

A Weekend Bedroom Makeover

Greener and cleaner in just two days? You bet!

Maybe allergies are keeping you from getting a good night's sleep. Maybe your bedroom's atmosphere needs sprucing up. Regardless of your motivation, the fact remains: It's time for a change. If the thought of a room redo is so overwhelming that you're waiting until the "Trading Spaces" TV crew knocks at your door, read on. We've got lists of ideas for quick fixes—from changing the sheets to eliminating electromagnetic fields—that will transform your *boudoir* in just a little more than two days.

The first step is identifying what needs to be done, then prioritizing according to your budget and how much you can realistically achieve in a single weekend. Is eliminating allergens your goal? Do you want to change the wall color or get new furniture? The more ambitious your ideas, the more you should plan ahead—at least a month in advance, possibly more if you need to custom-order items.

To create a natural bedroom, start with the bed. Perhaps your weekend project will be to clean out junk stored underneath and outfit it with natural, nontoxic organic cotton sheets, and a wool comforter and pillows. Once your bed is a healthy zone, turn your attention to the lights or windows.

"It's important to have a vision for your bedroom," says interior designer Cheryl Terrace, who advises clipping magazine photos to help define your personal style and decide on an overall mood. "Have fun and express your personality while designing your space. Let all your senses get involved in the process."

Now a luxurious space that invites deep slumber and quiet relaxation, Hermine and Jean-Charles's bedroom is also free of toxins and other harmful elements. The finishing touches on their bed include a comforter, courtesy Suite Sleep; a classic print duvet cover and pillowcases from Indika; and pillows from Pacific Coast Feather Company. A Zen Alarm Clock (available at Gaiam.com) on the heirloom bedside table will chime morning tidings to rouse them serenely from slumber. And stepping out of bed in the morning, their feet will land softly on a natural area rug, hand woven and naturally dyed from Garuda Woven Art (303-442-2096). Their new bedroom will luxuriate their senses while nourishing them physically and spiritually.

L A U R E L K A L L E N B A C H
P H O T O G R A P H Y B Y
P O V Y K E N D A L A T C H I S O N

1 Color Your World

Nothing enlivens a bedroom's atmosphere faster than a new coat of paint. Choose low-VOC paints or clay-based textured wall covering—or apply milk paint to create a dreamy, watercolor wash. Interior designer Cheryl Terrace urges you to be adventurous when choosing color. “Most people want cool, relaxing colors in the bedroom,” she says, “but for others, stimulating shades like red could be the perfect energizing, sexy fix.” Here's how to organize your painting weekend:

DO AHEAD

- Two weeks before your makeover weekend, pick out paint chips and tape them on the wall. If your chosen shade is especially daring, buy a quart of the paint and brush on a larger patch. Remember that color intensifies when it covers an entire wall.
- Buy sufficient paint to apply two coats with some extra for future touch-ups.

FRIDAY EVENING

- Clear the room of furniture.
- Assemble painting supplies: brushes, rollers, drop cloths, rags.
- Prep the room. Remove switchplates; tape around windows, doors, and trim; take down window treatments; cover the floor with drop cloths; apply primer if necessary.

SATURDAY

- Paint one coat early in the morning. If you live in a dry climate, you may be able to do a second coat later today.
- Set up a fan or open a window to accelerate drying.

SUNDAY

- Apply a second coat of paint if necessary. (Some natural paints take longer to dry than conventional brands.)
- Clean up the mess and wash out paintbrushes and rollers.
- When the paint is dry, remove tape and replace switchplates and windowcoverings. Vacuum or mop the floor, then reassemble your furniture.

Jean-Charles and Hermine trowel Terramed plaster onto the wall, creating texture and depth that didn't exist before. Nontoxic plaster allows you artistic license to experiment with troweled wall textures.

INSET: Terramed natural ochre plaster is so simple and nontoxic that even the kids can get involved in prep work. Stacey helps mix a batch of Golden Wheat color Terramed that will bring a soft, honey color into the bedroom. The rich tint adds more warmth than a neutral color without overpowering this small room.



Where To Buy It

Livos: natural oils, stains, paints, waxes, primers, and thinners. (888) 256-4821; TheNaturalFinish.com.

Old-Fashioned Milk Paint Company: (978) 448-6336; MilkPaint.com.

BioShield: Low-VOC paints. (800) 621-2591; BioshieldPaint.com.

American Clay: Clay-based finishes. (866) 404-1634; AmericanClay.com.

Terramed: Clay-based finishes. (866) 363-6334; MedImports.net.

2 Eliminating EMFs

Electromagnetic fields (EMFs) may disturb sleep by interrupting the body's own electromagnetic processes. Mary Cordaro, a baubiologist—someone who studies the relationship between buildings and human and planetary health—explains the four types of low-frequency EMFs. (To find out about testing for these, check with the Institute of Bau-Biologie at BuildingBiology.net.)

