

Transform your home with timeless style...

WATCHING miraculous TV style makeovers and seeing the experts work their magic can make transforming your home seem like a walk in the park.

However, every DIY-er knows that the true reality of painting, stripping, drilling, and hammering is very much different to the glossy results TV shows usually present.

But fear not, because no-nonsense Scottish design duo Colin and Justin, of Channel 5's How Not To Decorate, are on hand to offer some expert advice that could really come in handy.

KITCHENS

MAKE sure you have ample work-space for all that food preparation you do, and do your best to keep surfaces clean and clutter-free. Butchers' block trolleys are a great way of extending

your work zone, and there are some affordable options.

BATHROOMS

ANY colour goes in the bathroom - so long as it's white. Don't make a faux pas by going for anything else, no matter how tempting that avocado suite in the sale is. You'll only regret it, and with DIY multiples such as Wickes selling them from around £200 complete, there really is no excuse.

Carpets in the bathroom are a real no-no, so opt instead for water-repellent flooring such as ceramic tiles.

They are, of course, hardwearing, easy to clean and totally waterproof. They are also really easy to work with - provided you plan the job properly and use the proper tools.

It's vital you spend some time preparing the walls before you begin. They must be sound and dry, so slice away and replace any crumbling and flaky plaster.

If the walls are a mass of lumps and bumps, cover them with sheets of plywood or chipboard, and tile on to these or repair/re-plaster. Coat

each sheet with PVA adhesive to protect it against damp.

If the walls are already tiled, don't assume that these will have to be taken off - provided they are attached solidly, you can leave them where they are and fix the new ones over the top.

If you do this, clean the old tiles thoroughly first, and plan your work so that the joints between the new tiles don't coincide with the old.

If old tiles are loose or damaged and need to be removed, chip them off with a club hammer and a bolster chisel. But remember to wear safety goggles in order to protect your eyes.

1. To begin, screw a wooden batten to the wall approximately one tile width above the skirting board. Use a spirit level. When drilling or hammering nails into walls be careful of, and make sure you check for, hidden electrical wires or cables.

2. Spread tile adhesive over one square metre of wall. A notched spreader will create ridges in the adhesive that will help the tiles to stick.

3. Following the guides made on the wall, bed the first tiles into the adhesive with a slight twisting action - its bottom edge should rest slightly against the top of the batten.

Continue along the batten, bedding down tiles, and inserting plastic tile spacers in between them as you go. These will ensure an even grouting pattern later and should be pressed into the adhesive below the level of the tiles.

4. Leave gaps at either end until you have completed two or three rows. You will work more quickly if you tile in batches and cut in batches.

5. Tiles have always been cut by scribing and snapping separately, but a tile-cutting tool will do both jobs in one operation.

6. Care must be taken when cutting curves in tiles to fit around a basin. You may be able to tilt the basin away from the wall, insert a tile and mark your cut line directly onto its surface.

If not you will either have to make a cardboard template or use a profile gauge to obtain the exact dimensions of the curve.

Use a pair of nibblers to remove the unwanted portion of the tile,

taking small bits at a time to avoid cracking. Smooth off any rough edges using a tile file.

7. Covering a wall immediately below a window means the job will look best if you have a whole row of tiles here. Measure down from the edge of the window and position your batten accordingly.

HALLWAYS

MOST hallways are simply a narrow passage through the rest of your home, so avoid a gridlock situation by keeping furniture, junk, and clutter to a minimum.

LIVING ROOMS

AVOID sofas that are shell-shaped, floppy, velour-covered, fringed or wrapped in a visible 'antique' timber frame. Sofas should be coloured, strongly structured, comfortable, and practical for you and all your family.

Darker colours and patterned designs will hide marks and grubby fingerprints that would be far more visible on lighter, plain ones, but remember that they will still need washing.

Many people make the fatal mistake of pushing furniture into the corners of rooms in an attempt to make them feel bigger. Instead, you should fill out the space by bringing a coffee table into the centre and dressing your furnishing around a focal point, like a fireplace.

Remember that fashions come and go, so the best thing to do is invest in a timeless style that you love.

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● **RIGHT: Kitchens should have ample work-space for food preparation with surfaces that should be kept clean and clutter-free.**



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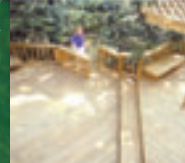
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Options for letting the light in without losing your privacy...

By Julia Gray

on flecks of paint with a window scraper, then spray with a soapy water solution.

This allows you to move the sheet once it's on the window to get the position right. Then peel off the backing paper - these sheets are like big pieces of sticky-backed plastic - and slide on to the window.

