



Apartment Decor On A Budget

It's time to decorate your first post-college apartment and you've got two simple requests.

First, you want it to look nothing like your dorm room.

You're an adult now and want your surroundings to reflect that. Second, you need to do it on a budget.

Sure, you've watched endless episodes of "Trading Spaces" and that's given you hope that it's possible to change the look of a room without breaking the bank.

However, instead of an interior designer, a carpenter and a thousand bucks to do one room, you've got your best friend, less-than-crafty parents and less than a thousand bucks to redecorate your entire place. Don't worry.

It can be done if you follow these guidelines.

1. Call on your inner Picasso. "The best and most inexpensive way to change the look of a room is to paint it," says Connie O'Brien, an interior decorator in the Philadelphia area and owner of a specialty boutique, Consiglia's.

"You can change the whole feel of a room just by giving it some color."

Picking a color is an important decision so don't rush it. Account

for the color of the furniture you already have (if you've got a red couch, don't go with green for your living room walls) and the colors of your adjacent rooms.

2. Decide what to salvage. Your couch is faded with some stains on the cushions, but it's definitely not worthy of the garbage dump just yet.

Try adding a slipcover — it will add years to your couch's life and allow you to color coordinate it with the rest of your new place.

The same goes for chairs and ottomans. Posters that hung by tacks on college walls can be framed as long they're still in good condition.

Be creative and you'll save yourself money, not to mention having an apartment full of cool knick-knacks.

3. Don't skimp on certain key items. Just because you're on a budget doesn't mean you can't spend a sizable amount of money on certain things.

In some cases, those higher-priced items might save you money in the long run if you splurge and buy them now.

For example, if you are going to reupholster your couch, "You shouldn't cut corners with fabric," advises O'Brien.

"Pillows, slipcovers, etc. will take a beating from people sitting on them and using them, so you need a fabric that's durable yet attractive."

4. Know where to cut corners. O'Brien says you can skip the million dollar window treatments.

But that doesn't mean you have to keep those old Venetian blinds.

Cheap curtains are easy enough to find and, if coordinated properly with the rest of your décor, can pull a whole room together.

O'Brien says "simple and elegant" is the best way to go when dressing your windows.

5. Canvass garage sales, flea markets and second-hand stores.

They are a budget decorator's dream and the easiest way to find items to cheaply replace your Yaffa blocks, halogen lamps and other college décor.

You can get funky lamps and mirrors to add character to your apartment.

Wooden bookshelves and bureaus are cheaper there than in department stores (just make sure you have someone to transport them for you).

Plates and glasses can be picked up for a few bucks, and fairly new appliances are usually sold at half price.

Be smart, though, when you're purchasing from any of these places.

Ask for anything electric to be plugged in to ensure that it works, and thoroughly inspect everything for cracks or chips. Also, don't just pay without trying to bargain — price tags are often negotiable.

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Tips For Selecting A Standby Generator

If you are considering a backup generator purchase, there are important sizing and code requirements that you need to know to insure a safe and adequate standby generator installation.

Sizing the generator takes into

account the total kilowatt (kW) requirements of the electrical equipment to be served.

Undersizing can leave you frustrated while oversizing is just a waste of money.

Pay particular attention to anything with an electric motor.

Starting a motor requires three to seven times the current used during normal operation.

Allowing for this startup or inrush of current when sizing the generator is crucial.

Electrical connections to the wiring system of the home, farm, or business requires a double-throw transfer switch.

This is not a do-it-yourself project! Involve an experienced electrical contractor to insure a safe, reliable installation that meets all local and national code requirements.

Another safety consideration is where the generator is placed. Unless you vent the generator fumes to the outside, never locate it inside a building, garage or basement.

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