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Your design problems solved

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Q: My apartment has absolutely no architectural details, interesting angles or even charm. I see nothing but big, white walls everywhere. I feel like I live in a dorm.

Where do I even start?—Brenna Stearns, 25, Brooklyn Heights

A: Charm and amenities don't often go hand in hand in the rental market, but consider your place a blank canvas. If painting walls is prohibited or too intimidating, invest in a fab, festive area rug that will travel with you when you move. To add drama over a sofa, hang oversize artwork—even a four-foot square canvas painted a solid color will do the trick.

Two or three of these high-drama moments will keep the space from feeling institutional.—*Nick Olsen, interior decorator and style blogger* (nickolsenstyle.blogspot.com)^[1]

Our apartment has a sizable sleeping loft, but you can't actually stand up in it. How can we transform this bonus space into a usable living area?—Kate Wilbur, 23, East Village

I love New Yorkers for the sheer fact that they live in every single inch of their apartments—when space is at a premium, you have to. A sleeping loft can be tricky because you have a lot of parameters to consider before you even pick the first piece of furniture. Since you can't stand up in the space, you'll want to keep the furniture low to the ground. Consider a platform for the bed; the slats mean you can forgo the box springs. Because maneuvering the space means crawling, keep the rest of the furniture smaller in scale, like a low side table that doesn't have sharp corners. Make sure you have storage, such as a side table with drawers to stow bottled water or a good read. It'll save you the climb up and down the ladder late at night.—*Nate Berkus, host of The Nate Berkus Show*

My living room and kitchen have no windows or overhead lighting. I feel like I'm

living in a cave.—Diana Rice, 22, Chelsea

You can create the illusion of natural light and that emotional breath of fresh air a few different ways. First, mirrors are the best surrogates for windows. Place a large one where you wish you had a window, and see if you can find a corner for a tall mirrored screen that also throws light out in a few directions at once. Next, all your artificial lighting sources should be on dimmers and at several different heights, so you don't get oppressive shadows. Invest in a pair of wall sconces—they don't have to be hardwired into the wall, cord covers are an easy option—and either flank your mirror with them or place them on either side of art across the room from the mirror. Make sure you have a table lamp or two, as well as a standing lamp. A little bit of uplit greenery will also give your apartment a shot of life and dappled light.—*Celerie Kemble, Kemble Interiors* (kembleinteriors.com)^[2]

How can I play down the 12-foot-high mirrored wall in my living room? As is, the space feels like an aerobics studio.—Michael, 29, Greenwich Village

Personally, I love mirrors. But the best way to handle it is to treat it as a regular wall—I would suggest hanging art on top of the mirror so it just becomes a backdrop. This will not only create intimacy, but look richly layered. You can either go for one large, strong piece, or cover the wall with tons of work. Black-and-white photography mixed with proper paintings would be stunning. You can use Scotch adhesive tape to mount the work, so you can take it with you when you go. I would also suggest that you place a piece of furniture against the mirrored wall; the “aerobics” area would suddenly feel intentional and expensive—remember that a fully mirrored wall is considered a luxurious element in Europe. Just look at Coco Chanel's mirrored staircase!—*Ryan Korban* (ryankorban.com)^[3]

I love the terrace off my bedroom, but not the large, metal, industrial-looking door that leads to it. How do I tackle this eyesore?—Sarah Rienhoff, 26, Soho

You can always paint the frame and door to match your walls. Or, since the door is metal, how about making a collage of candid pictures you love, or turn it into an inspiration board by hanging things on it with magnets? You could also buy some chic wrapping paper and paper the door, using magnets as glue. The last, and maybe the simplest option is to buy some ready-made linen or sheer panels that can cover the door, and soften the look in your bedroom. Ikea has some great extra-wide fabric panels that would work perfectly for this without breaking the bank.—*Elizabeth Bauer, Elizabeth Bauer Design* (elizabethbauerdesign.com)^[4]

How can my roommate and I turn our small, awkwardly shaped third bedroom into some kind of dressing room? We're two girls with too many clothes and accessories.—Kristen Joeger, 22, Upper West Side

Start by taking an inventory of yours and your roommate's clothing and accessories to get a sense of just how much storage you'll need. Then look into an affordable shelving system like Elfa (thecontainerstore.com)^[5], which has lots of easy-to-install options. Any leftover wall space can be transformed into cheap and design-savvy storage by getting some Peg-Board cut to fit the size of the wall. It's an easy, fun way to display jewelry, belts, bags and scarves. Finish the space off with a mirror, some cute drawer hardware, and maybe even an inexpensive chandelier to give the room a boudoir feel.—*Melanie Fascitelli, Clos-ette* (clos-ette.com)^[6]

I got stuck with our apartment's loftlike upstairs bedroom, which lacks an actual door. How can I create privacy without sacrificing style?—Jeanne, 27, Upper East Side

Open bookshelves can be a great spatial divider, and they're functional as well. You can use inexpensive and stylish shelves from a place like Ikea, or something more high-end. Both will look fantastic from either side of the shelves, and will give you the privacy you need. Another idea is drapes, which also block out a lot of noise. You can also do a combination of both bookshelves and drapes. Be bold and go for it.—*Cortney and Robert Novogratz, Sixx Design* (sixxdesign.com [7]) and stars of *the Bravo's Nine by Design*

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