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**Maximizing style on a minimal budget: Tips for decorating your home**

Styling your home can be very challenging – especially on a budget. Interior Designer, Deborah Tilbrook, shares how she was able to furnish and decorate a 3-bedroom showhouse for Lalela Estate on the KwaZulu-Natal North Coast on a budget of R150 000.

**The brief**

The new Lalela Estate showhouse is set amongst greenery as far as the eye can see, with the grand Manor House visible in the background. This idyllic setting with natural grasses sprouting hues of yellow in contrast to beautiful blue skies set the perfect colour palette and base for Debbie to draw her base colour inspiration from.

“We commissioned Debbie to furnish and decorate the showhouse at Lalela Estate where we wanted to highlight more than just a space with beautiful furniture. We wanted her to create a practical but inspired look within the home that was also very achievable for most people when choosing to buy and furnish an off-plan home here. We asked Debbie to incorporate sustainable living into her design and to be led by nature, which are both fundamental cornerstones of Lalela,” explains Melanie Clarkson of Collins Residential.

**Budgets and practicality**

Debbie explains, “Determining your budget is important because you need to be honest about what you can or cannot afford. It’s easy to design a space when you have an unlimited budget. However, the smaller the budget, the harder it becomes and the more hours you will have to spend trying to make things work. The home or space you are designing needs to cater to the needs of those living in it. In this house, I didn’t want to create an image of a picture-perfect house but rather that of a home.”

“I started the design scheme in the living room - for me, this is the heart of the home. The first piece of furniture I bought was a couch, this anchors the space. It was the most expensive piece of furniture in the house but I wanted to ensure that it not only worked aesthetically but was comfortable for relaxation in the tranquil surroundings,” says Debbie. Using the couch as a guideline, Debbie focused on keeping and maintaining flow and ensuring that spaces were not closed off. The back section of the couch is also low and welcoming. It orientates the TV and guides the profile of the coffee table, built-in TV unit, and the occasional chairs that tie the room together.

**The importance of space planning**

Space planning is to direct the functionality of a room. Critical things to think about include furniture placement and the flow of movement. Debbie adds, “When I first walked into the house, I identified what already existed, things we could not change and worked around that. Mapping out where everything fits can help you determine how the space will be utilised and how you can maximise it.”

The custom-designed homes at Lalela Estate are configured with living in mind. You enter through a courtyard instead of an entrance hall which would normally steal square metres from the living room. The glass doors on either side of the living area not only let in light but create a connected space which brings nature into the home while creating an expanse. “Having a separate dining room means you’re losing square metres from other living spaces. With this design, you are maximising utility and although the living area is open plan, each area has its own identity and use,” says Debbie.

**Colour creates character**

All the colours used throughout the house were inspired by the greens and the yellows in nature. Debbie explains, "When designing for a larger audience, I recommend using neutral tones which appeal to the majority of people. When working on your own personal space, you can be more creative and use colours that appeal to you.”

Designing a showhouse that needed to appeal to many people’s tastes meant that Debbie used neutral tones in the living areas. However, she used colour in the bedrooms to bring in pops of personality while ensuring cohesion by using her shades of greens and yellows, reflected in the grasslands outside, flow through the different spaces. This helps individualise each room while still keeping the consistent golden thread of colour throughout the house.

**How to use texture**

Debbie explains, “Using texture to bring character into a space is important to me. As an example, I’ve used mustard cushions which have a patterned texture that creates visual depth and dimension. The light reflects differently off the different patterns and that adds visual interest and saves a neutral pallet.”

When you are working with a limited budget you may have one standout feature, that will be your hero in the space. Overcrowding a room with only expensive items runs the risk of you losing a stand out element that demands your attention. Choosing how much texture and colour you use is a matter of feeling but there is also a fine line between all or nothing.

