvious.

I believe everything and anything that sits out in our home is a decoration.

When you choose a lamp, don't do what I used to do, looking for a lamp you don't hate that works and maybe is cheap. That's one way to look for a lamp but I want to tell you, some of my favorite lamps were actually second hand and inexpensive, and some cost a lot of money. It's not the price of the lamp that makes the difference in how it looks in your home. It's the combination of the lamp base, which is the bottom half of the lamp, and the lamp shade.

You know you're listening to this podcast about home because you care about how your home looks, and also how it functions and how it feels. And I already like that about you so much. When you care about how your home looks, why not make every decision count? Everything that sits out is a decoration. If you can choose between a lamp that adds nothing to the look of your home and a lamp that is stunning, why not choose the stunning one?

As you are considering lamps for your home, I want you to look at the base of the lamp like a piece of art or a sculpture or even a vase. Think of it as something beautiful that will sit out in your home on a main surface for years and years. It's both decorative and functional! It's the best of both worlds! This means in many cases, you should choose a lamp with visual presence! Once I decided to see my lamp as both providing light and sculpture like art, I was willing to spend on a special lamp, or spend more time looking for one, when I wanted to.

There is a time and place for a clear glass lamp base, or a really skinny, almost invisible metal base, and I have a few of those types of lamps. BUT, if you are adding a lamp to a room, in most cases, it's an opportunity to add some style that represents your own personal taste. Look for a lamp whose base has umph and isn't afraid to take up some space.

Once I realized I was lacking lamps, it was tempting to run to the nearest Home Goods immediately. But I wanted to make good lamp decisions, so I first paid attention to the lamps that showed up in rooms that I had already pinned on my Pinterest board, and that's a board that I created when we first moved to our new house. So I didn't create the board with lamps and lighting in mind. Not at all. I had just made a pinterest board that helped me visualize the vibe of our new house. I started it before we moved in, and then I just added to it over time as I was getting to know my home. I had 70 or so pins, and so once I knew I was on the hunt for lamps, I looked back at those pins like a detective.

As I scrolled through every photo, I noticed a few specific lamps show up over and over. I also saw a few general styles of lamps show up again and again. And I for sure noticed that rooms that I loved had lots of things in common with the types of lamps they used. I saw metal bases and chunky styles with triangular shades. That gave me so much information before I ever went shopping. So now I had a list of where I needed lamps, what surfaces the lamps needed to be paired with, I even had photos of these places in my own house saved to my phone, and I had inspiration photos of actual lamps in rooms that I loved. So now I had more confidence before I ever walked into a store.

Look at rooms that you love and pay attention to the lamps and especially the bases. What materials are they made of? What is the scale? What color and shape are the lamp shades? This can inform what types of lamps you will enjoy in your home that will contribute to your personal style.

A great lamp can cost \$8 from the thrift store or \$800 from the high end shop. The most important thing is that you know what size lamp works best and the kind of lamps that you like. That way when you find a lamp you'll be confident in your decision.

In episode two, we talked about decorating for fall, but let me tell you from my experience, if you have no lamps, no one will get to see your beautiful fall decorations. Lamps look great even when they're off duty, and they're one of the most functional items in any home. When I'm creating a little family of lamps that will all live together in one room, I don't worry about trying to match them perfectly. I like to think that the lamps will all go in one room, and they'll all just be friends, not twins. If they were in a band together they would all look great and make sense together on the cover of their album but they would each kind of have their own personality. Once you do this, you'll have yourself a little family of lamps that will fill your home with beauty and cozy welcoming light for years to come.

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This is your personal invitation to join the 100,000 people already on my weekly Cozy Minimal email list. You can expect pretty encouragement in your inbox every Tuesday September through May. This Tuesday, I'll share about the lamps in my house with links and tips if you want to learn more.