

Here's how four top Garden State designers advise tackling four key rooms in a home.

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NJ HOME invited four leading designers from different parts of our state to explain how they would approach four rooms—a living room, a kitchen, a dining room and a bathroom. The result was a wealth of ideas you should feel free to borrow.

LIVING ROOM

Now is the time to get rid of your clunky, traditional couch and chairs with curved arms and sofa skirts. These days, we're seeing clean lines, couches with squared-off track arms and chairs with sleek metal or wooden legs. Up the glam factor by avoiding matchy-matchy sets, meaning that your living-room pieces should complement each other without being identical. "Echo the same lines," says Melissa Bouffard of Melissa Lynn Designs in Green Brook. "If you have triangles in the rug or pillows, make it cohesive with triangles in artwork or the base of a lamp." As for color? Follow the 60/30/10 rule, says Bouffard—60 percent should be your neutral color of cream, gray or tan, 30 percent is your main, dominant color and the remaining 10 is that extra little pop of color. You can choose your palette based on your living room's inspiration piece, whether that's a carpet, artwork or the fabric in your drapes.



Quick Tips

Varying textures add warmth to a living room, which otherwise can feel stark. A sparkly chandelier, a wicker storage basket, a wool rug or velvet throw pillows, Bouffard suggests, are easy additions to make your space more inviting.



KITCHEN

Before beginning a kitchen redesign, you need to figure out what's on your wish list, because there's an unlimited number of features you can put in your kitchen. Do you want a large island to prep and serve, a double oven for entertaining or a beverage fridge, to name just three? From there, figure out how you'll make it your own, which is what will give it that "wow" factor, says Darlene Terrill of Sherry Frederick Interior Designs in Point Pleasant. "The focal point of your kitchen can be something as simple as gorgeous large slabs on an island," says Terrill, "with a beautiful backsplash and large overhead pendant." Window treatments, hardware and finishes should come more easily from there. To establish balance and maintain cohesiveness, our designers suggest varying the shapes. "Square shaker cabinets are popular right now, but so it doesn't look so plain, bring in a rectangular island and a round dining table to offer some visual relief," says Terrill. Another alternative is to choose a bold pendant that relates to the oven range, the hardware, the countertops or the color of the cabinets. "Together, all these different elements can create a cohesive design."

DINING ROOM

Here's where you'll likely do lots of entertaining, spending hours with your guests over food and drink, so this space should have some spice. Stephanie Tamayo, principal at Studio Aubergine in Edison, says you can create a dining-room "experience" by going big and bold, whether that's with intriguing art, a vibrant wallpaper, a dramatic ceiling or a large-scale light fixture. (She likes it to be at least one-third of the length of the table.) "If you're afraid to go too bold, you can do it with the window treatments or the rug," she says. "But you really want that conversation starter in the dining room." Modern, livable, delicate fabrics such as a silk-blend drapes are sophisticated but still family-friendly. To take the room instantly from blah to beautiful, Tamayo loves incorporating metallic touches into the decor via a metallic curtain, for instance, or sconces, or by choosing a fabric or piece of furniture that has gold or silver slivers. She prefers free-standing furniture to custom built-ins, because they maximize storage and create a focal point in the room. "I'll try to find or will design that special credenza or storage piece instead of the traditional built-in," she says.

Quick Tips

Personalize your dining room according to your individual interests. Bring in an antique vase that was once used on a boat if you're an avid fisherman or fisherwoman, for example, or display your teacup collection here. Says Tamayo: "I love for everything to look collected and for a guest to say, 'Oh, where'd you get that?'"



Quick Tips

If you're overwhelmed by the process of choosing a palette, keep in mind that kitchens should have light, dark and medium tones, which create depth. Terrill and her colleagues recommend considering light cabinets, dark flooring and a medium paint color such as blue. Alternatively, the backsplash can be your "medium"; tile is a fun way to bring in subtle splashes of color to the countertops.



BATHROOM

If you're considering a bathroom remodel, Pinterest and Instagram are your best bets for inspiration photos (though showrooms like Waterworks help too if you want to check out an entire vignette). But sometimes, the best part of the bathroom is what you can't see. "They're inexpensive, maybe five percent of the cost [of a renovation], but heated floors bump up the luxury level of the space," says Joan Enger, principal at J. Patryce Design in Hoboken. Other small yet impactful ways to make your bathroom feel more modern? Consider innovative, streamlined features, such as a floating double vanity, which draws the eye to a pretty floor tile or border, and integrated pulls, little grooves that are built into the drawers that replace large, clunky knobs centered in the middle. The palette and materials you'll use in your bathroom should depend on which bathroom it is—for example, a powder room should have good continuity from the kitchen, says our expert—but all of them should feel like they fit in with the overall style and aesthetic of your home. "I like to use the term 'visual vocabulary,' says Enger. "They're all different chapters but they're in the same book."

Quick Tips

Bathroom on the small side? Maximize space with built-in shelving in the tub or with a recessed vanity. Also, consider a pocket door, says Enger. "This adds more space to the bathroom [because it slides open], and it's a good way to create wall space for light switches, hooks and towel bars."