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by Carrie Whitney

Good Night, Sleep Tight

Turn your bedroom into a relaxing retreat

While your home may be your castle, it is your bedroom that's your personal retreat. It should be a place that welcomes you, relaxes you and reflects your personality. Choosing soothing colors, luxurious fabrics and the perfect mattress will lead to a cozy space that you will look forward to each night and won't mind waking up to each morning. What's more, creating the right atmosphere might even help you sleep better.

Photo courtesy of Atlanta Design & Build

Simple luxury

Thinking of your bedroom as a retreat or getaway translates into more Zen-like, restful rooms, according to Karen Oenick, owner of At Home Interiors. "Lines are simpler, patterns are less complicated, but lots and lots of texture keeps it interesting," she says. Keeping the room simple can even mean clearing space by making use of compartmentalized, organized closets so that traditional furniture pieces like dressers can disappear. This leaves more room for welcoming spaces like reading nooks and writing desks.

The key word in the bedroom is luxury, according to Muriel Sackey, owner of sakInteriors Inc., and one way to achieve a plush bedroom is to go for a hotel look. This entails using soft fabrics, dark wood and fine furnishings. In fact, the hotel look has become sought after enough that some hotel companies have gotten into the act and sell their products at retail stores or in the hotel locations.

Personal paradise

Whether you prefer a Zen retreat, a luxury hotel bedroom or something in between, your bedroom should reflect the personality of its inhabitants, like the rest of your house. "Fortunately, personality comes out in everything you do, so any attempt you make toward really making a room your own is going to work," says Aerah Davis, a partner in SheaJules Designs. Even if you work with a designer, you should be involved with the process so that the end result will have your thumbprint on it.

Although there are some rules about which paint colors to choose to ensure that your bedroom is relaxing rather than overly stimulating, you can still bring your favorite colors and design styles into the room. "Create your very own look by selecting unique pieces or objects that reflect your taste and lifestyle," Sackey says. It begins with furniture, but don't forget to look for unique lamps, artwork and accessories that make the space yours.

Photo courtesy of Jack Juszynski, courtesy of Castel Ltd.

IF YOU'VE GOT A GREAT VIEW from your bedroom, play it up! Put your seating areas around the windows, where you'll get the most light.

Begin with the bed

Probably the most important piece in your room will be the bed, and the type of bed you choose will help determine the overall style of your bedroom. The three main types of beds that are used today are platform beds, sleigh beds and poster beds. Platform beds are low to the ground and work well in contemporary spaces. They also will help smaller bedrooms seem larger, and often will have a headboard but not a footboard. Sleigh beds and poster beds impart a more traditional look and have both headboards and footboards. Another option, which can be incorporated into traditional and contemporary spaces, is to have an upholstered headboard without a footboard.

Room for two

When a bedroom has to do double duty and serve as a retreat for two people, compromising on design might be necessary. Actually, this is one area where working with a designer can be particularly useful, because designers can help couples locate a middle ground.

Bringing two personalities into the design of one bedroom can be tricky, according to Davis. One solution would be to divide the decisions and find out what each partner feels strongly about. He or she will get to make the choices on those aspects. If one partner wants blue walls and the other must have a reading nook, both people can get what they want in those areas. "It is all about meeting in the middle and making space for each others' personalities to show," Davis says.

Middle ground might also be called a "genderless look," according to Oenick. She says that it is unfair for a woman to expect her male partner to appreciate certain typically feminine motifs and colors. Instead, the two can compromise on something like geometrics or paisleys. "Solids can be used as well, provided the accessories offer enough punch and personality," she says.

Even when there is a gap in overall taste in furniture and design, there is still hope. For example, if one partner admires traditional looks and the other is a fan of contemporary looks, the old and new can be mixed, according to Sackey. Blending a traditional sleigh bed with contemporary bedside tables can make both people happy.

IN ADDITION TO A MORNING BAR for making coffee or toast before work, this suite also has a vanity and sink in the walk-in closet, a sitting room off to the side, and a tree-covered porch.

Sensory appeal

Once both of the bedroom's inhabitants have come to a design agreement, a few extra touches can take the space from restful to retreat. Remember all five of your senses when fashioning the bedroom. "Sumptuously comfortable bed linens, layers of interesting pillows, coordinating window treatments, folding screens and upholstered accents can all contribute to a cozy space," Oenick says. Complete the room with candles, aromatherapy and music to round out the sensory experience.

Specialized spaces

When your space is large enough, you might want to create a variety of zones in the bedroom, like a reading area, breakfast area or meditation space, which can make it even more hospitable.

Photos courtesy of Small Carpenters at Large Inc.

Delineating zones can be accomplished easily with the layout of the furniture. Area rugs are helpful, too, and lighting can further set a space apart. Just think about the difference in lighting requirements between a reading zone and a meditation zone.