Position it and carefully expel any air bubbles (from the centre out) using a plastic scraper (usually supplied). Prick any hard-to-budge bubbles with a pin and smooth out. Once dry, it sticks like glue.

If you're using an expensive patterned sheet, have a go with a cheap plain piece first. To buy, try www.windowfilm.co.uk or www.etchfx.co.uk

Don't be tempted to use frosting sprays, as it's hard to get an even coat and you'll probably use lots of cans, making it patchy and expensive.

Blinds are another popular solution to privacy problems. Venetian blinds (wooden ones look best) allow you to angle

the slats to give you some privacy, but the price is less light. Again, Ikea has a selection of inexpensive wooden Venetian blinds, as has Next.

They're fairly straightforward to install - simply centre the blind over the window and mark, drill holes for each bracket, place a Rawlplug in each hole and screw the brackets in place. The top of the blind slots into the brackets, then you click the rest of each bracket in place around it. The biggest problem is that the blinds are heavy, so get someone to help you.

Slatted wooden shutters (inside not outside ones) are similar and can also be angled. They're quite a specialist item, though, so aren't as cheap as Venetian blinds but, unlike Venetians, you can just have them on the lower half of the window. To buy, try www.openshut.co.uk (gives instant quotations) or www.shutterlyfabulous.com

A better solution is bottom-up blinds - roller blinds that go up from the bottom of the window rather than down from the top and can be unfurled as much

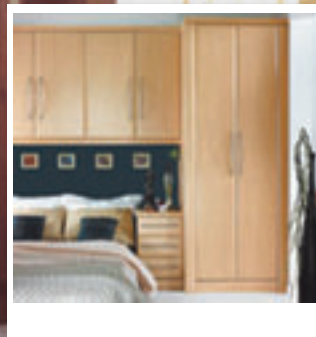
or as little as you want. Choose a sheer fabric if you want to be able to see out.

Again, they're straightforward to install - you have brackets to hold the cassette box containing the sprung blind, pulleys for the top and a cleat at the side. Once you've measured, all need to be screwed in place - use a bradawl to make the pilot holes. You then string up the blind with cord according to the instructions, pull it up and secure using the cleat. Instant - but not permanent - privacy when you want it.

The major drawback is the price - Eclectics has a good range but they're not cheap. Alternatively, they do 50:50 blinds, a roller blind with fabric you choose at the bottom and white mesh at the top, so only the bottom half of the window is obscured. These are cheaper.

Similarly, Argos has a Roman blind with a privacy-providing sheer panel, though it only comes in one size. And that's the problem - lots of us don't have standard-size windows, making more expensive bespoke options our only choice.

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MOST of us have a room or two that face the street and unless you want people peering in while you're relaxing at home, you need to address the problem of making your windows private - there's far more to it than just net curtains.

Nets rarely have a place in the modern home but, of course, some people still like them. They're inexpensive, let in lots of light and you can see what's going on outside, usually without twitching them.

Many people opt for nets just on the lower half of the windows, which is all you need to provide privacy, but aesthetically, floor-to-ceiling nets are the way to go, with them pooling on the floor - and forget dated tab tops.

Nets are traditionally hung on a covered wire passed through a series of hooks, which are easy to screw in to a wooden window frame. Another option is a double curtain pole, which allows you to hang nets behind curtains.

Ikea has a good selection of nets - its curtains are longer than usual (300cm), which is ideal if you have high ceilings. John Lewis is net curtain heaven, where both off-the-shelf and made-to-measure products are available.

If you want something more contemporary - and these days most of us do - how about frosting? There's no denying that frosting looks really good, but it is a permanent solution and you can't see through it.

Get round this by, again, only having it on half the window, or having a design, such as rows of cut-out circles or squares, incorporated into the frosting, which makes it more interesting and allows you to see out. Patterned frosting sheets are much more expensive than plain ones, though.

To fit a sheet, simply cut it to fit the window on a clean, hard, flat surface. Clean the window and remove any dried-

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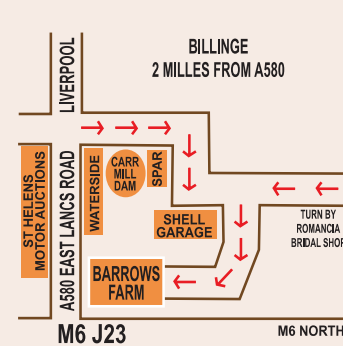
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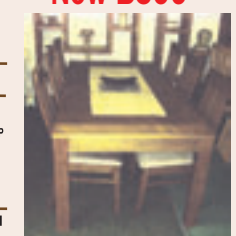
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