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DESIGN

The Big Decorating Mistake: Forgetting Your Hallways

Maxing out passageways can make your whole house look better. Here, how designers are strengthening the 'backbone' of the home with paint, wallpaper and strategic chic



Designer Juan Montoya commissioned local sculptor Nina Helms to create bas-relief for a New York apartment's hallway.
PHOTO: MIGUEL FLORES-VIANNA

By Kathryn O'Shea-Evans

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HALLWAYS ARE the freeway tunnels of the home—typically unconsidered and unadorned, they blandly deliver people from point A to point Z. In a 2017 Sherwin-Williams survey, hallways came in last when homeowners were asked to rank rooms that they'd fearlessly coat with color, which seems oddly inhibited given how little time people spend in your average passage. "Nobody is sitting there watching the Super Bowl or reading a book," said New York interior decorator Joe Nahem. "They're passing through. It's less than a 20-second experience."

Lately, however, designers are realizing that half the thrill of travel is getting there. They're renovating halls for maximum impact, lining them with an exuberance once reserved for low-risk powder rooms, a more traditional canvas for experimentation.

In one corridor, New York designer Gideon Mendelson hung wallpaper from Romo that's striped horizontally in a punchy palette: white, a brass tone and three shades of shameless pink. "The color is pretty zippy, that's an understatement," Mr. Mendelson said. "If it doesn't put a



A moody corridor in Farrow & Ball color curator Joa Studholme's home is painted in the company's Down Pipe and culminates in a bedroom painted their Nancy's Blushes pink. PHOTO: FARROW & BALL

smile on your face, there's a problem.”

Fellow New York designer Juan Montoya went artfully bold in an Upper East Side hallway by hiring local sculptor Nina Helms to create custom floral bas-relief for the walls, inspired by plaster work he'd seen in Paris. To further up the sense of unexpected drama, he tiled the floor in black and white marble and used it as a stage for a single Italian armchair upholstered in royal-blue velvet. “I wanted to design something that is personal, will stay there for many years and always give you pleasure,” said Mr. Montoya.

A hallway can be used strategically to frame a view or a vignette—say a bench and a magnetically intriguing painting—at its end. Richard Ouellette, president of Canadian firm Les Ensembliers, lacquered a Montreal passageway obsidian black, focusing attention the way a horse's blinders might on a view of the city through a distant window. Mr. Ouellette borrows the tactic from what Frank Lloyd Wright called “compression and release,” employing dramatic tension in corridors for a grander reveal at their destination.

Joa Studholme, color curator at the Dorset, England-based paint and wallpaper company Farrow & Ball, points out that architecture often lends itself to this trick. “Many halls in the city have very little natural light in them,” she said. “Instead of trying to fight that, to fight nature, why not embrace it?” In her London home, she painted the hallway walls in her company's Down Pipe, a lush gray hue. Not only is the corridor as cozy as a cuddle, the pink master bedroom visible at its end seems extra cheery. Ms. Studholme, who believes hallways are the backbones of a home, likes the contrast. “By decorating your hall in a strong color, every room off it looks lighter,” she said.

Of the Montreal corridor that Mr. Ouellette cloaked in ebony lacquer, the homeowner Andrea Wilde said, “It looks like black satin sheets and doesn't feel like a hallway. It feels experiential when you walk through it—no one is expecting it.”



In this corridor, New York designer Gideon Mendelson hung Romo wallpaper in a punchy palette. 'If it doesn't put a smile on your face, there's a problem,' he said. PHOTO: ERIC PIASECKI
