

7 Interior Design Secrets that Will Change Your Life



Debbie Wiener, author of *Slobproof!: Real Life Design Solutions*, creator of the *Slobproof! With Crypton* furniture line and go-to expert for family friendly design advice, shares trade secrets.



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Top 7 Tips

- #1.) Find the Right Furniture: Basics
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Find the Right Furniture: Basics

I've heard it a hundred times. Shoulders slumped, the clients bring me into their family room and tell me they hate their furniture and need all new seating. The sofa they bought just two years ago is so uncomfortable, no one sits on it. He says she chose it. She says it was all he would let her spend. They both complain that the kids take the pillows off the sofa and use them to lie on the floor, and they need to be cleaned up every morning.

Shopping for furniture is stressful, expensive and sofas aren't a disposal item. Or, at least, they shouldn't be.

Tips for buying great slobproof seating means knowing some of the interior designer trade secrets:

- Start with a well-made, well-proportioned frame. If you don't buy for comfort and quality, it won't last. The frame is like the skeleton of your chair or sofa. A strong frame will keep your seating investment look and feeling good even though your kids bounce on it day after day, year after year. It's what's underneath the fabric that determines a chair's comfort, durability and worth.
- Three materials are used to make frames— steel, composite wood (essentially engineered wood, with layers of wood laminated together), and kiln-dried hardwood. Of the three, the most expensive and hard-wearing is the kiln-dried wood. I always go with kiln-dried hardwood when purchasing seating for myself and clients.
- Don't accept tubing, press fiberboard or plastic when looking for a durable piece of furniture.
- Steel springs are fitted into frames for support and even weight distribution on the bench. The most common support are S-shaped sinuous wire frames made of heavy-gauge, tempered steel wire, reinforced with wire ties. Frame supports can also be made from coil-spring wire frames that are individually tied together in eight different directions. This eight-way hand-tied support is more expensive but both are a sure sign of quality and long lasting comfort.
- Even if you don't truly know what this means, ask your sales person and know that it matters!



Sharon Sectional, www.slobproof.com

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Find the Right Furniture: Cushions

A comfy, durable cushion that will retain its shape over time is critical. Think of Goldilocks: the seat shouldn't feel too hard or too soft, but just right. Additionally, seat cushions should "crown" meaning that they should be plump and have a rising slope in the middle, rather than look flat. Choose— yes, with most upholstery lines you get to choose— your cushion carefully. Most seat and back cushions are made from high-density foam, fiber, feathers and down, often in combination. The most common and least expensive is the high-density foam cushion, and many manufacturers offer two levels of comfort (and cost) in their foam cushions: standard and premium. Many of my clients prefer the premium foam because it's firmer than standard, giving the tush better support and making it easier to get up from a sitting position— all factors that matter as you hit middle age!

Tips for buying great slobproof seating means knowing some of the interior designer trade secrets:

- The next step up from foam are spring-down cushions which have coil springs embedded in a block of foam, wrapped in down. This is my favorite choice because the cushions are firmer and maintain their shape over time.
- The most expensive cushion is down-filled, but trust me, you don't need it. It requires constant fluffing and primping. **SAY NO TO DOWN.**



James Chair, www.slobproof.com

- Buying seating is a highly personal thing. Each person reacts to cushions differently, so go with what you like.
- Don't let price play too big of a role as you will likely forget the cost over the life of the upholstery.
- Test drive the piece to find something that suits your comfort level, your price and your body.
- Don't forget to rotate the cushions. You'll extend the life of the seat and back cushions and the fabric covering them. While you're at it, give the cushions and seat bench a good vacuum. You'll probably find the missing Legos and baseball cards!
- And, don't forget the padding. Padding should feel smooth and uniform, not thicker in some areas and thinner in others. You shouldn't be able to feel the underlying frame!

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Find the Right Furniture: Fabric

Call me Ida. If you're under 40, let me explain.... I'm proud to say that many of my slob-proof tricks come from years of watching my favorite TV mom on the old sitcom Rhoda. Remember? Rhoda moves away from Minnesota and her best friend, Mary, to go back to New York City and work as a window designer? I once saw myself as Rhoda – young, single, Jewish, and living a stylish, hip life in Washington DC. Now, I'm old, fat, married with children and living in the suburbs, just like, Ida Morgenstern, Rhoda's mother who kept all the furniture and lampshades in her Bronx apartment covered in plastic. I use that same mind-set to help protect the furniture in my home and in the home of my clients— but instead of plastic, I use fabric. Very, very tough fabric. If Ida only knew about [Crypton!](#)

Tips for buying great slobproof seating means knowing some of the interior designer trade secrets:

