

2 STYLES 1 HOME

Decorate your
living space together—
without a fight

BY JAMIE BECKMAN FOR USA TODAY

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ECORATING A HOME WITH YOUR MAIN SQUEEZE STARTS INNOCENTLY ENOUGH. After all, the idea of feathering a nest together—filling a big, blank space with things you both love—sounds romantic.

But, more often than not, romantic notions morph into a wall-shaking fight. Do the bedroom walls get granite or graystone paint? What goes in the living room, his overstuffed, beaten-up chair or your grandmother's credenza? And which gets room on the shelf, her pageant trophies or his bobbleheads?

You might contemplate walking out the door of your love nest and never coming back.

Silly, right?

Under normal circumstances, yes. These differences of opinion would be trivial.

But when you're decorating a home with your partner, emotions run much higher, says psychologist Marsha Lucas, author of *Rewire Your Brain for Love*.

"We decorate our homes at different stages in our lives, and usually we're going through some sort of huge transition," Lucas says. "You moved in together, you're about to get married, you moved because you're having a baby, one of you moved to another city to be with a person after being apart.

"It's good stress, but it's still stressful. It leaves us in a state of feeling a little amped up and a little wary and on our guard to see where the danger might be."

When your partner makes a suggestion that you find abhorrent—like giving the living room a hunting-lodge feel or decorating the house in a Victorian motif—subconscious alarm bells are triggered in your brain to defend the territory, Lucas says. It's actually pretty normal, biologically speaking.

Creating a beautiful space that combines both of your tastes take preparation, cooperation, and patience.



The bungalow, built in 1923, originally had an apartment upstairs. That became a laundry room, which the Scandlens recently converted to a **NURSERY** for their third child, daughter Ruby. The laundry room got pushed behind the nursery.



MANDY AND BEN SCANDLEN OF ARLINGTON, VA., have found the sweet spot for compromising on decor.



A recent project of theirs was closing in the **BACK PORCH**, creating what Mandy calls an "adult space." Ben wanted a breakfast area, but they've both enjoyed the sitting area with built-in bookshelves as a space to read and relax.



Mandy gives credit to her husband for the stacked **STONE COLUMNS** on the front porch of their home. "Ben was right," she says. The reworked pillars provide a handsome entry to the home, which also features a heavy, dark wooden door—another selection by Ben.



In the **DOWNSTAIRS BATHROOM**, the Scandlens updated a few new features while putting in black and white floor tile to pair with the wall tile. The upstairs bathroom has the original black and white tile.



Everett, the couple's **FIRST CHILD**, is one of three big reasons—along with brother Rollin and sister Ruby—for many of the changes in Scandlen home.

BONE UP BEFORE YOU SHOP

Before you set foot in a home decor store, you and your partner should pore through design magazines and websites separately. Tear out or print pictures of furniture and colors you like, then come back together and compare.

When you show your tear sheets to your partner, you'll get a feel for what the other person likes and find some common design ground, says interior designer Michelle Workman, who has decorated homes for celebrity couples like John Travolta and Kelly Preston.

Pin the looks you both love on a corkboard or paste them onto a large piece of card stock as your design board. "That way, you can say, 'Okay, so we both love this color blue, and we know that this type of modern sofa that you like works really well with this more traditional wallpaper that I like,'" Workman says.

From there, shopping will go more smoothly.

KNOW THE TERMS

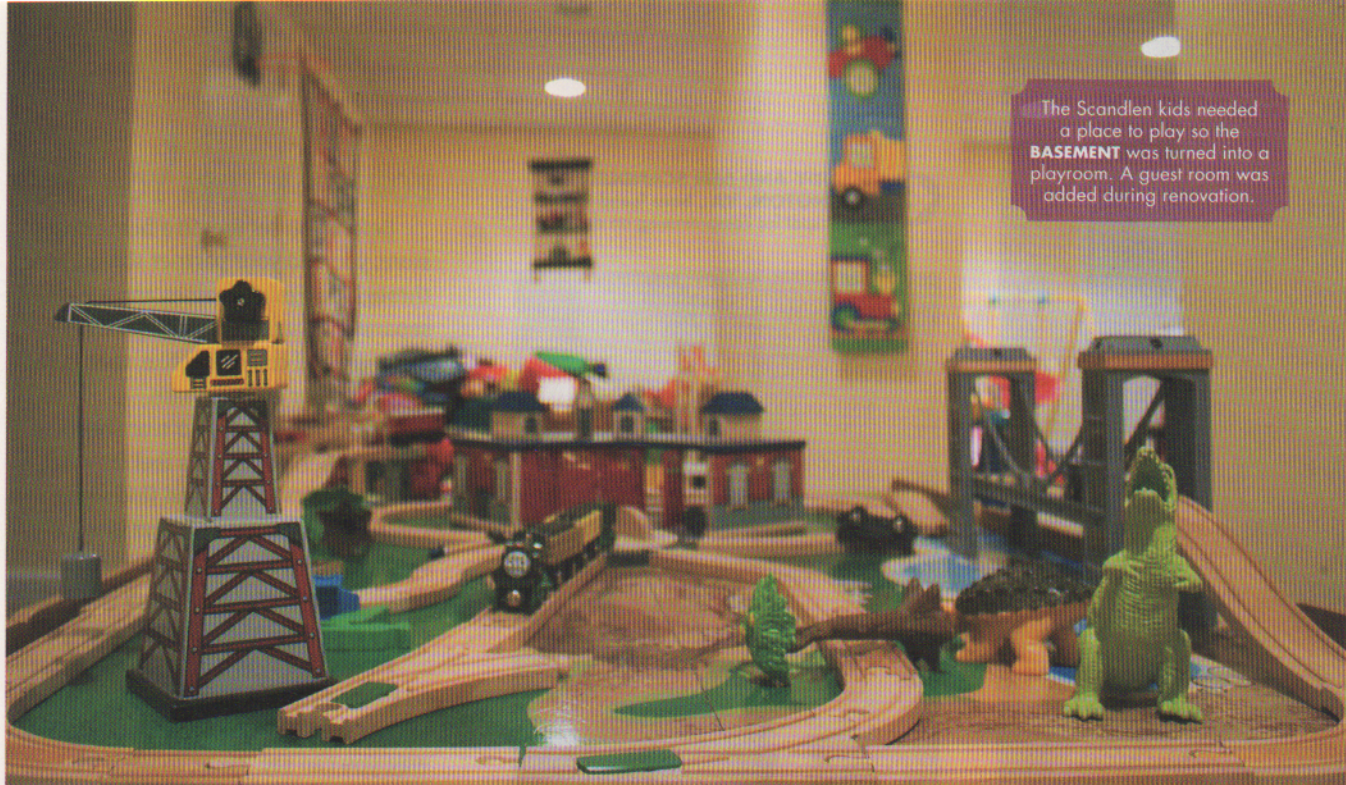
Getting on the same page from a vocabulary standpoint also will prove helpful when working together, Lucas says, especially if one partner has more experience with design or is more vocal about what he or she wants.

