

HOUSE RULES

Episode 22: Decor Mafia: You Don't Get to Ignore It

I'm Myquillyn Smith and this is House Rules
Welcome to Episode 22

One of the most basic things we all want when it comes to decorating decisions, especially in a room that is tricky, is we would love for someone to tell us exactly what to focus on and what not to worry about. Most of us have made a lot of great choices in a space, and often we have one or two things in a room that could be tweaked a bit, but the problem is, we can't identify what needs tweaking. We need fresh eyes, or a friend who's a decorator or a bossy big sister who's lived in 15 different homes who's made it her mission to figure out why some things look great together and other things look hideous, and then, shares that on a podcast.

By the end of today's episode you'll understand how to identify if your tricky space has a boss and what to do about it, brought to you by me coming in hot with my encouraging, bossy big sister energy.

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I love that right now it's popular to have your personal colors done. I follow Lindsay from Created Colorful on Instagram – we'll link to her in the show notes. It's fascinating to watch her pull out different pieces of colored fabric and drape them under someone's face and watch how their skin and eyes either light up, or go dull, just based on color.

Your hair, skin tone, eye color all affect what colors look best on you and make you glow! Yes you can absolutely wear any color you want, the goal is to feel great, but often those ideal colors boost our confidence and make us look and feel extra spectacular. Who wouldn't want that?

When it comes to decorating, one mistake I made for years, and one I often see people making is a form of ignoring the obvious.

Eleven years ago we moved into a fixer- upper, and the very first thing I noticed were the orangey wide-plank pine floors. You've heard me talk about those before. I also immediately noticed the hunter green walls, wallpaper borders with big patterns, and the red brick fireplace. All in one little room.

There was a lot going on.

I didn't know exactly what I wanted to do with the room, but I did know what I didn't want. So we immediately neutralized the walls and fireplace by painting them white. That left me with one strong statement element in the space: the pine floors.

What I didn't realize when we bought the house was that those wood floors were now the boss of me. By purchasing the house with the orange floors, I had entered into an unwritten contract with them. The green walls and brick were bosses too, but I chose to change those. Neutralizing them meant they couldn't boss me in the same way.

But the floors. Having a house full of beautiful, loud, orangey, leathery floors meant I couldn't just do whatever I wanted.

Actually I should rephrase that, I COULD do whatever I wanted. But the truth is, not everything looks great with orange floors and I knew in my head, just by picturing it, that I wouldn't like a room with orange floors that has pink walls or yellow walls or turquoise walls. Personally, I wouldn't want to have pastel colors in the fabrics for furniture in a room with orange floors. I wanted to like the way my room looked, and I know you want to like the way your rooms look as well or you wouldn't be listening to this.

Just like when you want to wear your ideal colors that work with your hair and skin, in my house, I want to pay attention to what colors are already there and work them to make everything look amazing and it's best.

My pine floors were a boss that demanded to be respected. So, I had two options: I could keep them and work with them, or I could choose to change them. The one thing I couldn't do – or at least what I wasn't willing to do – was ignore them and pretend like they didn't exist.

I'm not telling you this to be mean or make anyone feel bad. I'm telling you this because I think it's prudent and even a fun challenge to pay attention in decorating. And like the serenity prayer teaches us – as I add a few words to apply it to our home:

God, in this home, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.

Time and again I see folks ignoring their house bosses.

Maybe they have wood cabinets with a yellow undertone. And instead of working with that color palette or changing it, they decide to ignore the color and pretend it doesn't exist. Then they try forcing their favorite color or current trend to work with something it was never meant to work with. And of course they end up unhappy and perpetually annoyed.

Learn to recognize if your space has a boss. Some rooms do, and some don't.

I believe the bosses that trip us up the most usually involve color which is why I'm focusing on that today.

A boss isn't necessarily something that you hate, you might love it. But it's something that dictates what else is going to look good in the room.

Remember, decorating is about relationships. I think I say that every episode, and everything in your room is in a relationship together.

A boss in your room could be a patterned green sofa that you decide to keep, a brick fireplace you love (or hate), it could be a floor color like pink carpet or gray tile, or dark wood trim. When you choose to live in a place that has built-in bosses, you are committing right then and there to either submit to those bosses or change them.

Those are your only two choices if you want your rooms to look cohesive.

So, if you have pine floors like mine, they will boss or limit what colors you might use on the walls. If you have dark millwork, it's bossy. If you have a red brick fireplace, meet your boss.

I might not have chosen orange pine wood floors, but I knew I was up for the challenge of working with them. Because I was able to quiet and neutralize the other parts of the room, I let the orange floors be the star and made sure every other large item I used in the house worked with the floors.

I encourage you to work with the bosses that you love and don't try to work with a boss that you absolutely hate.

If you have a boss you don't love, but can't change it yet for some reason, this is a great time to add a temporary fix to the mix, which is House Rule #27.

Maybe your kitchen has a really bossy backsplash. You could consider a temporary fix. In a house we were renting, the kitchen was pretty neutral but the backsplash had pinkish tile that made the room dark and simply didn't feel like us. Of course I couldn't replace the backsplash but since we knew we'd be living there more than a year it felt worth it to spend a weekend creating a little temporary fix.

We bought some beadboard, painted it white and cut it to fit over the backsplash between the upper and lower cabinets. I used hot glue to attach it to the tile. When we moved out, I just popped off the beadboard and peeled the little globs of hot glue off, it was SO easy, inexpensive and made a rental house feel like home.

Maybe you have carpet that's bossy and you don't want to work with it. In the past we've had carpet in awful shape, but we didn't have the budget to replace it. So we tore out the carpet and our temporary fix was painting the subfloor a neutral color and then adding a huge, big, beautiful rug. It looked SO much better than the carpet, it gave me a chance to experiment and take a risk and it also held us over a few years until we saved up for new flooring.

One of our homes had a fireplace with a very yellow tile surround around the firebox. Yellow is a real difficult color for me to work into my decor so again, I added a temporary fix, some of you might remember this from years ago. I ended up using black contact paper and I even grabbed a white chalk pen, and I drew white bricks on it. The surround was built in a way that it didn't get hot at all when the gas fireplace was on, so it worked. This was about 15 years ago so it fit with the trends at the time, and it was an easy way, once again, to make a rental feel a little bit more like us.

In my current house, I have a bathroom floor that I'm not crazy about. The rest of the bathroom is fine. One day I want to redo it but I'm not going to do that any time soon. I'm considering those stick on floor tiles to add a fun pattern and neutralize the room and, again, make it feel a little more like us. I'd rather do that than submit to the bossy color of tile that I never would have picked out and try to decorate around that and choose towels, and decor to go with something that I don't like. That's something that I don't want to do.

One way or another, I encourage you to recognize and to respect your boss.

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Today's episode features House Rule #20: Respect your boss and House Rule #27: Add a temporary fix to the mix. These are just two of the 100 House Rules included in the brand new book called, you guessed it, House Rules: How to Decorate for Every Home Style and Budget.

House Rules is available everywhere books are sold April 23, 2024. If you are listening before that date, you're extra lucky, you can preorder and reserve your copy now and as a thank you gift, we've created a new masterclass House Rules in Action. I invited a video crew to my home and we walked through the rooms of my house and I shared which rules helped me make decisions in each room. You'll also receive the audio book FREE. There's a link in the show notes to order your copy and claim your gifts. Remember, you have to claim your gifts in order to receive them, but this thank you gift counts for preordering from any retailer, any version, in any country.