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House Rules

a GQ design primer

SURE, YOU COULD SHELL OUT A LOT OF CASH TO COMPLETELY RENOVATE YOUR PLACE. OR YOU COULD USE THE BASICS OF GOOD DESIGN TO GET THE JOB DONE. HERE ARE FIFTEEN SIMPLE IDEAS THAT WILL INSTANTLY IMPROVE YOUR HOME

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THE PURSUIT OF Good Design can lead you down some pretty treacherous paths. What you seek is simple: to make your home more inviting, to make it a space that rejuvenates and inspires. But most of us think the fastest way to achieve this is by tearing through design catalogs and furiously filling our spaces with objects that may look spectacular but end up demanding more of our attention than they deserve. A cutting-edge sofa made by some designer of the moment quickly loses its appeal when you can't sit in it without needing a visit to a chiropractor the next day.

The fact is, design showstoppers have little effect on your overall quality of life—and what effect they do have is transitory. Each season will bring a new crop of ornamentation or color trends (that supposedly prove to you and your guests you've got "personality"). But the comfort and style of your home is really the sum of less noticeable details—the way the light falls, cleanliness, a sense of solidity in the basic tools of everyday life. To pay attention to the shape and function of objects is a worthwhile and rewarding pursuit, but there's a problem when you start to notice a plate more than the food on it, a light fixture more than the room it illuminates, the bed more than the woman lying in it. Design is meant to support your life, not become it.

So here are fifteen simple upgrades that may not take your breath away but will instantly improve your sense of being—and continue to pay off for years to come.

1 CLEAR THE AIR

THERE ARE TIMES when your home could smell better than it does. Correcting the situation usually requires proactive measures—releasing chemical aerosols into the air, burning candles with fragrance-infused wax—the effects of which are usually short-lived. For an easier olfactory fix, try using a reed diffuser, which will effectively disperse the scent of your choice without the need for pressurized canisters or open flames. The most tasteful ones we've come across are made by Linari (www.linari.com), which packages its finely scented oils in handsome glass bottles with lids carved from solid wood. You can adjust the intensity of the smell by adding or removing the included reeds. The kits are pricey, but each one lasts six to nine months.



2 KEEP YOUR RUG CAREFREE

WE'VE NEVER understood the appeal of an exquisite rug, perhaps because we just don't feel comfortable walking on something that artisans have spent months slaving away over. We also don't want to spend the rest of our lives worrying about spilling something on it. A less precious floor cover makes much more sense. FLOR (www.flor.com), for example, makes a range of carpet tiles—most are twenty inches square—that can be combined to create area rugs or wall-to-wall installations. Carpet tiles have been used in office buildings and airports for decades, but FLOR was one of the first companies to make them appropriate for the home by introducing plusher piles and idiot-proof installation (the tiles attach to one another with stickers). The tiles can be detached and cleaned individually (we've scrubbed ours in the kitchen sink) or, in a worst-case scenario, replaced (FLOR recycles old tiles for free) without junking the other 98 percent of the rug. Beverage-related mishaps, therefore, become less grave.

3 INVEST IN A LOUNGE CHAIR

A GREAT LOUNGE chair may seem like an indulgence, but if you're going to invest in one piece of furniture, this should be it. Every man needs a chair of his own—a place to read, to listen to music, to power nap. Your lounge chair should be tailored to you, so devote the same level of attention to finding one that you would to finding a suit. The armchair shown here is Alfredo Häberli's Take a Line for a Walk (www.conranusa.com), which evokes Arne Jacobsen's famous Egg Chair but is more angular and enveloping.

4 CAST POOLS OF LIGHT

THE COZINESS of a room has less to do with its furniture than how it's lit. Even the most thoughtfully appointed space will feel uninviting when flooded with artificial light. For spaces where you intend to relax and wind down, opt for lamps that cast distinct pools of light and place them in areas where you expect your guests to congregate. You may not be able to move your walls, but you can essentially rearrange a room by rejiggering the spaces defined by your lighting.