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SMALL DESIGN DECISIONS THAT OFFER BIG IMPACT

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY JENN VERRIER

There's no denying that a massive, elegant chandelier makes a big visual statement in just about any room, as does a dramatic vaulted ceiling with floor-to-ceiling windows. But it's not just the big, bold design decisions that make noticeable changes in your home's look, feel, or functionality. Subtle design decisions also have the ability to create very impactful experiences.

In this article, I am delighted to offer ideas related to smaller design details that I know can make a big difference in your home. These ideas are beautifully illustrated in the photography of a residence my firm had the pleasure of working on with interior design firm W Design Collective and builder Brush Arbor Homes.



The Dutch Door

The Dutch Door is as practical as it is charming. Reminiscent of Holland and of the earliest American colonies, the original use of the door solved a significant problem—how to allow fresh air and light into the home while keeping children and pets inside and pests out. Today, we also often utilize Dutch doors in interior locations, such as at the end of a mud-room. This helps to maintain visual access to a space while still controlling access. In addition, the door is an excellent opportunity to incorporate a fun design element such as a pop of color, a reclaimed or rustic feel, or an elegant fluting detail.

Let the Light Shine In

It is common to see front doors incorporating sidelights or vertical pieces of glass placed on either side of the door to bring natural light to the home. To further bring the outdoors in and to maximize the impact of that beautiful natural light, a second sidelight can be added to the outer edge of each existing sidelight, creating two double sidelights that bathe the interior spaces with light.

Texture, Texture, Texture

The addition of texture onto the walls or ceiling of any room—whether beadboard, paneling, wallpaper, or tile—helps to enrich the space and at the same time scale down the room because of the intricacies of the design.

Deep Cased Openings

A cased opening is an opening between rooms or areas within a home, specifically an opening without a door or other barrier to connect the spaces. Examples of cased openings in homes include arched doorways between the living room and dining room or from a foyer into the family room. Cased openings can be created in a variety of depths; however, the deeper the opening, the more dramatic and impactful the space becomes. That impact can be elevated even further by layering beautiful paneling within the portal.

Casement Windows

Casement windows are hinged on the side, and hand cranks open outward to the left or right, allowing for full top to bottom ventilation. The beauty of a casement window is that it removes the horizontal bar seen in a double-hung window, which impacts the view. The bar quite literally dissects the view seen through the window. In addition, when placed over counters or furniture, casement windows are significantly more straightforward to operate than the double hung window, which requires additional leverage to push open and pull shut.



Dark Window Muntins

Windows clad in dark hues have increased in popularity in recent years and for numerous reasons—the dark frames make a bold and dramatic design statement and become a beautiful focal point in any room. However, for some homeowners, the powerful impact that fully dark-framed windows bring is too much of a design commitment. A gentler approach to incorporating dark windows is to paint only the window muntins dark while keeping the larger window frames light in color (muntins are the vertical and horizontal elements that divide a window's glass into a grid). This creates a lovely contrast with light-colored walls while keeping the dark color from overinfluencing the remainder of the space.

Recessed Tile Niche

If you aspire for your bathroom to feel more like a spa than a storage space

for various bottles and soaps, a shower niche is a beautiful solution. A niche is a built-in shelf recessed into the shower wall to provide storage space for bathroom products. It replaces the need for a caddy hanging from the showerhead, a corner shelf that's hard to clean, or products sitting on the shower floor. Incorporating a shower niche allows for a more organized shower and creates a more luxurious visual experience.

Monochromatic Paint

A monochromatic color palette can make secondary spaces such as mud-rooms, offices, and bathrooms feel like a focal point versus an afterthought. Yet another significant benefit is that painting the walls and trim the same color will make rooms feel quaint, intimate, and rich. Your eyes won't find an "end" spot like they do when your walls are one



color, and your trim is another. Remember, color is a powerful tool and costs nothing, so don't be afraid to use it to create a special moment. Another tip: choose different paint sheens to help create visual interest in a space that's all one color. I recommend using a flat or matte finish on the walls, a semi-gloss or satin finish on all trim, and a higher-gloss sheen on the ceiling to reflect light and give your monochromatic space extra textural depth.

Pocket Doors

A conventional hinged door can be a significant inconvenience when space is at a premium. Some areas are simply not conducive to a swinging door. Incorporating a pocket door, or a door that slides into and out of a "pocket" inside a hollow compartment in the wall, can create additional usable space. Pocket doors are perfect for connecting two spaces you might want to join without a door getting in the way—think bathrooms, laundry rooms, closets, or offices. Pocket doors also free up wall space for more art or furniture.

I hope these suggestions leave you encouraged by the ability that small design decisions have to create significant functional and aesthetic effects. As Vincent Van Gogh famously stated, "Great things are done by a series of small things brought together."

Born and raised in Virginia, **Cathy Purple Cherry** ultimately landed in Annapolis where she grew a large architectural firm specializing in high-end custom homes and estates. Today, the firm has four offices—Charlottesville, VA, Middleburg, VA, White Sulfur Springs, WV, and Annapolis, MD—and specializes in creating luxurious residences across the United States. A talented architect, visionary, and three-dimensional thinker, Cathy is able to marry clients' dreams with the reality of the built environment. While she revels in the intricate design opportunities presented by high-end residential architecture, Cathy is equally passionate about her philanthropic efforts. She and her firm offer their design knowledge and sensitivity to the special needs community via the Purple Cherry Purposeful Architecture Studio. A true creative servant, Cathy Purple Cherry is unfailing in her efforts to positively impact all those around her.

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