

# When decorating a room, let colorful area rugs have the floor

“Start with a great rug.”  
How many times have you heard that maxim from interior designers talking about how to decorate a room?

“OK, fine,” I think to myself, “but then what?”

“Just pull color from the rug” is the rhetorical answer.

“Oh, easy for you to say,” I think. If you’re like me, you’re left wondering which color, where, how much of it, solids or prints?

Now, those of you who already know the answers and think this is easy, kindly go smugly off to read some other section of the newspaper and leave the rest of us to muddle through.

Also, while I’m off the subject, allow me to address another peeve of mine: That mocking word “just” (as in “just pull color”) does not belong in any sentence that involves home decorating. I will leave it at that.

For me, this ability to “just pull a room together around a rug” doesn’t “just happen,” and yet, my favorite rooms are those that seem to effortlessly fall together around a fabulous area rug.

When I encounter such a room, I try to visually deconstruct it to figure out what’s working, but find no formula. I craved the secret.

So, recently, when I came across a photo of a living room inside an historic Manhattan townhome in the West Village, which had at its core a vividly patterned, room-unifying rug. Rather than speculate, I called the interior designer behind the project.

“The easiest place to put a lot of color is on the floor,” said New York designer Kathleen Walsh, owner of Kathleen Walsh Interiors. “Color on a floor has less impact than a bold pattern anywhere else in the room but will still enrich and energize the space.”



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However, she added, “a patterned rug like this works best when everything else takes a step back. The minute you add something that competes, the eye gets confused.”

Walsh’s clients tend to fall into two groups, she told me: non-rug people and rug people. “For the non-rug group, looking at rugs is dizzying, while those in the other camp say, ‘I can’t decide on anything else until we have the rug figured out.’”

Either way, she adds, the choice of a rug, even if it’s solid, should come early in the design process, after creating the furniture plan but before choosing furniture and pillows.

The reason designers often advise furnishing a room around a great area rug or a lead fabric is because these textiles have built-in, curated color. This is the genius. Designers who really understand color and how colors work together

have already created a palette that gives you a running start.

However, to make sure you don’t run off in the wrong direction and make one expensive mistake after another (as I have), here are some pro tips on how to (and not to) decorate a room around a rug.

*Give the rug the floor.*

If you are building a room around a colorful, patterned rug,

let the rug be the dominant voice in the space. “It’s the main speaker,” said Dallas interior designer and author Betty Lou Phillips. “Everything else needs to play a supporting role.”

Don’t upstage it, but do turn to it to find colors to pull out for large, upholstered pieces and accessories.

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