

Decor Score: The right shade of paint will lower your ceiling

by *Rose_Bennett_Gilbert*

Q: We bought a builder house with a double-height living room. That was what attracted us to the house in the first place, but after living here eight months, my husband and I finally confessed to each other that we really don't like sitting in there.

It's like being in the "bottom of a well," as my husband says. Do you have any suggestions on how to make this big tall room feel cozier?

A: Double-height rooms have magic appeal, a fact not lost on today's home builders.

It's something we learned the hard way when New York's majestic Pennsylvania Station was razed some 40 years ago and replaced by a squat building that is low-ceilinged, totally bland and lacks the first ounce of dignity (happily, it, too, is soon to be replaced).

On the home front, tall rooms can be either exciting ... or overwhelming. Relax. There are a number of ways to counteract that "bottom of the well" sensation without resorting to remodeling. Color is your best ally here. Intense and darkish colors fill the eye, bringing surfaces closer than they look. Therefore, you can "lower" your ceiling by painting it, say, warm brown.

The same idea applies to walls. Study the warm, inviting room we show here and imagine those red walls repainted a cold, flat white instead. You get the picture. We got this picture from a big colorful book called "Living Dreams" by Lindal Cedar Homes. You can click on www.lindal.com for more information.

Another space-taming trick is to use low-hanging light fixtures and lamps that illuminate the lower part of the room. Massive pieces of furniture, like an armoire or tall clock, will also help bring the room down to scale, visually. So will large works of art - think tapestries - and big green plants - think palms and trees. If

you have a second floor balcony, toss a colorful quilt over the railing to bridge the gap between downstairs and up, up, up.

The idea is to keep the focus low and human-size. That way, you can have all that lovely space without losing your perspective.

Q: Our bedroom faces east so we were literally waking up with the dawn until I put up heavy lined drapes (I had them lined with black-out cloth). That works, but makes the windows feel swaddled, especially in summer. Do you have another idea?

A: Get thee to thy nearest window treatment shop and ask to see all the room-darkening shades and "shadings" fabricated especially to offer light-control and privacy-control.

Take an especially close look at a new offering, a shade with what the manufacturer (Levolor) calls its "day/night" option. The shade features a liner that rolls up from the bottom to provide privacy and light-control where you want it. With the liner down, you have total daylight; pull the liner half-way up and you have privacy below, light above. At night, pull the liner to the top for total black-out. (See how it works at www.levolor.com.)

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