"It's really important for the person ahead on the path to be able to help the other person and say, 'I want us to be on a team with this, how can I help you find the words that you're needing?'" Lucas says. "Maybe what (the other person) can say is, 'I don't even know how to talk about this. Can you help me?'"

MAKE THE CALL: KEEP OR TOSS?

In the movie *When Harry Met Sally*, Jess's giant wagon-wheel coffee table from his bachelor pad caused friction when he and Marie moved in together.

Every couple has a proverbial wagon-wheel coffee table that can cause conflict, whether it's a shabby-chic dresser from her single days or a prized mounted »



The Scandlen kids needed a place to play so the **BASEMENT** was turned into a playroom. A guest room was added during renovation.

moose head he cherishes.

Before you drag the offending item to the dumpster, interior designer Kari Whitman suggests breathing new life into the items via reupholstering, refinishing, or totally rethinking them.

Try putting silver leaf on that wagon wheel and turn it into a rustic chandelier, complete with dangling filament light bulb. (Whitman actually did this with a wheel belonging to one of her Oklahoma-bred clients). If it's an old recliner that's causing discord, reupholster it, or put a funky hanging light over it to draw attention away from the beast.

When in doubt—or if your space is too limited to keep everything—store the extra stuff.

"I believe in keeping the things you love, even if it means incurring storage bills," says interior designer Kishani Perera. "I find that when one partner is forced to get rid of belongings with sentimental value—however aesthetically undesirable to the other—resentment begins to set in. Knowing those cherished pieces are safely tucked away makes moving forward a bit easier."

MIX YOUR STYLES

In a perfect world, you'd have enough space to form separate areas where your

specific tastes can live, whether it's a man cave with surround sound or a dressing area where she can go girly.

For those of us who don't have space to play with, mesh your tastes in cheeky, unexpected ways.

"Get creative," Whitman says. "If his affinity is cigars, and your affinity is old movies, find old posters of movies with guys smoking cigars."

Shelves are also ideal places to mix and match your favorite items. Whitman suggests having a handyman or cabinetmaker build simple shelves above your couch or at the top of the stairs with sections that can hold knickknacks you both cherish. However, avoid putting your things on one side and your partner's on the other—that creates too much division.

One great place to go crazy with your individual tastes is the bathroom.

"Create a story for yourself," Whitman says. "If you entertain a lot, the best way to create conversation and shock value is the powder room. If he loves a picture of Joe Namath [throwing a pass], make it into wallpaper, and put something you love on the other wall, and then put blackboard paint on one wall and write [in chalk], 'This is what we love—what do you think?'"

If you find yourselves at an impasse, there are a few colors and textures that both women and men tend to like. Oranges (like burnt orange, peach, or coral), blues, grays, and turquoise-greens are top choices. And, if you have to convince your husband of one thing, try pushing wallpaper.

"Guys don't like wallpaper when they see it on a board or in a roll, but when it's on a wall, they love it," Workman says. "I think they like that pattern on the walls, and they don't realize it until it's up."

ENJOY THE PROCESS

Despite your best intentions, fights happen. To defuse the situation before it happens, devise a kind of safe word to use if arguments start getting too heated.

"Have a signal, a word, a sentence to say, 'I need to take a time out,' 'I need to breathe,' or 'I'm too angry to talk about this right now,'" Lucas says. "And you both have to agree ahead of time that that's okay."

It's also important to remember why you're in the home in the first place.

"The house isn't about the girl. The house isn't about the boy," Workman says. "It's about two people coming together, and that's what the house should represent." ■