

ASK THE EXPERTS

From interiors and gardening to DIY and eco design, our team answer your questions



INTERIOR DESIGN

SALLIE CHATER

Founder and director of her own interior design company, Interiors at 58, Sallie is the latest expert to join our panel. She believes in creating luxurious, elegant and original interiors at affordable prices

EMBRACE YOUR SPACE

Q I have an L-shaped living room and for years I've only really used one half of the room with the other becoming a corridor. How can I rearrange it to make better use of the space? *Anna Sandell, Nottingham*



Carrying design elements through both areas will help unite the space

● Email your questions to us at house.beautiful@hearst.co.uk or post to House Beautiful, Unit 9, Apollo Business Centre, Trundleys Road, London SE8 5JE

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A When thinking about the layout of an L-shaped living room, the key is to create zones to give each area a purpose. You can do this by making sure furniture fits the space correctly and by using cohesive tones and textures throughout.

If you already have a dining room and want to use the entire space as a living room, creating formal and casual seating areas is a great idea. The larger part could work as a comfy, informal space with soft sofas, a TV and footstool, while the smaller section can become a reading or relaxing area with elegant armchairs and a coffee table.

A bookcase or shelving unit can turn an unused walkway into more of a feature. There are also some fantastic ready-made designs that fit around doorways and into corners, enhancing even the most awkward areas.

If you don't have a feature window or patio doors in the room to act as a focal point, installing a fireplace in the trickier 'corridor' area will create a cosy area to gather furniture around.

For rooms with a narrow section, choose armchairs that aren't too deep and have longer legs so there's plenty of flooring visible to maximise the feeling of space. Position a console table on the opposite side for balance and hang a mirror to make the area feel wider.

By picking up the key design elements and carrying them through the whole space, you'll avoid it feeling like two separate rooms. The same patterns or tones should be used in both areas in different ways. For example, try pairing a darker sofa and lighter accents at one end, with paler chairs and accessories in deeper tones at the other.

Finally, rugs will help to define your new layout. Consider more luxurious textures in your formal area, and natural fabrics such as wool and sisal in the other.



If you're prepared to make more effort, using reclaimed materials can bring stunning results



ECO DESIGN

OLIVER HEATH

The UK's leading expert in sustainable architecture and interior design, and a familiar face on TV

RECLAIMING MATERIALS

Q We've had planning permission granted for a ground-floor extension and want to source reclaimed building materials instead of buying new. Where should we look?

Sonia Baxendale, Newcastle

A Making use of reclaimed building materials can lead to the creation of beautiful and unique rooms. It does require careful consideration though, as it can be time consuming to locate materials that are frequently of mixed quality and often only available in limited quantities.

While these materials are often cheaper pricewise, using them can be labour-intensive. With reclaimed parquet and timber plank flooring, for example, you'll need to remove old adhesives or nails, and then sand, varnish and finish. Similarly, if you'd like to reuse reclaimed bricks, just chip off any attached mortar. This is far easier with the lime mortar used in Victorian buildings than modern type.

Taps and other plumbing often won't meet today's standards (such as WRAS approval for drinking

water) and will come with non-standard size connections, which can make them difficult to install.

If you've done your research and love the aged look and ecofriendly benefits of using reclaimed materials, then there are several places to investigate. The National Community Wood Recycling Network links reclaimed timber facilities across the UK, and can supply timber salvage ranging from window frames to sheet materials and old flooring. Go to communitywoodrecycling.org.uk to find your local supplier. Architectural salvage shows around the country, including Salvo Fair, can provide a variety of materials and products. These shows are often popular, so get there early to beat the dealers! Similarly, antiques fairs are usually full of reclaimed furniture and materials if you're happy to rummage. ▶



DIY shelving works well in awkward corners and alcoves

WHERE CAN I FIND A... BOLDLY PATTERNED RUG



In a recent Ask the Experts, you featured a monochrome patterned rug alongside Sallie's answer. It's exactly what I've been looking for to complete my newly decorated bedroom. Where can I buy it?

Rita Sampson, Torbay

This rug is a real case of east meeting west to create sensational design. It comes from Nordic brand Linie Design, featuring all the simplicity and sophistication of Danish style together with the quality craftsmanship of the Indian men and women who handknot it from pure wool. Called Aragon, it's available online at woven.co.uk. Prices start at £650 for 140 x 200cm.

ALICIA FORD

Junior features writer



DIY AND PROPERTY

JO BEHARI

A champion for women in DIY and business, as well as an expert on using space and improving properties, Jo will help you find the answers to all your home and DIY challenges

MADE TO MEASURE

Q My daughter recently bought her first flat and can't find a shelving unit to fit a difficult alcove in the living room. Would it be easier to make one? *Tina McDermott, Bangor*

A Finding a shelving unit to fit an alcove isn't easy and constructing one by hand to fit a tricky space requires experience. Making individual shelves for the alcove is simpler, although you'll need to be confident with power tools.

First of all, measure the width, depth and height of the alcove (the width and depth may not be uniform all the way up). Decide how many shelves you want and how far apart you want them spaced, and plot this on a paper plan with all the appropriate measurements.

You'll need 2x4 timbers and sheets of MDF. You can buy all the materials from a local hardware store. Many of these will deliver so you won't need to worry about fitting long timbers in your car, or you may be able to get your MDF cut to size from an online supplier!

The 2x4 timbers need to be cut and used as supports (batons) for the shelves. You'll need three supports for each shelf – two

along the sides of the alcove and one along the back wall. Cut and fit the back wall supports first by measuring out the correct width – matching the width of the alcove – and then using a saw or electric jigsaw to cut to the right size.

Next, drill three to four holes through the wood and place against the wall. Poke a bradawl or thin pencil through these holes to make corresponding marks on the wall. Now drill holes into the wall at the pencil marks, big enough to fit a medium to heavyweight wall plug (8mm is a good size). Slot in the plug and use long screws to attach the baton to the wall. Repeat with all the batons for each shelf, checking measurements as you go.

Once the supports are up, cut your MDF sheets to the right size and place on the batons. Then screw the sheets to the supports so they're secure. Once in place, cut a piece of trim and add it to the front of the shelf as a lip to hide the supports, if desired. Finally, sand the surfaces and paint. 🛠️