

HOUSE RULES

Episode 20: The Big Decorating Mistake

I'm Myquillyn Smith and this is House Rules
Welcome to Episode 20

From time to time when someone new finds me on Instagram or Facebook and they see that I'm teaching really applicable decorating tips about styling a coffee table, or how to choose a sofa you don't hate tomorrow, a well meaning person will leave a comment and say "just decorate with what you love" and it will all work out.

Oh how I wish this worked for the masses. If you are a person who can pick out a bunch of random things you love and then you love how they look all together in your house, congratulations, I think that's wonderful. But most of us have the opposite problem. We pick items we love, then try to create a vignette on our coffee table and wonder why it all looks weird together even though we personally picked out every item, including the coffee table.

The thing is, we don't tell people to go to their closet full of clothes they picked out and probably things they love and close their eyes and pull out 5 pieces and put them on without question. You might end up with a pair of converse tennis shoes, a fancy skirt, a bikini top, a garden hat and a winter coat. Just because you like something doesn't mean it will naturally, automatically look good together with other things you like.

You can't just wear everything you love in any combination, you have to think about the purpose: where are you going that day, how do you want to feel? Do you have a job interview? A day at the pool? Are you volunteering at the animal shelter or sitting at your son's baseball games all day? What about the weather? Then you consider the color, shape, silhouettes of the pieces you are putting together to create a balanced, cohesive outfit so you don't look like you are dressing up for tacky day at the local elementary school.

Of course, it's the same with decorating.

By the end of today's episode you'll recognize the one thing that most people overlook when it comes to decorating, and three reasons why it's worth paying attention to. I call it The Big Decorating Mistake and after today, you won't make this mistake anymore.

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In their book, *The One Thing*, writers Jay Papasann and Gary Keller present one question meant to help us figure out exactly how to move forward in any situation.

I'm gonna paraphrase it for us: What's the one thing I can do that would make everything else easier or unnecessary?

It's a great way to approach your work day, especially if you feel overwhelmed and don't know where to start.

Or say you get home from vacation and there are one million things that need doing: the plants need watering, the mail needs sorting, the dog needs petting, the refrigerator needs stocked, the clothes need washing, email needs to be returned. You get the idea. No matter what needs doing, when I get back from being gone, I've learned that the one thing that I can do that makes everything else easier or unnecessary is to get food in the house. That means going to the store or ordering groceries online. If we don't have food, we literally cannot function. It's the ONE thing. Once that's figured out, I can ask myself now that we have food, what's the next thing I can do? It sets the hierarchy of importance and helps me know what to focus on. If I get nothing else done, as long as I tackle the one thing, I've made progress.

This is lovely, right? But what in the world does it have to do with decorating?

Ok, real quick we're going to go back to your wardrobe real quick.

Let's say you just found the most adorable pair of jeans. The color, cut, wash, rise, fabric, are all exactly what you've been searching for. Finally. Maybe styles have changed recently and you've been on the prowl to update your look! And these jeans are on sale!

There's just one tiny problem: the only available size is three sizes too small. These jeans are useless to you. It doesn't matter how perfect they look, they don't work. We know better than to force it. We can't get them past our knees so they're going to be out of the question.

Sadly, we don't let this stop us when it comes to decorating.

As I thought about today's topic, I even asked myself: What's the one thing I can teach that would make everything else easier or unnecessary for you, the listener? And I know it was what I call The Big Decorating Mistake: which is actually small.

We are decorating with items that are too small. That's it. That's the big decorating mistake.

We don't understand the power of scale and relationship, and unlike a pair of jeans that we don't buy because we can't put them on our body, we'll go ahead and buy decor that is too small and then try to force it to work and wonder why our room doesn't look right.

In this episode, when I talk about scale, I'm talking about the size of something in comparison to what it's near. Everything in your room is in a relationship together. When you create vignettes or place a sofa next to a side table on a rug with a lamp and art on the wall, congratulations, you just created a little family. Does the scale of this family make sense?

Ask yourself: Did I nail that scale or is it not quite right?

I remember when I moved to our fixer upper and I looked around our family room and it felt disjointed, unfinished, chaotic, not my style and it was also just undone. It was a mystery to me and it was one I wanted to figure out how to solve.

So I got out my computer and I decided to look at my Pinterest board. I had a family room board with lots of beautiful pins and I was sure I was missing something. And I thought if I could just figure out what that thing was and buy it and add it to my room, it would solve my problem.

