



**Alex Fulton**  
INTERIOR DESIGNER

# Ask Alex

Get your decor dilemmas solved by our resident interiors expert and colour enthusiast

**We have a really low stud ceiling and it seems all the cool light fittings these days are pendants for high studs. Can you recommend some great light fittings that would suit our ceiling situation?**

**Tessa Hansen, Wellington**

Light fittings for low stud ceilings are tricky all right and it's one of those age-old dilemmas. How do you light a room with a low ceiling without adding visual clutter and glare? You will either need to get creative or get your wallet out. Lighting is like fabric, you get what you pay for, but we're lucky that here in New Zealand we have suppliers that cover all ends of the market. You will need a defined budget and a clear goal in mind. Sometimes asking a lighting expert is a good idea for a tricky space. Tina, from e-decorating company Roomie, is a true 'light-head' and passed on some pearls of wisdom: "If you want a central feature light – then a low profile pendant, installed close to the ceiling can offer an alternative. Look out for lights that offer a dual purpose or create interesting shadows and patterns

on the ceiling. This will help to increase the sense of space in the room." You could always try a fabric covered drum shade with a diffuser on the bottom (so that you don't see the bulb). You can find these at Lighting Plus or get your local interior designer to make something bespoke. For something more ornamental use the Ceylon Pendant from BoConcept or the Hemp light from Freedom. A high-end option is the Axo Light 'Muse Ceiling Mount' or the Flos Smithfield C Light from ECC Lighting + Furniture. Happy light shopping!

**I wondered if you could share your tips and tricks for getting a great finish when re-painting furniture?**

**Laura Burton, Auckland**

Oh goodie, what a perfect question Laura and I'm very pleased you asked. It's my number one way to up-cycle and update a piece of furniture and so easy to make a favourite piece into something contemporary.

**1) You will need** a mask, sandpaper, primer and spray paint or paint. Oh, and use the good paint – it may be more expensive but it will cover better and you'll end up having to use less in the long run. I find a high gloss or semi gloss works best as it's easier to clean and looks smart.

**2) Clean and prep** – it's very important to fix up cracks, tighten screws and correct any structural issues. Sand with a medium to high grit sandpaper and use the grain of the wood as your sanding direction. Wipe down thoroughly after sanding to remove dust for a lovely smooth canvas.

**3) Find a well-ventilated area** to apply the paint. Outside works well but choose a day that's not too hot, cold or windy. All extremes will effect drying time and the final finish!

**4) Prime.** This stage is important as it helps adhere the paint to the furniture. Allow paint to dry in between coats and sand out any imperfections as you find them.

**5) Spray or paint.** Spraying the paint provides a better finish but you can also paint it too. You will get brush strokes with this method but that can be minimised with a good quality brush. Spray paint dries quicker than normal paint (9-12 mins or so) and covers better. My tip is to mix up your spraying actions – try cross-hatching your spray strokes. Then voilà! You should have a piece that you're proud of. Don't forget to send us a photo of the finished product.

**We bought our first house, a lovely cottage called Nikau Cottage, a year ago. It has heaps of charm and personality and is brimming over with light and warmth. I'm keen to tackle the hallway and would love your help.**

**I would dearly love to wallpaper the hall. However, as my partner pointed out we have a puppy who likes to swim in the frog pond and rub himself against the wall and two young girls who scooter and have doll chair races up and down the hallway. So, wallpaper? I have even been thinking about painting and then stencilling my own wallpaper design onto the walls.**

**Rachael Hennessey, Auckland**

Hello Rachael, I can tell the colour force is strong with you. Your hallway is the perfect blank canvas to show off your creative bent and to welcome your guests. I love the wooden floors and the high ceiling. Let's get those down lights removed and put in some oversized pendants to provide ambient light. I would add a hallway runner to tie in with your colour palette.

Speaking of colours, choose one for the whole space or maybe paint the lower half a dark colour and the upper half a lighter colour. This will give the illusion of height and space while letting the two colours fight it out (both win!). Paint the back of your front door – business at the front and a party at the back! When mixing dogs, kids and paint use a good quality brand that is easily wiped down after general wear and tear.

It's got to look good even though it's well used. If you are considering wallpaper then use a heavy-duty product that has a vinyl finish and is wipeable too. Perfect. Once the walls are painted, decorate with framed kids' paintings, family snaps or garlands (I love to hang anything on walls). Have fun, and more importantly, make it a space that reflects your style and makes you feel good inside. It's your space to create your way!



Illustration by Samantha Totty.