Decor Score - Can't take the heat, or the glare

by Rose Bennett Gilbert

Q: Our family room is all windows on three sides -- one reason we bought this house in the first place. The problem is, I didn't think about that when I planned an all cream-and-white color scheme. I really love the way the room looks -- cool -- yet it's anything but; it faces south and gets the afternoon sun. I have drapes on all the windows, but it hurts me to keep them closed. Should I just give in and go with a darker color scheme, so the room won't look so bright?

GLARE DOWN - The windows in this all-white room have been covered with a light-and-heat filtering film that promises to block 99.9 percent of all UV light rays. That means your room stays an even-temperature all year. CNS Photo. A: There are a number of natural phenomena at work here. It's true that white and light colors dramatically intensify the light, yet keep things cooler because they deflect the rays (one reason desert-dwellers always wear white). On the other hand, dark colors absorb glare and warmth, the reason we tone down our wardrobes for winter.

Putting that physical principle to work at home, it is possible to use color to regulate both light and temperature. So, yes, you could redo and darken your family room and soften the light that streams through your walls of windows.

But there are other ways around your glare-and-heat-gain problems.

For example, Hunter Douglas is just one window coverings manufacturer that makes blinds, shades, and what they call "shadings" designed to filter -- but not block -- the light. A new concept altogether, these shadings look like sheer curtains and work like blinds with soft horizontal or vertical vanes you can turn to control the light. Check out Silhouette, Vignette, and Luminette shadings at www.hunterdouglas.com.

You may also be interested in roller shades that can be installed upside down. With the roller mounted on the sill, they pull up as far as you need them, leaving the top of the window open to the view but not too much glare.

Another approach is to treat the glass itself so the glare can't get in, but the view can, and with no noticeable change in natural colors. In the all-white room we show here, the windows have been covered with a light-and-heat filtering film (Vista UV Shield, www.vista-films.com). The high-tech film promises to block 99.9 percent of all ultraviolet light rays, which means your room stays even-temperatured year-round, and your furnishings will be safe from sun-fading.

Unlike do-it-yourself products, this film must be applied by trained professionals, and carries a lifetime warranty. Look on it as an insurance policy for the life of your furniture and the comfort of your future.

Q: We need to combine our guest room with my husband's home office, so I'm looking for interesting furniture that he will enjoy, too. I read your news report from the Furniture Market and thought you might have some suggestions. We need a bed and desk and maybe bookshelves.P.S., We can't find a sofa bed we like.

A: You are exactly right about the International Home Furnishing Market in High Point, N.C. If you can't find it there, whatever it is probably doesn't exist. The largest home furnishing resource in the world, the expo runs through hundreds of showrooms in dozens of buildings, and editors like me who try to see it all can come home with smoking feet -- and notebooks full of ideas.

Here's one for your office-cum-guest room from Bauer International, manufacturer of handcrafted rattan, mahogany and leather furnishings that look as though they'd come straight from a 19th century safari to darkest Africa or brightest India. Brainchild of Kenneth Bauer -- his great-grandfather made trunks and valises in the 1850s -- and wife Dee Ann Bauer, the company offers fun and functional pieces like the travel bed trunk that could work in your room. It's a brass-cornered rattan and leather trunk that opens out into twin bed with a cool leather compartmentalized headboard.

There are also rattan and leather bookshelves and campaign desks with carrying handles -- only the slide-out keyboard shelf belies their origins in the 19th-century's Golden Age of Exploration. You could have jolly good fun with the safari theme. I see old maps, rattan carpeting and large potted palms in every corner. See what you think at www.bauerinternational.com.

Rose Bennett Gilbert is the co-author of "Hampton Style" and associate editor of Country Decorating Ideas.
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