But as I looked at the rooms I pinned, then looked back at my own room, I finally noticed something. The rooms that I was pinning and loved had more visual style than my own room. I don't normally do this but for our sake here I went back and I counted the items in some of the rooms that I had pinned. There was one room in particular that I loved. It was designed by Lauren Leiss and I counted the items in her room. There were 18 items seen from the angle in the photo – from the seating, surfaces and storage to wall art, drapes, rugs, lighting, and pillows and tchotchkes. Then I looked up from where I was sitting and I counted the stuff in my room – just stuff I could see from where I was sitting. Ya'll, I had 48 items screaming for attention. What was crazy to me was that Lauren Leiss' room had more style BUT, it had less individual items?! WHAT in the world? They had more style but it took less stuff to get there. How did they do this?

Not only did the rooms I liked online have less things, but imagine if every item in the room had a voice – we've talked about this before in the House Hushing episode. When it comes to rooms with fewer items, every voice is heard, every item gets the attention it deserves. But when a room is overflowing with stuff, the voices, especially the smaller, quieter voices get drowned out. It's just a quiet roar. And nothing is truly heard.

The answer lies in scale, the size of items compared to the other things nearby.

Alright, we're going to talk about 3 reasons to go bigger and nail that scale:

Number one is the Budget.

Yes, I used to think that I was saving money and honoring the family budget by always choosing the tiniest version of something because it was cheaper. Are there five white vases at HomeGoods I could use on my mantle? I'll take the cheapest one, thank you very much. Why would I spend more to get a different vase? They both hold flowers. Look at me cheating the system!

I was actually cheating myself. Yes, on day one, you're going to spend less when you buy a \$12 vase instead of a \$24 vase. But when I use the small vase on my mantle, there's a bunch of extra space left over that I still felt like I needed to fill. It seemed empty and I naturally wanted to add more stuff. Suddenly I was in a race to the bottom to "fill up space," and guess what: I went out and bought more tiny items.

The thing is, if I would have purchased the larger vase that very first day and spent more money on one thing, I wouldn't even need much else on my surface to get the style I was after. \$24 is all it would have cost me. Instead, I bring the one tiny vase, I bring it home and put it on the mantel and the only thing I know to do is to add more stuff because it's not the right size. My natural tendency is to go buy more small items to fill it up. This is exactly how I ended up with a room full of 48 items.

Once you know to look for scale, you can shop around for items you want and you can find the right size items. Often, once you know you're looking for pieces that are larger, you can find them for the same price as smaller items if you make it your mission to scale up. To nail that scale.

The second reason you want to nail that scale is Simplicity.

Let's say you have a big 98 inch sofa. For most of us, the largest piece we all have in our house is our sofa. Maybe a king size bed. You want to style it with some pillows, so you go to Target and buy two 18 x 18 inch pillows and you put them in the corner of your sofa and, guess what? They just don't have impact. Why? Because they get lost on the big sofa. So now you have two choices.

In the past, you know me now, I would have gone and bought a bunch more tiny pillows until it felt like it was filling up enough space on the sofa. But now, I don't do that anymore. Instead, I begin with what I call anchor pillows. If you have a huge sofa, he deserves to be paired with large scale pillows. I really like a 24, 26 or even a 28 inch square pillow! This is going to feel balanced with a big sofa or even a king size bed. And then it's only going to take maybe two anchor pillows and one additional pillow or throw to make your sofa feel styled, to make it feel balanced. Using the right scale allows us to need less, which results in simple walls, simple surfaces, simple seating, and simple beds that are still stylish.

Lastly, the thing you get more of when you focus on scale is STYLE.

When we see large scale items in a room, our brain kind of registers them as being more risky, and we automatically read that as contributing to the style in the room.

If you don't believe me, go walk around your house, find the largest vase you own and then look around for the the smallest vase you own and set them one at a time in the middle of your cleared off coffee table. The larger vase creates more style.

Large art, large rugs, large chunky lamp bases, large potted plants in large containers. These all add to the style of a room. Plus, they keep a room simple because fewer items are needed to complete the space and ultimately they save us money in the long run.

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Nail that scale is house rule number # 39 in my new book House Rules

Are you ready to see large scale items and the difference they make in a real home? I'm ready to show you. I want to thank you for preordering the House Rules book, and I have some thank you gifts. You can preorder and claim your gifts at the link below in the show notes.

The first gift is a video masterclass. We filmed it in my home and it's called House Rules in Action. You could be watching it in just a few minutes from now if you go ahead and claim your gifts. You'll see large scale items like my 9 foot mirror, I also share my huge living ficus tree, big artwork, pillows, and even large scale collections. Plus, you'll also receive the audiobook free when the book releases. All as a thank you for going ahead and preordering the book now before it releases.