

Easy weekend makeover: the living room

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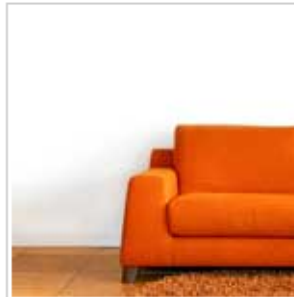
environment

home, design and style

By Barry Cashin

Whether you feel that your home deserves a thorough makeover, or your intention is to improve its presentation and saleability for market, the enthusiastic DIYer is always looking for inspiration and advice to tackle those jobs most likely to enhance a home's appearance. Our Easy Weekend Makeover guides will show you how to achieve, room by room, effective results with minimal effort.

The living room is the social epicentre of the home. A place where families converge at the end of the work day and weekends to relax, read a newspaper, talk or watch the TV. As a venue for unwinding, living rooms should provide a haven where everyone feels relaxed; the key being to make this particular living space as inviting as possible. Having said the above, living rooms should also have one eye on practicality too as they usually have to house a range of lifestyle equipment such as TVs and hi-fis, as well as functional furniture like dining tables and chairs. They are the multi-function room of the home.



When it comes to colour schemes, unless you have eclectic or unusual preferences, it is best to keep living room colour schemes broadly neutral to create a light and airy feel, remembering to balance personal taste with practicality. For example, if you have small children or pets, white or off-white walls with a light coloured carpet will need replacing in a very short space of time so will be impractical. A professional couple who spend a lot of time at work, on the other hand, can afford to be more indulgent and creative in their choice of colour and furniture. It is all a matter of balance and lifestyle.

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Fabrics and furniture within the modern living room should also complement the main colour scheme and blend well with the general theme of the home. If every aspect of the living room is planned and chosen carefully from furnishings, curtains and flooring through to the general layout, you should be able to create a space where all facets are working together in harmony, whether your taste is monochromatic minimalist, contemporary modern or French chic.

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Laying wooden flooring

Types of wooden flooring

Timber has revolutionised British homeowners' thinking on flooring over the past decade. From budget laminate strips at £6 a pack, to laminate veneers and solid wood systems costing over £100 per square metre, timber flooring in its variety of forms has relegated the good old carpet very much into second place.



There are two main types of flooring within the scope of the competent DIYer - laminate and solid wood. Both come in board or slat form and are shaped with tongue and grooved edges which fit together in an interlocking fashion. The variety of natural wood finishes on offer is limitless, ranging from the pale, almost white tones of birch through to rich, earthy ebony. Most laminate and real wood flooring can be laid on a number of sub-floor surfaces (linoleum, vinyl, existing timber floorboards, concrete and tiled floors) and are ideal for most domestic situations.

Difficulty level: 3/5

Tools for the job

- Floor fitting kit with fitting tools and spacers (for solid wood)
- Underlay
- Fine hand and electric jigsaw
- Rubber hammer
- Set-square
- Pencil
- Profile gauge
- Tape measure

How to do it

Before laying your floor, it is essential to acclimatise the individual floor panels in the room they are being laid in. Timber is a natural material and whether laminate or solid wood, boards are usually kept in tight, pre-sealed packs and stored in cold warehouses before going on sale. Open all the packs and leave them in the room for 48 hours before use.



Ensure that the sub-floor is clean, dry and level before you begin. If laying on top of existing floorboards, tap down any protruding nails, check for level and any of the old floorboards for squeaking.

Timber flooring must be laid on top of a special underlay. This underlay helps insulate the floor against heat loss, damp and sound transmission (follow manufacturer's advice on which type to use). If using a foil underlay on a concrete sub-floor, there is no need to lay a plastic film moisture barrier but do check whether your intended flooring situation requires a vapour barrier which will be essential to ward off damp which will cause your floor to warp.

Running opposite to the direction of your existing floorboards, lay the first laminate or timber board into the corner of the longest wall in the room with the grooved edge facing the wall, allowing a 10mm gap between the board and the skirting. This is to allow the natural expansion and contraction that happens with all timber floors. Use cork spacers to fill this gap.

Slot boards together following the manufacturer's instructions, checking all the while for a tight fit with each length laid. With solid wood flooring, you will need to glue and nail each board in place ensuring that any nails are inserted into the tongue and are hidden by the next board (called hidden nailing). Make sure that boards are staggered for maximum floor strength. Use a profile gauge to mark around any awkward shapes such as radiator pipes and then use a power jigsaw to make the cut.

When the floor is laid, use matching quadrant or primed moulding to cover the perimeter expansion gap. This will give a smooth transition between the floor level and the skirting.

Redecoration - painting

The range of paint colours available today is wider than it's ever been - so the key to creating a contemporary, attractive living room colour theme should be relatively easy. By allowing natural as well as artificial light to influence colour choice means that it should be possible to create a light, airy and comfortable space whatever size and style of room you are painting and whatever your budget.

