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Real Estate

How to use a pop of color in a small space

You can introduce color into a small space through an accent wall, pillows and gold-colored metal in furniture legs. (Benjamin C. Tankersley for The Washington Post)

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Design articles often suggest a "pop of color" to perk up an overly neutral palette in your home. But if you live in tight quarters, how do you know how many pops are too many?

We asked Debbie Lori Travin of DLT Interiors in New York City to share her insights about using color in your home, particularly when you are living in a studio or one-bedroom apartment or in a home with smaller rooms.

"The use of color in a small space needs to be done strategically and sparingly," Travin wrote in an email. "If there's too much color, the space becomes unsophisticated looking; more like a child's room. If there is not enough color, it could look rather dull and uninspiring."

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Here are Travin's recommended steps to using just the right amount of color in a small space:

1. Start with a neutral palette for the key pieces of furniture, which include the sofa and chairs.

2. Decide which accent colors makes you happy and go with that. Remember, you want to design a room you enjoy looking at and spending time in.

3. Once you decide which accent color you like most, decide where you would like to use it. Using color sparingly and precisely is a challenge and requires editing accordingly.

Here are other ways to use color in a small room:

- Add color with the pillows. She chose light blue and orange for one room because her client loved that combination.
- Choose an accent piece of furniture in a color to add personality and punch into the room. For example, she chose to use a soft, blue animal-print fabric on benches in one project, which, she said, added panache to the room and balanced with the light blue pillows on the sofa.
- Incorporate artwork. This is a great way to introduce color into a small space. In her client's home, she added a large painting with oranges and blues over the sofa to tie in and bring all the colors together.
- Include metal. In a client's home, she added gold accents in the cocktail table and side tables as well as in the lighting. Gold is a warm metal and works well with oranges and blues, she said. Silver accents add a cooler tone to blues and oranges. Either one works beautifully and adds another dimension to your room's colors, she said.

"Make sure you do not overuse color in a small room," Travin wrote. "Choose wisely with the pillows, accent furniture, artwork or accessories and keep most of the base of the furniture neutral, and then you will have a room that is both sophisticated as well as inviting."

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