



This loft decorated by Flynn demonstrates the designer use of electric, vintage pieces to make a space feel unique and collected.



Designer Brian Patrick Flynn creates relaxed interiors for his clients by meticulously editing all furnishings down to a mix of shapes, scale, materials and finishes.

Sweat the details like doorknobs and handles

In many homes, these hardware items are mostly ignored. Interior doors may have mismatched, inexpensive knobs that were installed at different times. Drawers and cabinets may have functional but unappealing knobs or bars.

It's a small thing, often overlooked amid major items like furniture and paint colors when you're decorating a room. But don't underestimate the power of household hardware. These small items - doorknobs, drawer pulls, cabinet-door handles - are "the jewelry" that can add style and sparkle to any space, says New York-based interior designer Young Huh. Just as the right necklace can turn a simple dress into a fashion statement, a striking new set of knobs on an old cabinet, or vintage crystal doorknobs can bring a huge dose of style to your home with minimal expense, she says.

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Swapping these items out is often easy, and Los Angeles-based designer Betsy Burnham says her clients are frequently surprised at the visual impact of something as simple as carefully chosen hardware. Last summer, she added door pulls made of rope tied in small nautical knots to the built-in cabinets at a California beach house, inexpensively adding a dash of personality to the space.

Here, three interior-design experts - Huh, Burnham and designer Brian Patrick Flynn of Flynnside Out Productions - offer advice on choosing the right hardware and using it to coordinate the look of a home.

Trends

One of the most popular styles now is lacquered or aged brass. "Ten years ago," Huh says, "it was all about nickel: brushed nickel, shiny nickel. Now it's the resurgence of brass." Designers are using "bold tones, and things that look worn," she says, by installing unlacquered brass that tarnishes over the course of a year, or paying extra for "pre-antiqued" brass that already has a colorful patina.

Flynn uses a lot of brass, especially "satin or antique finishes, because they're more sophisticated and less formal than polished, glossy styles." In addition, "a newer option I'm seeing and totally love is matte black hardware," he says. "This is excellent for

modern kitchens or for adding dark contrast to an otherwise light and bright space. The matte finish helps camouflage any scratches or smudges you'd deal with on glossy black pulls and knobs." Another dramatic favorite of Flynn's: unlacquered iron.

Upgrades and changes

Burnham and her staff recently gave a preteen girl's bedroom a more grown-up look by "changing the vibe from kind of old-fashioned to Bohemian." Their changes included a new set of striped, bone-inlay knobs from Anthropologie that gave the furniture a funky appeal. The same approach can make grown-up furniture look just right for a baby or child's room: If you are turning a guest room into a nursery, Burnham says, change the cabinetry hardware to something "sweet or pink or shiny," or choose knobs shaped like birds or other animals.

If you're shopping, Huh suggests hunting for an affordable piece of furniture and then making it look more expensive by adding dramatic hardware. The range of available styles is enormous, and shopping for new or vintage items online is easy. Even if you'd prefer to buy in person, Burnham says a bit of online research "makes your creativity kind of percolate a little bit."

"Just pay attention to dimensions," she warns, because you "may not realize that in person, an inch-and-a-half sphere is quite large." Measure the size and location of the holes left behind by your current hardware, she says. If you buy replacements that don't match, drill new holes and fill the old ones. And amid all the focus on style, do choose hardware that is easy to grab and use.

Consistent or contrasting

Take note of all the hardware and metals in a room, including lamp bases, and decide whether you want them to match or whether you'd like to inject some dramatic contrast. Either method works, as long as it's done deliberately. "If you don't do it consciously," Huh says, "then it could all look really messy."

"You don't want to have shiny brass in one case and unlacquered in another and nickel hardware on something else," she continues. "Having similar tones is a good way to start. When you feel more expert, then mix metals." In a kitchen, "your finishes should probably match," Burnham says. "You wouldn't want the finishes to be fighting just a little."



Designer Brian Patrick Flynn decorated this living room with soft neutral tones including mossy green and pale pink, and he kept the furniture light and casual by sticking with breathable fabrics such as cotton and linen. — AP photos

Get crafty

"In addition to pulls and knobs, I think nailheads can make a huge impact in a space," Flynn says. "After updating cabinets and drawers, I'll also give closet or interior doors a unique look by adding a nailhead border around the perimeter. This can elevate a basic hall closet into an architectural feature." You can buy nailheads at a craft store, or roofing tacks from a hardware store. Then cut fabric batting to size and use spray adhesive to cover the door with the batting.

Stretch your fabric across the door and attach it with staples. Finally, place nailheads over the staples and secure in place with a mallet or hammer.