Types of paint



Today, there is a specialised paint for every different surface and a final finish to satisfy the fussiest of tastes. From eggshell, emulsion, gloss, satinwood, matt sheen, soft sheen to colour effects such as sparkling glitter, the homeowner is literally spoilt for choice. You can even visit some DIY centres and have your very own colour made to match an existing scheme, an individual piece of furniture or fabric or even scanned from an image or a magazine clipping!

Whatever colour you decide on, emulsion remains the finish of choice for most domestic walls and ceilings.

Difficulty level 1/5

Tools

- Dustsheet
- Paint brushes and rollers
- Paint tray
- Sponge
- Masking tape

How to do it

The key to good decoration is making space. For the best results, empty the whole room, including curtains. Lay down dust sheets to cover all carpets and flooring. Mask off any light fittings, light switches and power sockets.

Starting with the ceiling and using a roller attached to a long handle, lightly charge the roller head with paint from the tray and begin in one corner using long, broad strokes, smoothing as you go. Do not apply too much paint at a time. Follow the same forward direction to the end of the room then begin again next to the line where you originally started. If the ceiling is particularly grubby or has a dark colour underneath, you may need to apply two coats. Always paint during the day as natural daylight will show up any areas where you haven't evenly covered the ceiling.



When it comes to painting walls, mask off all light switches and sockets before 'cutting in.' Cutting in essentially means loading a small brush with paint and painting a 5cm border along the top where the wall meets the ceiling and the same where it meets the skirting. The trick is to keep the brush flat to the wall and slowly wiggle it up towards the ceiling (or down towards the skirting), ensuring that no wall colour spoils your carefully painted ceiling or floor. Once you have painted a border line top and bottom along the length of the wall, follow the exact same painting process as for ceilings using the roller brush and applying paint in long, even vertical strokes along the wall until the room is

complete. If you are painting one wall in a contrasting colour, allow all other paintwork to dry before painting the feature wall or better still, paint the feature wall first.

To keep paintbrushes from drying out when not in use, wrap in cling film. And of course, every time you finish a job, wash the brush in hot soapy water for emulsion paints, or white spirit for gloss paints.

A new living room layout - how to organise furniture



You can take one room and the same set of furniture but create a myriad of different looks all by the subtle repositioning of individual pieces within the room. From dining, coffee and occasional tables, three-piece suites, sofas and chairs, through to hi-fi system and TVs, most living rooms have a number of furniture pieces to contend with; the object of the exercise of having a new layout to create a completely new look without buying anything. It is perfectly

possible to achieve this but as with most things, time spent at the planning stage will pay rewards.

Difficulty level 0/5

Tools - none

How to do it

Planning The first thing to do is make a scale drawing of your room as well as your furniture. Mark on the diagram the position of all windows, electric and light sockets, lighting, any alcoves, radiators etc and then start placing your items of furniture in random layouts. When you have selected two or three possibilities which look good on paper, you can start to experiment by moving your furniture until you find the layout which works best for you.

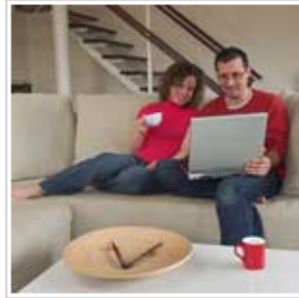
What to think about

There are a few key things to consider. For example, most people usually site a large dining table right in the middle of the room. This not only breaks up the general flow but the eye is automatically drawn to the largest object in the room, so tends to make the room appear smaller. By placing a dining table within a bay or near to a well lit area of the room such as a rear window or patio doors, or even against a side wall, it can open up space in the centre of the living



room, making it feel dramatically larger.

Look at the number of pieces of furniture you have. Do you own a three-piece suite when there are only two of you? Even with visitors, most rooms can get by with two sofas, so think about disposing heavy, cumbersome armchairs which are generally awkward to place strategically. Try to run sofas along the longest walls instead of across the width of a lounge. Doing this will draw the eye along the length of the room, making it feel less claustrophobic.



Most homes with fireplaces and/or chimneys will have an alcove either side of the chimney breast. In many cases, these alcoves are under-used, wasting a lot of useful storage space. If you have unit furniture which fit, use them. If not, consider fitting shelves within the alcove voids which will free up useful space elsewhere.

For hi-fi equipment and TVs, unobtrusive storage is possible with most TVs now being of the flat-screen variety and therefore wall-mountable. Hi-fis too, can be placed on the walls with specialist shelf brackets and cable tidies which keep wires to a minimum. Lighting can also have a dramatic effect on the feel of a room, enhancing space and illuminating key areas such as a dining area. See our [guide to modern, stylish lighting](#).

