

HOUSE RULES

Episode 19: How to Test it Before You Invest in It

I'm Myquillyn Smith and this is House Rules
Welcome to Episode 19

It was time for me to get a new desk for my office.

I had been using a 60 inch round dining room table for five years and it worked perfectly in our last house. As our boys grew up and moved out, we had an extra big bedroom where I could hang a pretty chandelier in the center. A round table made so much sense to use as a surface in that big square room. I centered it right under the chandelier and had plenty of space to spread out. A creative's dream.

When we moved, I claimed the downstairs guest bedroom as my office and for the first year, I used the same table as a desk but over time, I found it wasn't working as well. The table couldn't be centered because of the other furniture and walkways and there was no overhead light so I always felt like I was floating. It was time for a surface with flat edges so that I could put it against a wall. I couldn't even remember if I liked working against the wall. I didn't want to buy a whole desk, pay a bunch of money and wait for it to be delivered just to see if I liked working at a rectangular desk. What's a girl to do?

By the end of today's episode, you'll have three methods to practice the zero risk way to make better decorating decisions in your home. It's house Rule number 22: Test it before you invest in it.

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If you listened to Episode 15, I told you about the kitchen in our fixer upper. It was the first kitchen I ever got to design from scratch and it for sure had its limitations. I was nervous about

making an expensive mistake and unsure if what I saw on Pinterest would translate to something I'd enjoy using and looking at in my kitchen.

We removed walls and I wanted the largest island that made sense in the space. So, I created a layout on graph paper, I used an online kitchen design program from Ikea, since we were using some of their cabinets and, of course, I taped out all the dimensions on the floor. But I still wanted to get a better feel of the actual space.

So, I pushed in a dresser from the family room to where the sink would be. It was almost the perfect height and helped me know where I would be standing the rest of my life. Ok, I liked it. It was right across from a bay window. Nice. There was one more thing I was curious about, this was 2013 and those restaurant style faucets were everywhere with the gooseneck sprayer and the faucet itself was tall. Taller than any faucet I've ever had. I wondered if I could also figure out a way to better visualize that. I walked around my house and found an umbrella with a hook handle that had the same feel of the big faucet. I looked at some faucet measurements, measured the umbrella and duct taped it to the back of the dresser right where my faucet would go so I could see how a big tall faucet in the middle of the kitchen island would feel.

This was immensely helpful. I did not like the look of the super tall facet so I lowered the umbrella handle until it felt right. Then I bought a faucet that was that height. And that's how I used random objects to create a real life mockup to help me make better decisions. If you subscribe to my weekly emails, I'll be sure to include that image of the umbrella taped to the dresser in my gutted kitchen so you can see it. We'll add it to the show notes on the podcast page at thenester.com too.

Another time I started with what I had and created a 3D mockup was when we were ready to buy a new sofa. Decorating decisions do not start in the furniture store. I knew I needed a new sofa and yes, I had pinned inspiration photos on Pinterest of family rooms I loved, then looked to see what types of sofas they had so I knew the style and color sofa I was drawn to. But I also didn't go right out and shop, even though I had saved money and had a budget.

Instead, I knew I wanted to rearrange our family room now that we were getting rid of our sectional. However, the sectional still had one more role it needed to fulfill. It needed to help me test out if I was going to like where I thought I could put my new sofa. So, I rolled up the living room rug, unclipped the sectional in half. I pushed half of it out onto the covered porch, went to the major trouble of unplugging the television, quieted the room taking out all the smalls and tchotchkes so they weren't in the way. Then I focused on seating, surface and storage placement. If you are in the Cozy Community, you recognize this as Phase 2 of the order of decor.

I used the weird half of my sectional as a placeholder to see where I could put a new smaller sofa. I thought I wanted it in front of our windows, but I needed to see some sort of something there to know for sure. I put the half sectional in that spot and then moved the TV around to a good place, scooted my coffee table in front of the sofa, then brought in some random chairs

from our barn to place in front of the fireplace. I shopped my house (House Rule number 38) and used what I had to help me test it before I invested in it.

