

apartment
therapy



How to Make Mismatched Decor Feel Cohesive



We've all been there—trying to decorate a first apartment or home on a beer budget when you have champagne taste. Hand-me-downs often come easy from parents, older siblings, and other relatives, and free is a beautiful thing. Remember: Pieces that mean something will always be special, even if they're worse for wear or not quite what you had in mind. But that doesn't mean your place has to look like a hodgepodge of random castoffs either. There are ways to be smart about working with inherited goods. In fact, we asked a few designers for tips on how to make it all go together, from grandma's painting to mom's dresser. And guess what? It's easier than you may think.

1. Embrace a More Eclectic Design Style from the Get-Go



Your place probably isn't going to be uber-modern if you have your grandpa's old leather chair, and that's okay. "Collected pieces tend to have more meaning and character," says designer Jennifer Carter, owner of [Studio Envie](#). So if you have inherited or stockpiled a bunch of vintage or antique furnishings, chances are, you're going to have a ton of textures, colors, and design styles on your hands. But each piece will probably have a story, and that counts for something. Don't fight the mix—or stress over the fact that your chairs are Early American while your sofa is contemporary, or vice versa. Learn to love the juxtapositions, and look for clean-lined accessories or basic shaped items to add to the equation whenever you want to make a new purchase.

2. Stick to a Neutral Palette for the Big Things



For designer **Jess Cooney**, a post-college apartment or house full of inherited wares is not the place to go crazy colorful with your walls, rugs or other foundational pieces. Best to choose whites, tans, grays or even darker blues instead. They won't compete with your more storied items.

3. Get Creative With Storage Solutions



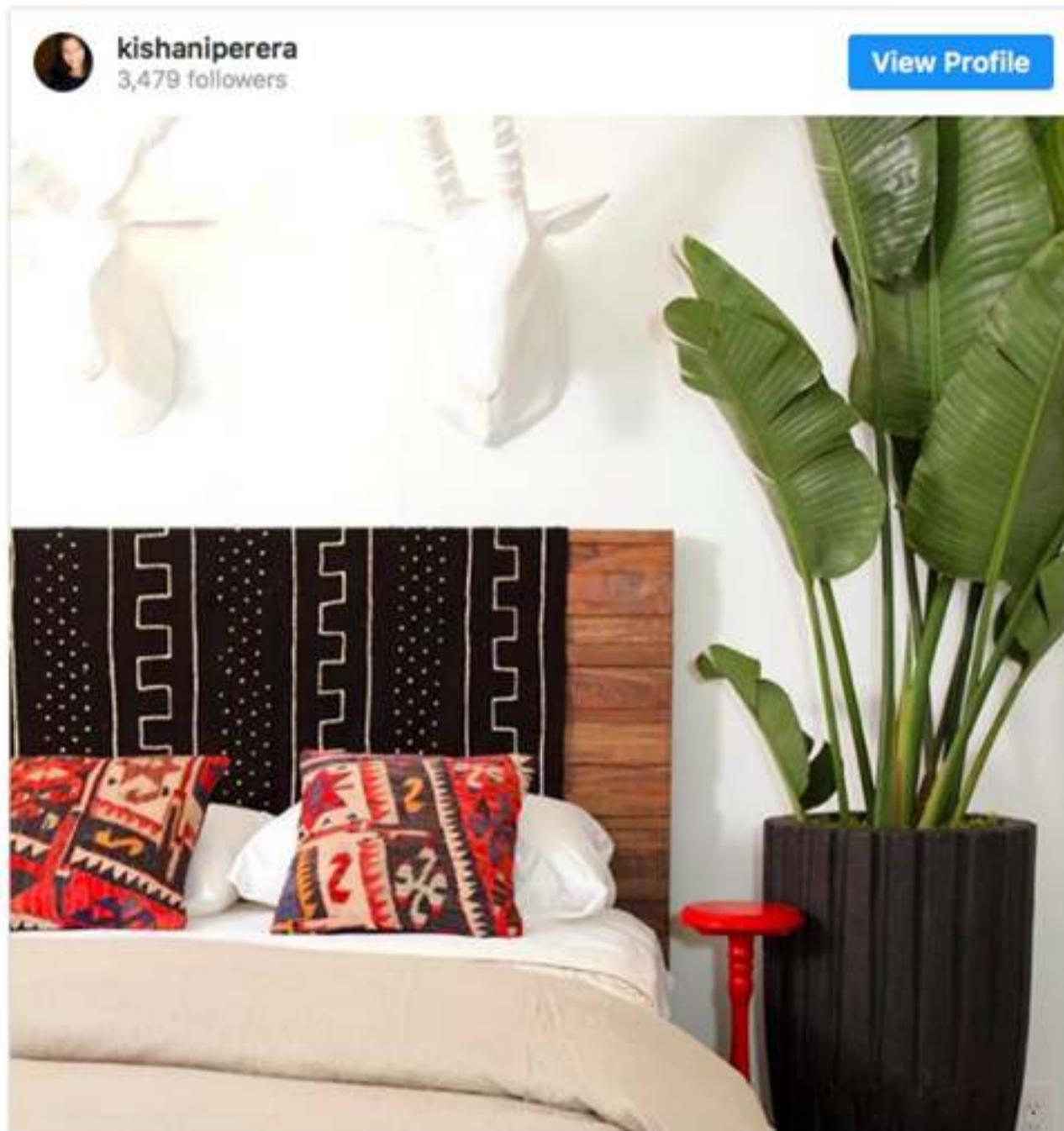
"I have gotten a few old steamer luggage and hard case suitcases from an aunt," says designer Courtney Thomas, owner of [Courtney Thomas Design](#). "Since they're really heavy, I can't use them for travel, but stacked from large to small, they make a fun side table to a reading chair." The best part is you can also put things, from extra linens to cleaning supplies, inside them. If vintage trunks or suitcases are offered to you or you see them at a flea market, Thomas says to snag them.

