



Photo by Shanna Wolf

A Prada Look on a Target Budget

Home style inspirations from interiors
maven Laurel McManus Brown

Story by Lori Conner / Photos by Brownhouse Interiors

In late summer, when outdoor living segues to parent-teacher conferences, trips to apple orchards and a new holiday entertaining season that's just around the corner, the style-minded feel an urge to freshen up wardrobes and rejuvenate their homes in anticipation of the exciting new season. For inspiration, *Modern Bliss* caught up with the president of Brownhouse Interiors, Laurel McManus Brown, who likens home design to fashion, and graciously shared a few of her "Laurelisms" to guide readers in sprucing up their abodes for a look that says *Prada*, even if they're temporarily on a *Target* budget.

Celebrate the ceiling

"Ceilings are a huge palette of opportunity. They separate the mediocre from the spectacular." She often wallpapers ceilings or paints them a color other than white and, for higher-end clients, installs elaborately coffered ceilings, light coves and even reflective tile that visually expands space by drawing the eye upward with light and color.

Obsess over details

A consummate accessorizer in her personal appearance, Brown also considers interior details opportunities to engage people at a more intimate level. Even in minimalist spaces there is room to increase interest via fixtures, mirrors, tables and other utilitarian elements. "You can create an experience and elicit a response just by grabbing a door handle. Never accept mediocrity in anything in a space — ever."



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—Laurel McManus Brown



Energize with texture

Creating something unexpected is another Laurelism, and texture is often what helps Brown to accomplish that. Instead of paint, she will cover an accent wall in diminutive, light-colored brick. Or instead of upholstering furniture entirely of light-absorbing matte fabric, she will inject shiny silks that reflect the light.

Capitalize on millwork

You won't see any small, mousy mouldings in Brownhouse's portfolio. "Size matters! It's absolute gospel in this office that we do big mouldings. Whether traditional or contemporary — make it big. Why waste this opportunity to create impact?" For even greater impact she recommends painting woodwork and casings so that they contrast with walls, and also carrying the moulding color through to the rest of the home for cohesion.

Maximize sculptural elements

Although her work has been published in numerous design magazines, Brown knows that interiors aren't just pretty pictures; they must be comfortable and appealing from every angle. She considers dining room and occasional chairs sculpture since they are seen from different angles, and elevates that appeal by employing different fabrics on the fronts and backs of upholstered pieces. "It's another opportunity to engage people with their surroundings through a fun detail."



Add drama with color

Paint, rugs, upholstery, art, throw pillows and other accessories can inject refreshing splashes of color into every room. And since they're not big financial commitments, like appliances or built-in architectural elements, you can be as trendy and experimental as you like. "I highly recommend that people take risks with paint. It can really transform the look of a space. Most people are very leery of a lot of color, but once they do it they say, 'How could I have lived without color all of my life?' They love it!"

You've arrived: The foyer

"The foyer creates a sense of arrival and sets the stage for experience of the house." Ironically, the foyer is often neglected, wasting a prime opportunity of creating that all-important first impression. Unleash your creativity to create drama and hint at what's inside through color, imaginative moulding, artwork, light fixtures and displaying collections or groupings of like-framed family photos.

Vacation in your bedroom

Brown recommends investing in a beautiful bedding ensemble that evokes a relaxation response the moment you walk in. No room for a headboard? Create a recessed headboard by anchoring a large frame on the wall or creating one with moulding and filling that area with fabric, wallpaper, paint or tile. **mb**