- If you are purchasing new upholstery fabric: you can choose from the fabrics the manufacturer offers or you can find fabric elsewhere and have it shipped to the manufacturer for use on your own seating (known as COM– Customer's Own Material). I almost always choose COM.
- **Other than leather, I rarely find fabrics I would want to use from the manufacturer.**
- First thing to think about is fabric weight.
 - Chintz, polished cotton or drapery weight barely last a year
 - Loose weave fabric will move, stretch and become loose and shapeless
 - Lightweight fabrics don't have the thickness to last on everyday upholstery
- Now think about **a fabric's weave: pull it, stretch it, look through it.** If its thick and tightly woven, it shouldn't move and should be difficult to see through.
- Additionally, the design industry uses "rub tests" to classify fabrics into categories such as light use, medium use and heavy use. For a slobproof home, **you need fabric that meets the "heavy use" standard.**
- **Don't forget about camouflage.** Be realistic— if you have kids stay away from beige. Choose something multi-colored, patterned and easy to clean. Choose fabric based on how your family lives now, not how you wish they would live.
- Choose a cleanable fabric, if you care about keeping the fabric clean. Have a stain barrier built right into your fabric rather than sprayed on after the fact.



Ellen Chair, www.slobproof.com

Taken from [Slobproof!: Real Life Design Solutions](#)

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Find the Right Furniture: Style

When I'm sitting at my desk scrolling through page after page of seating selections for clients, I often end up daydreaming of what I would do if I could make my own sofa. I'd start with a great frame and springs, as described earlier, with spring-down cushions, and of course, Crypton fabric. But the details would really set my sofas apart from others: exposed legs with indestructible finishes, small rounded arms, generous padding to give great neck support for napping, seat cushions that strap to the sofa base, and back cushions that zip to the back of the sofa. Nothing would move unless I wanted it to—say, for vacuuming purposes. I'd design my sofa with slob-proofing style built right into the details!

Tips for buying great slobproof seating means knowing some of the interior designer trade secrets:

- Most manufacturers will give you a choice of legs, you just have to ask.
- Choose sofas without skirts so that they won't get dirty from dirty shoes.
- When choosing seat backs know that:
 - Multi-pillow backs are high maintenance
 - Semi-attached backs and standard seat backs are the most common choices for seating, requiring little primping and fluffing.
 - Standard backs are moveable
 - Semi-attached backs aren't.
- Welts are another thing to consider. They are fabric covered cords that get sewn into the seams on the upholstery's edge to define them. They're also quick to stain and wear out. You have the option to choose welts in a contrasting fabric which adds style and strength.
- Height and pitch are worth considering because they affect how you sit. If you want to be able to sleep on your sofa, consider padding; think about shoulder and neck support; don't overlook lower back support and think about getting up and down from the sofa.



www.slobproof.com

Places to shop for Furniture:

- My Slobproof! With Crypton line: www.slobproof.com
- Lee Industries: www.leeindustries.com
- Shaver/Melahn: www.shavermelahn.com
- American Leather: www.americanleather.com

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Design With Color

If I had a recipe that would tell you exactly what color to paint your room or which colors work best together, I'd be a Noble Peace Prize winner, saving millions of relationships from falling apart because couples could stop fighting about what color to paint the house. Unfortunately for both of us, that recipe doesn't exist. I guess that's why I'm still working and so many homes are done in white, or off-white, or some combination of white with off-white. Without a recipe to follow, most people are afraid of color and argue about color, ultimately settling for off white. Rooms look bland in off-white, homes eventually look dingy and no one can live a normal life in a white and cream home.

Tips for using great slobproof color means knowing some of the interior designer trade secrets:

- Go with your gut. Color has to be more than camouflage, it has to make you happy and make design sense. Your home should be decorated with colors that you love.
- Building a color plan is like assembling a layer cake: you need a bottom layer of color (your floor), you need layers of filling (upholstery fabric), another layer (window fabrics), and icing (paint and wall trims).
- When looking at paint colors bring fabric swatches to the store.
- Its all about synergy—the elements should work together so that the sum is greater than the parts.
- Put the strongest shades and patterns just where you need them most, on the flooring, upholstery, windows or walls. Wherever you need the most camouflage, that's where to add your largest pieces of color.
- Guidelines:
 - For more serene seating, use one dominate color.
 - Trim that's painted the same shade as the walls, gives a more subtle look to rooms.



- To make furnishings stand out, paint walls in colors that contrast with the flooring
- To make a ceiling seem higher choose a color that contrasts with your walls
- To make a ceiling seem lower, choose a ceiling color that is darker and more dramatic.