4. Find an Unexpected Spot for an Inherited Statement Piece



If a piece doesn't fit the flow or feel of a room, find a work around. Cooney recently had a client that moved from a very traditional home to a mid-century mod pad. She had her mother's crystal chandelier, but it wasn't quite right for the entry or dining room. So Cooney proposed the bedroom as a solution. "Don't shy away from finding those non-traditional spaces to hang something special," says Cooney. "It may be easier to design around in a smaller space than a large and busy one anyway." Translation: The lighting situation in your bedroom, bathroom or even the laundry room can use a bit of sparkle and pop, if you have some to give it. Instead of looking out of place, it'll seem deliberate and special.

5. Make Slipcovers and Textiles Your Best Friends



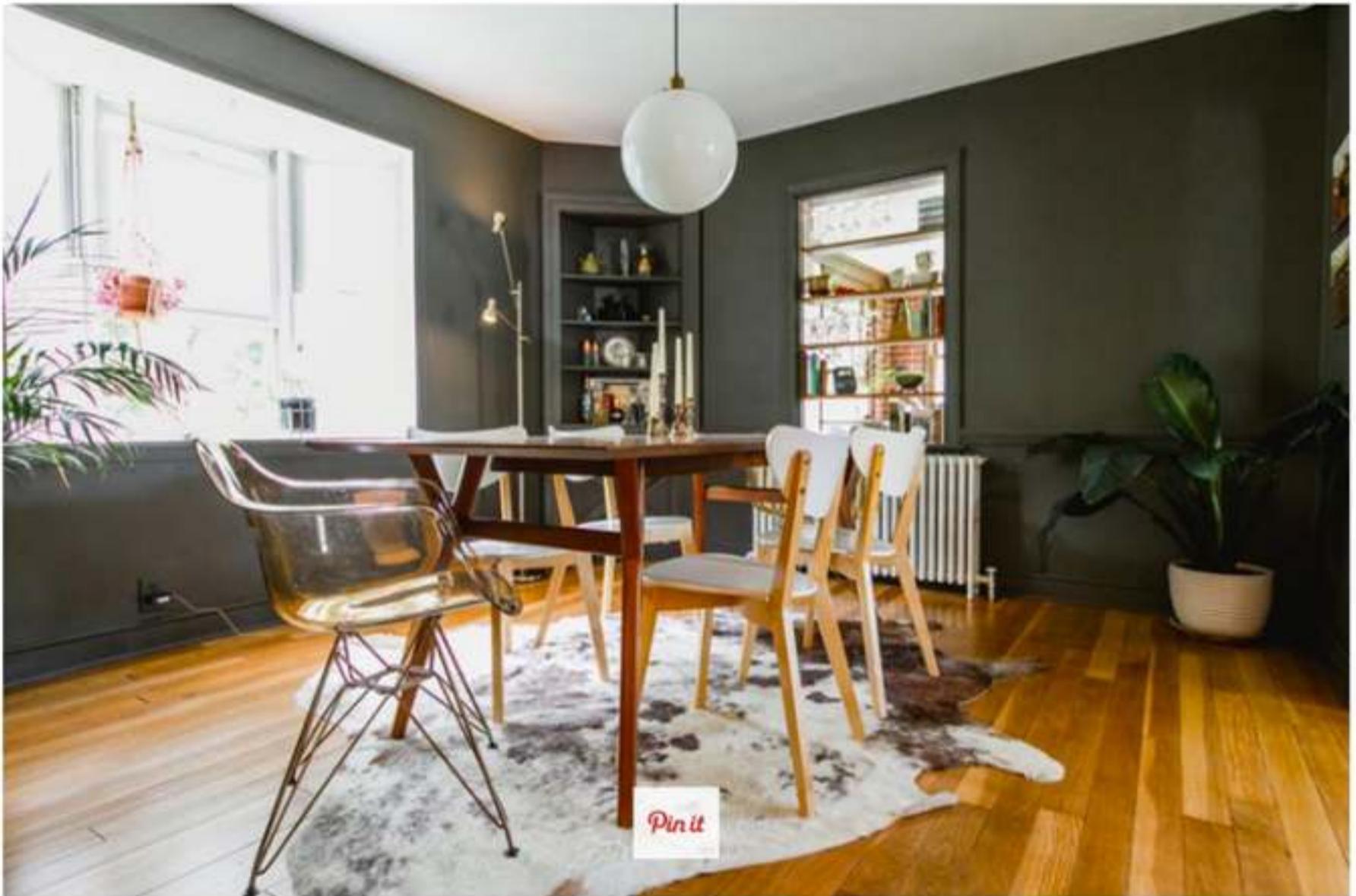
Carter is a big fan of taking something with good bones and tweaking it to fit your lifestyle or aesthetic with a slipcover or new upholstery job. "Bring an older piece back to life with a more modern print and a nice clean fabric, while keeping the integrity of the original piece," she says. If cushions seem flat or saggy, she likes to replace the foam or batting to get more mileage out of it. For a no-sew option, you can also strategically drape fun patterned textiles over an old headboard, sofa, or chair. You won't even notice that headboard is from your mom's teenage bedroom with a piece of mudcloth fabric hanging over it, right?

6. Reinvent an Heirloom or Sentimental Purchase by Giving it a New Context



