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Liven up your dorm room — and still live within your budget

By Nicole Tsong
Seattle Times staff reporter

Seattle interior designer Jann Placentia usually shops at the exclusive, high-end Seattle Design Center for her clients. But when her son was preparing for college last year, she headed to a collegiate standard: Bed Bath & Beyond.

Budget, rather than design, was at the forefront of her mind as her son's tuition bills became a reality, she said, but design never goes completely by the wayside in her household.

They picked out items that reflected her son's personality, like khaki and blue sheets, holiday lights and posters.

"It's not just like decorating his room," Placentia said. "We had to do his bed and think about having a temporary portable existence that somehow would be his own statement. That was a very interesting thing."

Professional help

We enlisted Placentia and her professional design eye to help put together a sassy, well-designed dorm room on a \$400 budget. We spiced up the décor with items from Urban Outfitters and found functional, affordable pieces from Ikea to fill out a standard freshman double room at the University of Washington's Lander Hall. (The room came with a bed that can be lofted, a wardrobe, bookshelf, desk, chair and bulletin board.)

Tips from a Husky

With a couple of years of dorm living under her belt, University of Washington junior Regina Durr has

Here's what we learned:

Where to begin

Placentia recommends starting



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Dorm-room design doesn't have to mean a huge budget. Add affordable touches like this basic ottoman below the window (Ikea, \$19.99), pillows (Ikea and Urban Outfitters, \$14.99-\$24) and a throw (Ikea, \$9.99). Streamline the look with posters matching your color scheme, and jazz it up with a lantern (Urban Outfitters, \$10) and holiday lights around the bulletin board.



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Freshmen assigned to dorm rooms face a blank slate with just the basics. This room is at the UW's Lander Hall.



Washington junior Regina Durr has emerged with a bunch of creative, cheap ideas to make your dorm room show off your personality. Here are some of her suggestions:

Parchment paper: Durr and her friends tacked colorful parchment paper on the wall and wrote quotes on it throughout the year. She used a yard of one-color paper, or four smaller colors to make a checkerboard to write on.

Fabric: If parchment paper doesn't appeal to you, try lightweight fabric that will stay on the wall with Sticky Tack or thumbtacks. Create a curtain look by hanging two pieces and leaving space in the middle for pictures.

Posters: Durr loves blowing up personal pictures at Costco or at uwposters.com.

Magazine pages: Cover your walls with your favorite magazine pages as your main décor.

Wall décor decals: Wall decals in different patterns and colors are an easy and affordable way to add a splash to boring dorm walls. Just stick them on and peel 'em off when you want something new.

Picture collage: Forget about standard collages in a frame or on a bulletin board. On student networking site Facebook.com, students can print out collages of their friends' pictures from the site.

Storage: Make the most of under-bed storage for clothes, and add filing cabinets. If you live near your parents (and they allow it), rotate your summer and winter wardrobes between their house and your dorm room.

and a mix of velvet, wool and corduroy throw pillows in the same palette as the coverlet.

"That's really how the personality occurred," she said.

from the ground up — picking out a rug first and then adding sheets, a comforter, throw pillows and wall decoration.

Our palette was based on a lively raspberry, orange, yellow, green and gold polka-dot coverlet, which we paired with a punchy green chenille rug.

Satiny green and blue picture frames and throw pillows dotted the room and floor.

Placentia picked music posters in green and orange that pulled the look together.

Simple touches like a couple of well-placed mirrors gave depth to the walls, as did sleek black-and-white posters. A warmer orange throw made the bed cushy and inviting.

Big and funky

Students often use too many small items to decorate walls, Placentia said. Instead, she went with big, dramatic wall art.

"That's what made our little vignette more powerful," she said. "Bigger is just a better anchor."

But the best, funky touches came from glittering gold holiday lights; a chic paper lantern hung from the ceiling;

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Jann Placentia, a Seattle interior designer who typically works with high-end clients, lends her keen design sense to deck out a UW dorm room from scratch.



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Make your bed pop with this double dot bedspread (\$32), green velvet pillow (\$20) and vivid pink pillow (\$24), all from Urban Outfitters.



JOHN LOK / THE SEATTLE TIMES

Slip your pooch's picture into a colorful frame, like this green one from Urban Outfitters (\$16). And wake for class with this retro alarm clock (Ikea, \$8.99).



JOHN LOK / THE SEATTLE TIMES

Holiday lights, personal pictures and your new school's pennant will make your study space cozy. Pick a versatile lamp, like Ikea's Lersta lamp (\$9.99), which can be adjusted for your desk or bed, and a fun hanging lantern (Urban Outfitters, \$10).

Bits and pieces

What belongs in your dorm room (or not)

Leave behind: Halogen lamps, candles, toasters and other open-coil appliances; space heaters; full-size appliances; and hanging items that require nails.

Can bring: Rice cookers, small microwaves, blenders, coffee pots, sandwich grills, small vacuums, extension cords and water purifiers.

Source: University of Washington Housing and Food Services. Check with your college or university, as rules may differ.

Placentia's other suggestions include:

- Use colorful Mardi Gras beads in a clear glass holder to add visual interest, or hang them over frames on your desk.
- Buy a plant. It adds a green touch and might even freshen dorm-room air.
- Minimize clutter by using storage bins on your shelves.
- Add an ottoman for friends to sit on (storage ottomans are ideal).

- If a coverlet is too thin, buy an inexpensive sheet to sew on the back of the coverlet, leaving one end open with buttons, then add a plain down comforter to the inside.

- When deciding a color combination, remember that the dorm rug is probably going to be neutral and the walls stark white.

Resources

Jann Placentia: Piacenza Design, 309 37th Ave. E., Seattle. 206-948-5022, www.piacenzadesign.com.

Urban Outfitters: 1507 Fifth Ave., Seattle. 206-461-2777.

UW junior Regina Durr, who has a couple of dorm spaces behind her, also suggests buying décor items a month into school, especially for freshmen, as their tastes may change. There also may be



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Details like sparkly thumb tacks will make personal photos sing, even on a university-issued bulletin board.



JOHN LOK / THE SEATTLE TIMES

This adjustable lamp moves easily between desk and bed (Ikea, \$9.99).

Seattle. 206-381-5111,
www.urbanoutfitters.com.

Ikea: 601 S.W. 41st St., Renton, 425-656-2980, www.ikea.com

more sales then.

"Once you get to college, you're freer, you can express yourself without the constraints of parents or high-school

society," Durr said. "You can really do whatever you want. Your room represents you."

Nicole Tsong: 206-464-2150 or ntsong@seattletimes.com

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Mardi Gras beads liven up a glass pen-and-pencil jar.



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A fun hanging lantern (Urban Outfitters, \$10) can brighten up your dorm room.