“The couch I’ve used in the living space is a lovely neutral and soft grey, and has a soft texture that’s not overbearing. From here I would advise that you add one texture at a time. So just add one of the cushions to start with, and then you keep adding more until it feels right. So first use something that contrasts it and then try find something in between to marry the two together.” It’s key to choose something that will lead while everything else needs to sing the same tune. Layering and using texture and colour in the cushions and curtains can help you make the space feel like your own.

**Multipurpose living**

Post-covid, people are spending more time in their homes, and we have realised the importance of having a comfortable place to live and the value of our most precious asset. How we live has evolved to incorporate working from home and the need for beautiful ‘Zoom’ backgrounds.

“We’re living in a day and age where you’re cooking and answering emails at the same time. The eat-in kitchen is a perfect example of a multipurpose space that’s used often by both young and old. It can serve as a homework area for kids and a place to host dinner for family and friends. The kitchen table was second-hand and refurbished. It was sandblasted and then painted a modern and industrial black colour. However, the colour is muted and doesn’t overpower the room. Sandblasting the table revealed the texture underneath its previous painting work. The chairs to match the table were also refurbished and painted black to match the table. I decided to reupholster the cushions with yellow fabric to make them stand out,” says Debbie.

**Local is lekker**

Designing and decorating a 3-bedroom house can easily run upwards of R350 000, which is certainly not in most people’s price bracket. Yet Debbie has struck the perfect balance of style and budget. One of the secrets to her success was repurposing furniture bought at second-hand furniture shops - a piece of furniture passed down from a family member would also do the trick. She also intentionally used local artisans who assisted her in manufacturing custom pieces and repurposing furniture in a bid to support local suppliers and demonstrated how old pieces can have a rush of new life, if placed in the right space with a cohesive vision.

* Decorating with plants is a great way to save money. They have several benefits including, purifying the air, bringing life into a space, and bringing out the nurturing side within you.
* Make your spaces appear bigger by placing mirrors opposite a window. They will reflect natural light and landscape.
* Choose one piece to be the feature in the room such as a sofa or coffee table as the hero, and allow the other pieces of furniture to complement it. It is better to use a few large items than numerous small pieces which may clutter the space.
* The best way to add colour and texture is through inexpensive accessories such as cushions, vases, rugs, wall art and planters.
* Repurposing furniture is a fabulous and inexpensive way to breathe new life into a previously loved piece of furniture. Reimagine it to suit your style and make it your own. You can purchase these at second hand shops, online marketplaces and at auctions. Be bold and brave, often these are the most talked-about pieces in your home once they have a new twist!

What stands out about the Lalela showhouse is the emphasis on creating a home rather than a house with pretty furniture. The focus is on creating a liveable space. We see now that creating a dream house doesn’t need to break the bank. It’s not often you see showrooms with heart, but this one has captured ours. Visit the Lalela Showhouse at Lalela Estate, next to The Manor House, open 7 days a week!

**ENDS**

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**Notes to Editor:**

***About Lalela Estate***

Situated in Sheffield, Lalela is spread across approximately 104 hectares of lush greenery with natural wetlands, 5km of walking trails and a community clubhouse where you can relax poolside with the kids or try your hand at putt putt, cricket or skating in the park In this idyllic landscape, nature is present in every direction and invites you to be part of a new residential lifestyle where neighbours and community matter! Lalela is one of the fastest growing nodes on KwaZulu-Natal’s North Coast.

While being just off the new planned Seaton off-ramp, in Sheffield, you’ll see the Manor House in the distance, a landmark where future North Coast communities will meet. This is where the lush, vast landscapes meet relaxed beach living. Lalela is situated on the inland side of the N2 highway.

For more information or visuals, please contact Janna Strang on

[janna@rainmakermarketing.co.za](mailto:janna@rainmakermarketing.co.za) / 082 551 3865 or email Mbali Mpofu on [mbali@rainmakermarketing.co.za](mailto:mbali@rainmakermarketing.co.za)