My half sectional helped me make much better decisions because, based off what I had, I now knew I wanted my new sofa to be a few inches shorter than the length of the half sectional. I also knew I wanted the back to be lower, tight back and have a one bench cushion. I used the sectional to make additional measurements about the depth and how close chairs could be. My family room looked ridiculous, but this phase was priceless. Later that week, I walked into the sofa store like a boss and knew I wanted an 80 inch wide, 38 inch tall, 40 inch deep English Roll arm, tight back, bench seat black velvet sofa. I've never been more confident in a decorating decision in my life. And it worked perfectly. This is my favorite way to test it before I invest in it.

I want to share two other ways to test it, real quick. One, is to sample it.

We've all taken home paint swatches and taped them to the wall, that's exactly what I'm talking about. That's a great way to sample it. An even better way is once you have settled on 2-3 colors, buy three sheets of poster board and 3 sample pots of paint in your colors and paint the posterboard and move it around the room. Or just paint the walls in different places. The more trouble you go to to get it right on the front end, the less likely you'll make a decision you're unhappy with and have to start over. I'd rather have 18 different paint samples painted on my walls and confidently know which one I love and then buy gallons of paint instead of being afraid to try too many colors and prematurely committing to a color I haven't tested. I promise the latter ends up being much more trouble.

If you are considering buying a new rug, lots of higher end places will sell a sample – it's worth it. In the Cozy Community, one of our members shared that she will just order a few of the smallest rugs she can – usually a 2x3 and use that sample to help make a more informed decision instead of taking a big risk on a 12x14 rug that she'll have to ship back if the colors are off.

The last way you can test it before you invest in it is to make a digital mock up. I don't feel qualified to teach you how to do this, but I can tell you what I do. I start with a photo of my room. I make sure the room is quieted, without excess stuff laying around. I take a photo in natural light, straight on, making sure the corners are all lined up and I crouch down to furniture level. Load that photo into some type of program – I use Keynote or Canva. Anything where you can remove a background will work. I've seen people do this on their phones.

Then I'll add and subtract chairs, rugs, and art as needed. Sherwin Williams even has a paint color tester you can load a photo of your room in and try out different colors.

So, back to the story I started with, my office.

I gave my round table away and I for sure looked online at desks, created a pinboard for my office and observed what desks were in rooms that I loved. But before I moved forward, I

decided to test it with a folding table I had in the basement. I had a wooden folding table we used in the past as a patio table, it was old and rustic so I threw a linen sheet over it so I could get a better visual. I wanted to practice with this rectangular table to see where I might like a real desk in my room and I also knew that if I used the temporary patio table as a desk for a few weeks, I'd know if I wanted something bigger or smaller, taller, shorter, or totally different.

Well guys, it's been two months and I'm still using the temporary desk. I actually love it! The shape allows it to butt up against the window, the size is great and my favorite part surprisingly is the fact that it's covered with the sheet! It's so welcoming! Something I realized at my last desk with the cold marble top, I wasn't really drawn to. It was cold and, I don't know, kind of made me not want to sit at it. The fabric on my desk has added a surprising layer of cozy that I'm not willing to part with right now. Also, because the sheet goes to the floor I have all this hidden storage under the desk. I bought a little roll cart and I keep my ugly podcasting equipment and my second monitor I have to use when I teach in the community. I never would have dreamed this temporary fix would work so well. I'm not saying I'll never get a real desk, but this one is working great currently and I have no need to change it.

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Test it before you invest in it is House Rule number 22 out of 100 House Rules included in my new book called, you guessed it, House Rules: How to Decorate for Every Home, Style and Budget. At the time of this recording, you can now preorder the book and then instantly claim one of the two thank you gifts: a video masterclass called House Rules in Action. Want to see the sheet covered patio desk in my office that I use? I'd love to show you, it's one of the 10 rooms in my house that we filmed sharing what house rules helped me make decisions in each room. Preorder now, claim your bonus and you can be watching the House Rules in Action class in the next 15 minutes. I would love to take you on a tour of my house. You can watch the entire class in less than an hour with your kids if you want. Plus, when you preorder you'll also receive the audio book FREE the week the book releases, April 23 of 2024.