AC MAGNETIC: Occurs when electrical current flows, such as when an appliance is plugged in and turned on. May also be caused by outdoor powerlines or wiring errors inside walls. Minimize these by removing electrical items from your bedroom or keeping them (and their cords) eight to ten feet away from your bed.

AC ELECTRIC: Simply having voltage present produces these EMFs. When a lamp is plugged in, AC electric fields exist—even if it's turned off. Mitigate these by unplugging the device from the wall before you sleep, plugging it into a switch-controlled outlet, or having an electrical contractor rewire it with special shielded or grounded cable.

DC MAGNETIC: Caused by metal that becomes magnetized by the electricity in a room. Bed-springs become magnetized over time and interfere with the body's orientation to the earth's natural energy fields.

DC ELECTRIC (electrostatic charge): Builds up on a room's synthetic surfaces including paint, floor finishes, carpet, polyester sheets, and computer and TV screens. Electrostatic charges result in more positive than negative ions—the opposite of the balance found in nature.

Based on Cordaro's recommendations, here's how a weekend EMF makeover might shape up.

DO AHEAD

- Measure EMF levels with a Gauss meter.
- Arrange for an EMF-specialized electrician to shield your lamps and appliances. Or, have the electrician rewire the outlets using "flex" wiring so you can turn off bedside lamps via a switch.
- Order a metal-free bed and bedframe without a synthetic finish. Instead of springs, some mattresses use natural latex (from rubber trees) and wood slats for support.
- Remove synthetic carpet. (It takes more than a weekend to remove old carpet and install natural, untreated fiber carpet or finish hardwood floors.)

FRIDAY EVENING

- Take an inventory of the EMFs in your bedroom. Move out electronics and electrical units, especially those with transformers (the black boxes attached to cords) such as the TV, stereo, computer, cell or cordless phone, answering machine, and halogen lights.
- Prep the bedroom for painting. (See "Color Your World," page 57.)

SATURDAY

- Remove cordless and cell phones—big sources of high-frequency EMFs. If you prefer a bedroom phone, buy the traditional, nonelectronic model.
- Paint with botanical-based, electrostatic-reducing paints such as lime washes, milk or clay paint tinted with natural pigments, or solvent-free paints.

SUNDAY

- If you've bought a nonmetal bed, locate it as far from electrical sockets as possible.
- As you reassemble your bedroom, keep electrical devices and their wires and plugs eight to ten feet from the bed.
- Plug the reading lamp into an accessible outlet so it's easy to unplug from the wall at bedtime. Or, plug it into a switched socket so power flow shuts off at the source.
- Use a battery-operated alarm clock.
- Move the air filter as far away from bed as possible, or invest in one with a shielded cable.

Hermine does a final check for EMFs with a Gauss meter. Removing the phone and the digital alarm clock from her bedside have eliminated the biggest EMF sources in her bedroom—especially because the couple has chosen a metal-free bed.



Where To Buy It

H3 Environmental: natural bedding and latex mattresses, HEPA/carbon air filter with shielded cord, and Gauss meters. (818) 766-1787; H3Environmental.com.

SuiteSleep.com: natural rubber mattresses with organic cotton/pure wool covering. (866) 753-3337.

EMF Safety Superstore: information, Gauss meters for sale or rent. LessEMF.com.

3 Time for Bed

You want a bed that's healthy for both you and the environment, which means you need to be concerned about synthetics such as plastic and polyester, as well as how prone the bedding is to retaining moisture and harboring dust mites. Many people are allergic to the waste of the microscopic mites, which thrive in seldom-washed pillows and mattresses because they feed off dead skin cells. You can minimize dust mites by regularly laundering sheets and blankets in hot water and choosing wool-filled pillows and comforters because wool doesn't retain as much moisture as down, explains Angela Owen, owner of SuiteSleep.com (see "Sleep Like a Lamb," page 68). Here are her recommendations for a healthy bed:



DO AHEAD

- Locate a natural bedding store in your area. If there isn't one, order sheets, pillows, and bedding in advance.
- Buy a natural fiber comforter or duvet, preferably a wool one.
- If your mattress or futon sits on the floor or a solid platform, get a slatted bedframe or platform that allows air circulation beneath it.
- If you need a new mattress—most last ten to fifteen years—buy one filled with organic cotton or wool rather than petroleum-based foam.

FRIDAY AFTERNOON

- Take your comforter or duvet to a nontoxic dry cleaner. (If this isn't an option, air it out with the rest of the bedding on Saturday.)