When recommending paint colors, I only trust [Benjamin Moore](#).

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The Power of Patterned Flooring

Since constant nagging to “Wipe your feet!” is tiring for me as well as my husband, I’ve learned to outsmart him—in many ways, which being a woman, ain’t so hard to do. First I added a large 3x5 polypropylene indoor/outdoor rug on the front porch. It looks good, and he can’t help but walk on it as he approaches the door. It’s just plush enough to remove a lot of dirt from the soles of his shoes. This rug is my first line of defense.

Next I got rid of the beautiful but neutral-colored runner that once looked so good— for exactly 24 hours, I mean— on my foyer and hall floors. I replaced it with two smaller matching rugs in chocolate brown with bursts of green, orange and turquoise in a highly patterned design.

These rugs camouflage everything coming into the house, and permanent stains blend in so well that only I know they’re there. Matching a foyer’s area rugs to the color of dirt was a sanity-saving move for me. They keep my entry way looking good and they’re small enough to be removed every now and then for professional cleaning.



Find great flooring buys at:

- Company C: www.companyc.com
- Sara Schneidman: www.saraschneidman.com
- Safavieh: www.safavieh.com
- Michaelian Home: www.michaelianhome.com

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Recession Friendly Tips

Some parting thoughts and great all around tips!

- Use [Wite-Out](#) to paint over dings and dents in baseboard trim, door trim and anything white.
- Use [Sharpies](#) to fix up dings and dents in chair legs
- Spruce up curtains by adding colorful trim and tie backs (found at local fabric stores)
- Re-mat, re-frame and re-arrange your art and photos to update wall and table top displays. Replace white and off-white mattings with something fresh and colorful- grass green, pumpkin orange or periwinkle blue. Try a few new frames to give new life to your photos.
- Light up room perimeters to make small spaces look large and dramatic. Inexpensive canister uplighting, purchased in home stores, fits in floor plants and behind furniture to add Hollywood style accent lighting along room walls. Battery-operated flameless votive candles use LED bulbs for realistic and long-lasting candle light that's perfect in groupings. Add them down the middle of a long dining table, along a fireplace mantel or on shelving for soft, zen-like room lighting.



Debbie Wiener: Designer to the Slobs!



Debbie Wiener, the Jewish mother you never had, found her niche in the design world when she married a self-proclaimed slob who challenged her to design a home that he couldn't destroy. Years later, with two kids and various pets, Debbie's no-nonsense approach to pet-friendly, family-friendly home décor has made her the go-to expert for living with, dealing with and fixing up slob households. Debbie is a strong advocate for the cleaning-impaired and the decorating-challenged, encouraging them to save for their future, not their furniture! With a busy interior design firm in the Washington DC area, a top-selling book that flies off the virtual shelves of Amazon.com- *Slob-Proof: Real Life Design Solutions* - and a new slob-friendly seating line, Debbie's on a mission to restore sanity and common sense in the home.

Slobproof!: The Book

Debbie's book, *Slob-Proof: Real-life Design Solutions*, provides hilarious insights into decorating your home with style, comfort and lasting value. She teaches you that real life design isn't art, it's smart, with lessons for picking out vomit-proof flooring, damage-proof window coverings and seating that will look and feel good till your kids leave for college. Mixed with family stories and exclusive, to-the-trade shopping sources, Debbie's book is both engaging and informative. A top seller.

Slobproof!: The Furniture

"Slobproof with Crypton" is perhaps the only home-ready furniture line that's truly indestructible, comfortable, stylish and affordable- all at the same time! Debbie's hand-selected fabrics from Crypton stand up to any mess- ketchup, baby drool, ice cream and the unmentionables- without wincing. Combining traditional and contemporary styles with quality construction, Debbie's collection of seating is both fun and functional. Made in the USA.

Slobproof!: Let Debbie Do It

Think Ida Morgenstern meets WWE's Friday Night Smack Down. Yes, Debbie's sought after interior design firm combines the common sense of a Jewish mother with the muscle of a professional wrestler. Her basic guiding philosophy is simple: "You shouldn't have to work at keeping your home stylish and comfortable. Your home should work for you!" Debbie's totally livable interiors have been featured in publications around the world and here in the US.

Slobproof!: The 2 Hour Designing Solution

Let Debbie tackle any decorating problem with an intensive two-hour, in-home consultation. By focusing on the fundamentals of home design, she'll provide a written plan of attack, showing how to better use what you already have and telling you which additional things you'll need to achieve your design dreams and avoid costly mistakes.

Slobproof!: Designing Dilemmas

Got a designing dilemma? We'll create a designing solution just for you! And, it's free!



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