5 Common Interior Design Mistakes (and How to Avoid Them)

By Lahood Published 30 October 2024 · Updated 30 October 2024

When it comes to creating beautiful homes there are a few pitfalls nearly every homeowner encounters. To help shed some light on these common interior design challenges, we sat down with Tricia Dunlop, Lahood's award-winning interior designer. Tricia's eye for detail and dedication to creating spaces that feel truly special has helped her transform countless homes across the Auckland region. In this blog she shares her thoughts on the five most common design mistakes she sees, and how to avoid them.

1. Ignoring Function for the Sake of Style

" One of the most common mistakes I see is prioritising aesthetics over functionality. Of course, we all want our homes to look beautiful, but the design also needs to be practical. For example, you might fall in love with a gorgeous couch that looks amazing

in the showroom, but if it's uncomfortable, too big for the room, or difficult to maintain, it becomes more of a hassle than a pleasure. Good design should make daily life easier, not harder.

Tricia's solution? “Always start by thinking about how you use the space. If it's a family room, go for comfortable, durable seating and surfaces that can withstand everyday wear and tear. If it's a guest room, create a restful, easy-to-maintain environment. By prioritising your needs, you can create a space that looks beautiful but also works seamlessly with your lifestyle”.

2. Skimping on Lighting

"Lighting is often an afterthought, but it's crucial to both the functionality and ambiance of a space. Many people stick to just using overhead lights, however this can make a room feel very cold, flat and unwelcoming."

Tricia's solution? "Use a layered lighting approach. Combine ambient lighting (overhead down lights), task lighting for specific activities (side lamps, standard lamps for example), and accent lighting (angled spotlights) to highlight architectural features

or artwork. Don’t forget dimmer switches - they let you adjust the brightness, creating versatility and warmth at any time of day. The impact of windows and natural light is also often underestimated – the right window furnishings can play a huge role in controlling and maximising daylight in a room.

3. Ignoring Scale and Proportion

"Scale and proportion are vital, but they’re often the most challenging aspects for homeowners to get right. Too often, people buy pieces they love without considering how they’ll fit together in a room. A sofa that's too large can overwhelm a small living room, and tiny artwork can look out of place on a big wall"

Tricia's solution? "Before making any purchases, measure your space carefully and visualise where each piece will go. It's helpful to think in terms of layers: start with the main furniture pieces, then add smaller items like side tables, lamps, and artwork. Consider not just the size of individual pieces, but how they'll work together. If you're unsure, try mapping out the layout on paper or using masking tape on the floor to mark where items will go. A good rule of thumb is to leave about 45cm of walking space around furniture. Don't forget to consider the height of pieces – mixing heights adds visual interest to a room. Hanging curtains from the ceiling rather than just above the window frame can add height and scale to low ceilings and make even more of a statement with tall windows.

4**. Choosing Paint Before Furniture and Fabrics**

"It's tempting to start with paint because it's relatively easy to change, but it's better to choose your furniture and fabrics first. With paint, you have thousands of shades at your disposal, but finding the right upholstery or fabric that complements your vision can be a bit trickier. If you fall in love with a particular curtain fabric or sofa, choose your paint to enhance those elements instead. If the paint is already chosen, don't panic! Just be mindful of bringing in complementary pieces that work well with it. And remember, accessories like cushions, throws, and even wall art can tie things together beautifully if the paint colour feels a bit bold or unexpected"

5. Underestimating the Power of Texture

"Texture is so important. It adds depth, interest, and personality to a room, but it's frequently underestimated. People tend to focus on colour and pattern while forgetting that a room filled with only smooth, flat surfaces can feel cold, boring and one-dimensional.

Tricia's solution "You can introduce texture with a mix of materials such as leather, wood, metal, and natural fibres like linen or wool. Even a simple addition like a plush fur rug, wool throws, velvet cushions, or woven baskets can make a world of difference. Layering these elements gives a room a cosy, inviting feel that's hard to achieve with colour alone."

Final Thoughts from Tricia

My biggest piece of advice is to take your time and enjoy the process. Designing your décor should be a pleasure, not a race. Good design takes time. It's okay to leave some walls bare or spaces unfilled initially. Live in the space, see how you use it, and let your design evolve. Collect pieces that truly speak to you over time, rather than rushing to fill every corner at once.

Lahood's Interior Design Service

While these tips can certainly help homeowners avoid common mistakes, working with a professional interior designer can truly transform your interiors and eliminate all the stress of potentially getting it wrong. At Lahood, we bring years of experience and a trained eye to each project, helping our clients create spaces that are not only elegant but also functional and reflect their personal style. Whether you're refreshing a single room or reimagining your entire home, our Interior Design Team is here to help every step of the way. Come visit us at 104 Mt Eden Road or book a complimentary consultation below to see how we can help bring your design vision to life.

LAHOOD