SATURDAY

- Strip all bedding off your mattress and vacuum it to clean out dust mites. (Repeat monthly.)
- Take the mattress or futon outdoors in the sun for a thorough airing that helps combat the four "M"s: mold, mildew, moisture, and mites.
- Air the mattress pad, wool topper, featherbed, and pillows in the sun. (Repeat every few weeks for healthiest results.)
- Clear away everything under your bed; it impedes the healthy flow of air, and it's bad feng shui.
- Vacuum all dust from under your bed. If you have a hardwood floor, mop it.

SUNDAY

- Change your sheets. Polyester traps moisture and creates static electricity, and wrinkle-free sheets are treated with formaldehyde. Switch to hemp or organic cotton sheets—and wash them before use.
- Get new pillows, preferably filled with mite-repellent wool. If you want firm support or are accustomed to a contour pillow (typically made from synthetic visco-elastic or "memory foam"), choose natural, nontoxic rubber.
- Cover pillows with organic cotton protectors that prevent dust mites from burrowing into your pillow.
- Assemble your all-natural bed.

Hermine and Jean-Charles easily zip together a Green Sleep Hevea natural rubber mattress. The cover is made of organic cotton, silk, and wool layers that surround a rubber mattress core—a design that allows the layers to come apart quickly and air out in good weather.

Where To Buy It

SuiteSleep.com: natural rubber mattresses with organic cotton/pure wool covering, wool or buckwheat pillows. (866) 753-3337.

Gaiam.com: organic cotton sheet sets, comforters. (877) 989-6321.

Rawganique.com: organic hemp/flax bedspreads, sheets, blankets, throws, and duvets. (866) 729-4367.

Obasan: organic beds, comforters, futons, pillows. (800) 313-3799. Obasan.ca, GreenSleep.com.



All the Trimmings

Window treatments, lighting, and furniture all contribute to an aesthetically pleasing, eco-friendly bedroom. These elements must be planned far in advance of your weekend makeover so you have time to custom order. Then, simply add them to your Sunday afternoon task of reassembling the bedroom. Here are some planning tips:

LIGHTING

Much of the atmosphere in your room depends on lighting, says designer Cheryl Terrace, who suggests locating four or five small pools of light around the bedroom. These could include aromatherapy candles (with lead-free wicks), a lit rock crystal sitting on a shelf, a tiny lamp on the dresser, and a paper lantern. Her other ideas:

- To keep your nightstand uncluttered, mount swing-arm reading lamps on either side of the bed. Look for units that accommodate a three-way bulb so you can control brightness.
- If you use energy-saving compact fluorescent bulbs, compensate for the starker light with a lampshade made of oilcloth or parchment.
- Find unique lamps at bazaars and flea markets, or create your own from interesting pieces of wood, a damaged musical instrument, or antiques. Most towns have a local lamp doctor who can wire just about any item to hold a bulb.

Jean-Charles and Hermine hang a jute and paper shade that controls light into the bedroom and is also easy to keep clean. You can purchase a custom-made nontoxic shade similar to this one at Earthshade.com.



WINDOW TREATMENTS

Controlling the light adds atmosphere to the bedroom—either bright and airy or intimate and cozy. As you plan your window design, however, remember that curtains, swags, and blinds tend to collect dust. “I like a clean, simple look,” says interior designer Daryl Stanton. “If you don’t need a lot around your windows, skip it. What you do choose should be washable or easily cleaned.” Stanton also suggests:

- Look for curtains or Roman shades from hemp, silk, or organic cotton.
- Order blinds made from untreated natural products such as bamboo, sustainably harvested wood, or natural grasses.
- Instead of a metal curtain rod, mount a branch (twigs included!) or a bamboo pole over the window and hang tab-top curtains or a swag of raw silk over it.

FURNITURE

Much conventional furniture is made of chemically treated plywood or pressboard, says Stanton, and upholstery stuffing is filled with synthetics containing polyester and formaldehyde, then treated with stain-guard chemicals.

- Look for solid-wood furniture made from sustainably harvested, recycled, or antique wood.
- Choose antique pieces that outgassed long ago.
- Pick up secondhand furniture that hasn’t been repainted recently.
- Have a chair and ottoman upholstered using natural latex or wool stuffing and a natural fiber covering.
- Buy old wooden benches and chairs and attach organic cotton seat cushions to them.

Where To Buy It

Earthshade.com: nontoxic, environmentally sustainable shades.

Smith + Noble: natural Roman shades made from reeds, grasses, bamboo. (800) 560-0027; SmithandNoble.com.

Akari Light Sculpture Lamps: paper-lanterns by Japanese designer Isamu Noguchi. (718) 721-2308; Noguchi.org.

Furniture: furniture and bedding without chemicals, dyes, polymers, or toxins. (800) 326-4895; Furniture.com.

The Bedroom Design Experts

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