The morning kitchen is one bedroom zone that has recently gained in popularity. Usually hidden in an alcove or concealed under cabinetry, a morning kitchen might include a sink, refrigerator, microwave, coffee maker and countertop. Just like in a hotel suite, a morning kitchen makes it possible to have a snack, brew some coffee or enjoy a glass of wine without leaving the comfort of your bedroom retreat. While these are typically found in the master bedroom, one of Davis' clients included one in a guest room, which allows her guests a level of privacy and makes them feel right at home.

Bringing in color

With the many aspects to designing a cozy bedroom, from fabric to making nooks and competing personalities, color is the feature that can tie everything together. The colors you choose can be the difference between a soothing space where sleep is filled with dreams and a jarring place that is neither welcoming nor relaxing. And even with the morning kitchens and the reading nooks, sleep is still the most important thing that happens in the bedroom.

"So many people are sleep-deprived that it makes an appropriate bedroom even more important," says color expert Rebecca Ewing of Rebecca Ewing Color & Design. In the bedroom, there are no inherently good and bad colors, just some that are most appropriate. You want to find a color that supports resting

Sleep On It

Even in a bedroom designed with the most relaxing aspects in mind, your mattress can have a huge effect on how you sleep. There is a wide variety of mattresses on the market right now. Most important, you should choose a mattress that is comfortable to you, turn it regularly and remember to replace it when it stops feeling quite so comfy.

- **Innerspring:** This is the traditional mattress, which has steel coils inside. Make sure you know what quality of steel was used and what the quantity of coils is, because these factors will affect quality. Spring mattresses also come with a variety of coil systems.
  Cost: For the mattress alone, anywhere from $219 (on sale at a department store) to well over $1,000 for a top-of-the-line mattress set in queen size.

- **Foam:** Called memory foam or visco elastic foam, these mattresses are said to provide a higher level of comfort and support than innerspring mattresses. They also last about 20 years. The density of the foam can affect the overall support of the mattress, so be sure to ask questions before buying.
  Cost: About $1,300 with an additional $200 for the box spring in queen size.

- **Sleep Number®:** From level 1 to 100, this mattress adjusts to your support needs. Also, couples can individually adjust each side of the bed in case they have different Sleep Numbers®.
  Cost: These can run anywhere from $860 to $3,800 for a queen-size mattress set, depending on the model.

- **Flotation:** These are more commonly referred to as waterbeds and can have therapeutic effects for pregnancy, arthritis and backaches, and have even been used to make burn victims more comfortable. Today's flotation mattresses can also have dual-sided adjustability.
  Cost: Around $300 to $1,900 for a queen-size mattress; you will also need to purchase a heater.

- **Air mattress:** Made from nylon, these mattresses are portable and can be inflated. You will need a pump to blow it up.
  Cost: You can find a queen-size mattress for less than $100, including the pump.

- **"Air" mattress:** How about an actual floating bed? The Floating Bed, designed by architect Janjaap Ruijssenaars, hovers 16 inches off the floor using a repelling magnet system. It can support almost a ton. Check it out at www.universearchitecture.com.
  Cost: $1.5 million

IF YOU PREFER BRIGHT COLORS but still want to create a relaxing space, consider painting the walls a neutral shade and bringing in pops of color with bedding or accessories, which you can change easily with your mood or the season.

Photos courtesy of Weidmann Remodeling

and restoring. Colors found on the cool end of the spectrum, like green and blue, along with neutrals, have been found to be more refreshing, so they make great choices for the bedroom. Violet also can work well, and can inspire the portion of the brain that has to do with dreaming, promoting an active dream state (this is a good thing).

By contrast, bright colors, like red and terra cotta, stimulate rather than slow down, making sleep more difficult. Dark walls might seem cocoon-like to some people, but can be oppressive to others. Black and white do not seem to have either a positive or negative effect, but a bright yellow can make sleep difficult and is particularly unflattering.

The best idea is to start with colors that support the function of the space, according to Ewing. Incorporate multiple colors by keeping them within the same tonal quality. "I tend to use less contrast in a bedroom," Ewing says, since contrast also can be stimulating. Instead, she might use a mushroom-beige paired with a dark, creamy white and a soft periwinkle. Even window treatments should blend well with the wall rather than contrast with it. This blending should be extended into the master bathroom, where a soft color keeps a cohesive theme.

If these cool or muted colors sound nice for other people, but you prefer fuchsia or royal purple, there is still a chance to integrate these shades into the bedroom. If you must have them, simply use bright colors as accents. Instead of painting your walls a bright orange, add some orange throw pillows, and always keep fresh, bright orange flowers in a vase. These punches of color will keep the room yours while still maintaining a soothing atmosphere, which, in the end, will create a bedroom in which you can relax after a long, busy day.

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