Have a piece of furniture that you really love but can't seem to find a traditional space for it? Cooney says to think outside the box with where and what you use it for. An old sideboard can be a media stand in a bedroom, or an old dining chair can be a nightstand in a guest room. Drop-leaf tables are common hand-me-downs. Instead of using yours in the kitchen or dining room, Thomas says to try one (with a leaf down) as an entry console or sofa table.

7. Purposefully Mismatch, but be Mindful of Materials



Say you inherit a small round dining table and only two dining chairs, for example. Thomas says to just go with it. "Buy another set of chairs that don't try to match," she says. Or get all different kinds of chairs in one color. Then maybe add in one accent chair in a funky color. There aren't rules, just one stylistic suggestion. "With no designated host end of the table, look to keep the chairs of a similar surface—hard surface chairs with hard surfaces instead of fabric," says Thomas.

8. Change the Finish or Finishing Touch of an Item so it Fits Better with your Vibe



Changing the hardware out on old furniture is a go-to for Thomas, but keep in mind the scale of the knob and finish color. "Chrome is a hard finish to pair with that mahogany dresser from Aunt Ida," says Thomas, whereas brass, glass, or ceramic knobs will feel more appropriate. Paint is also pretty powerful stuff for reinventing an old dresser or cabinet.

Now go forth, and be a little eclectic. If you try some of the above things, it'll be that much easier to tie hand-me-downs into what will become your own unique aesthetic.