

Solve two of the most common design dilemmas – high ceilings and oddly shaped rooms.

Builders love to give their homes unique features such as double-height entrances. However, too often these 'features' pose a decorating challenge. Here are some suggestions to solve two of the most common design dilemmas that homeowners face – high ceilings and misshapen rooms.

Double-height spaces

Those of us with low ceilings may find it difficult to muster any sympathy for homeowners who face the soaring ceiling syndrome. However, double-height rooms do pose a unique problem. After all, where do you hang artwork and draperies?

By all means, hang artwork at eye level and enjoy it from the main floor, but take advantage of the second-storey space as well. Choose large-scale artworks of an abstract style rather than a representational nature. That way you'll be able to enjoy the image when viewed from a distance.

Beyond paintings and photography, consider displaying a tapestry or antique wall hanging. A ceremonial kimono is another excellent choice. You might hang vintage fabrics or colourful scarves in an acrylic shadow box, or hang a folding screen on the wall. Align the bottom of the screen with the height of the second floor. Its grand presence will make a statement upstairs and downstairs.

Another option involves grouping sculpture accents such as a selection of African masks. Jennifer Haines, owner of Savanna Style (in Toronto at 173 King St. E.), says masks are a great way to add



three-dimensional interest and texture to a wall. Pairings or odd numbers can look equally enchanting.

There are numerous options to try and changing a piece from horizontal to vertical, on a level plane or staggered, can give your art a fresh new look.

What is the best way to treat double-height windows? Think of them the way you would any window treatment and take the draperies all the way up the ceiling. If you like drama, bright red or saffron drapes will make an eye-catching display against white walls. Make sure

the drapes are two-and-a-half to three times fullness, or they will look skimpy at such a length. If, instead of one tall window, there is a single window on the main floor and a matching window on the second floor, opt for wooden slat blinds or shutters.

If you've always longed to have a library, now's your chance. A more expensive, though very satisfying project, involves installing a large built-in bookcase. Span the full wall and take advantage of closed storage on the bottom and open display shelves on top. A library ladder

allows you to access the upper shelves. Make sure to address lighting needs along with decorating needs. Pot lights aren't likely to be effective at such a height. Instead, rely on floor and table lamps for general and task lighting. Sconces, hung at eye level, will attract attention and distract from the awkward wall height.

Odd angles

A misshapen room, one with awkward sloping ceilings and irregular floors or walls, is a true challenge. This problem is often common in older homes that have been modified over the years to accommodate bathrooms, modern heating and air conditioning.

In general, a uniform colour softens angles, so paint the walls and ceiling in the same tone. If you like wallpaper, an overall pattern can cleverly distract from odd angles. Avoid geometric patterns such as stripes, which will only highlight bumps and twists. If walls are very irregular, you might try stencilling instead.

You can also physically change the shape of the room with built-ins. Square off an irregular angle or cumbersome bulkhead inside cabinetry. You'll be left with the odd shape inside the cupboard but most find this is an ideal solution.

If a sloping floor or ceiling is distracting to you, cheat the baseboards and crown mouldings to make them appear to run at right angles. Install mouldings on a straight line, ignoring the slope of floor or ceiling, and paint the leftover gap in a receding colour such as dark grey. 🌿

■ *If you love French design, you won't want to miss Kimberley Seldon's French Decorating Seminar on Sunday, Nov. 12, 2006. For more information, phone Cortney at 416-780-9187 ext. 221, or visit www.kimberleyseldon.com.*