"Although it may seem small, hardware can make the biggest impact of all elements in a space," Flynn says. "With so many styles and finishes to choose from and so many available price points, there's no reason not to update hardware regularly to give a room a fresh new look." — AP



Designer Flynn added cool, coastal charm to this Los Angeles bedroom by packing it with casual, forgiving fabrics such as linen and cotton. The bold blues and vibrant pinks are balanced with a use of neutral sand tones.



Knotted rope drawer pulls add a casual, nautical style to a simple white dresser in a guest room designed by Burnham Design.



Striped drawer and door pulls neatly echo the chevron-patterned mirror in this residential bathroom designed by Burnham Design.



A closet door by Brian Patrick Flynn demonstrates the designer's love of turning contractor grade materials into high design with the addition of fabric, satin brass pulls and perimeter outlines with brass nailheads.



Photo provided by Burnham Design, sleek, half-moon metal drawer pulls that evoke Chinese design are a perfect complement to the assorted international knickknacks on this built-in cabinet designed by Burnham Design.



Photo provided by Burnham Design, vintage-style ceramic and silver-toned faucet and white ceramic cabinet door pulls are a perfectly casual, unpretentious match for the plaid window shade and wood-paneled walls in this residential bathroom. — AP photos

How to balance gorgeous style with relaxing comfort

It's a difficult compromise: Many of us want our homes to look as stylish and carefully designed as the ones we see in decorating magazines. But we also want them to be comfortable and easy to enjoy. "A relaxed lifestyle is something people want more and more, and their homes are reflecting that," says New York City-based designer Young Huh.

"The old rules of formal living, and therefore decorating, are disappearing. People want to have dinner parties with mismatched dishes, and candles and flowers that are casually and imperfectly arranged. They're looking to enjoy themselves more and impress less," Huh says. Designer Kate Jackson, based in Rhode Island, gets the same message from her clients. "I am typically asked to create a space that can be used more by family and friends," she says, and to "lose whatever formality lives there."

How do you pack a room with gorgeous style but also make it a place where you can comfortably kick back? Some advice from interior designers on achieving that perfect middle ground - gorgeous, relaxed style:

Go soft

Choose "seating that is comfortable enough to spend the entire day lounging," Huh says, with plenty of pillows, throws and ottomans. Use slipcovers rather than structured upholstery, and opt for durable, touchable fabrics like washable cotton, stonewashed linen or soft burlap. For even more softness, layer smaller rugs on top of a larger one. To add a burst of style, Los Angeles-based interior designer Brian Patrick Flynn suggests choosing some bold, graphic stripes rather than solid-colored fabrics.

"Relaxed interiors don't always involve soft, muted colors and neutrals. They can be packed with color and still be laid back and casual," says Flynn. "I'm a huge fan of an all-white backdrop with tons of saturated color introduced with old objects like canvas flags, old maps, and even torn and tattered handmade rugs," he says. "When the bold color is introduced with texture and character, it adds a collected feel, almost like a sense of history."

Personal pieces

Relaxed rooms include items that have personal meaning, such as heirlooms that might be worn or tattered by time. "Homeowners love when I incorporate special pieces that they already own into their 'new design,'" Jackson says. "Whether it's a familiar wooden box placed in the bookcase or a framed black and white photo from eras past, items of sentimental value that mingle with more modern and fresh accessories easily make a room feel special. A well-curated collection of books adds wonders and layers of personality to a room, too."

Vintage items are "like buying that perfectly comfortable worn pair of jeans without having to break them in for years," Huh says. "Imperfect, worn things in a room make you feel that you can touch everything and can withstand the wear and tear of a life that's being fully lived." With personal mementoes and hand-me-downs, consider scale - not too many huge items or too many small ones - and combine colors or styles that work well together.

"When you've got a bunch of meaningful items which aren't from the same period or in a common color scheme," Flynn says,

"you've just got to edit it all with a keen eye and a strong emphasis on mixing shapes, textures, sheens and patterns." Huh agrees: "Attention to detail will keep a room from looking sloppy."

Functional style

Think about how you'll be using a space, and then choose furniture that will work for you. If you'll be watching movies, consider a sectional sofa where the whole family can camp out together. If you'll entertain often, consider swivel chairs that make conversation easier. It's all about your convenience: Locate side tables where you'll put down drinks. And if you'll be reading, place lighting exactly where you'll need it. You might even want to rethink a room's purpose: "I've had clients ask me to repurpose their formal dining rooms to create a relaxed space that can be used on a daily basis," Jackson says. — AP