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SPEND WISELY ON BIG ITEMS

We would all love an unlimited budget that makes buying your new sofa as stress-free as buying a new kettle but, being realistic, working to a budget is one of the real skills in interior design. Finding the right rug for the scheme is just half of it: finding the rug that looks perfect and yet sits comfortably with the pocket is another matter entirely. The key to achieving this is allocating your budget carefully, with a view to spending more on the things that will be with you the longest: sofas and chairs, art and window dressings. These provide a strong foundation for your interior; other items can be added to and improved upon later. For cornerstone pieces, it's also good to steer clear of any big trends. Keep the lines clean and simple and the colours neutral — bringing in colour and personality with less expensive items that can easily be replaced as trends and tastes change. Ask yourself: "Am I adding value to my property in buying this?" Getting the core right is vital to the resale value — most people are pretty design savvy and will not be fooled by cheap copies, so don't be afraid to invest.



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MIX RATHER THAN MATCH YOUR TABLEWARE

The best homes are eclectic, cool and not matchy-matchy. One of the questions I hear all the time is: "How do I mix up my tableware successfully without it looking a mess?" My top tip here is to twofold. Pattern can be pretty mixed, providing the colour palette works. From the outset, decide what your colour range is going to be (two or three colours together work best) and layer patterns, stripes, florals, etc. to your heart's content. Play with outlines. Look for plates and bowls with interesting edges — square, scalloped, circular — and experiment with what looks best. The look is relaxed and really works.

The same goes for dining furniture. A good, solid table with odd chairs in different shapes and colours can look really great. As long as the colour palette works, you can be as creative as you like with the shape.

2

GO BESPOKE

My designs rely heavily on bespoke items — and there's no reason yours shouldn't too. But having a chair made to my specification is not about putting a 'designer's stamp' on a scheme — it's about meeting the client's demands to the dot, about being able to find the exact depth of sofa, and crucially it needn't be the expensive option. There are amazingly skilled joiners who will work with you and your budget to design and make the piece of your dreams. Our homes shouldn't be places we have to force-fit ourselves to; they should be places that are made for us, and conform to our lifestyle and preferences.

Jo's GOLDEN rules

*Interior designer to the stars
JO HAMILTON shares her
décor tricks for giving
any house a high-end finish*

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BE ON THE LEVEL

One of my favourite ways of adding value to a property is to create a beautiful extension. It's often to a kitchen, with the extra space being used as a dining/living area. This is something that is quite often top of people's wish list for their properties and so it's important to make sure you get it right. We all long for space, and giving the illusion of more space will really add value to the property. A great tip is to visually extend your living space into the garden. Glass bifold doors extend the eye into the garden and also allow the space to open out instantly when the weather permits. Keep the floor levels the same inside and out, thereby creating a seamless transition between the two spaces, and keep the colours the same for both. For example, if you have wooden flooring inside, choose a similar-toned wood for the outside and lay it in the same direction. When the doors open, the garden becomes part of the room and — with the right furniture dressing the space — will give a huge boost to way it works.

USE SCALE TO MASTER PATTERNS

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'Small, medium and large' is a lot more than just the coffee options at Costa. It's also a way of thinking about your interiors that will allow you to master the use of patterns. A simple rule of three, it means your cushion selection will work perfectly together and will look as though you really know your interior design. Take the size of the pattern on your fabric and see how it fares against another patterned fabric — are the patterns of the same size, or is one bigger or smaller than the other? If they are different sizes, you can safely complement your selection with a third fabric if the pattern on it is either smaller or larger than the other two, or even in between. This element of definition and discipline to your choice of patterns should give you the confidence to consider any kind of fabric and not just play it safe with plains.

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LIGHT THE WAY WITH DIMMERS

For me, one of the key elements that mark a property out as a luxury home is great lighting — and part of this is control of that lighting. A good electrician should be able to put pretty much all the lighting in your home on a dimmer, allowing you to change mood as easily as you change the television channel. Dimmer queries and requests for electricians and lighting suppliers are definitely among the ubiquitous conversations I have on my projects. But one thing to remember is that if you go to the trouble of ensuring all your lights can be dimmed, don't then let down the luxury feel with cheap-looking white plastic dimmer switches.

Jo Hamilton is appearing on the Inspiration Stage at House 2017 today and tomorrow. The high-end interiors event runs at Dublin's RDS all weekend. See house-event.ie