



**Alex Fulton**  
INTERIOR DESIGNER

# Ask Alex

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

**My living area is quite dark and cold in the morning, and too warm in the evening. I'm talking colour here, not heat. How do I decide what colours will work best with the light we have in the room?**

**Carla Bostelmann, Auckland**

This is a curly question Carla. Without seeing your space in person it's hard to gauge the light you describe, but it's a good question because you are obviously aware of how colour can affect your surroundings. Darker colours absorb light and lighter colours reflect light – that's the basic principle of colour theory. There are a lot of 'rules' around which colour should go in which room, but I tend to throw all that out the window and design for the person who lives in that room and the mood they are after. For example we have painted our kitchen in Dulux 'Piha', which is a dark colour with a blue base. It's a west-facing room with a low ceiling and probably not the type of room you would pick to be painted so dark, but we love it. It's cosy and makes the room feel 'lived in'. It's also been offset with bright accessories and furniture. For your space think about the overall feeling of the room and look for examples so that you can make an informed

decision. There's a wealth of colour options out there so find one that settles well with you and makes your design heart sing.

**I'm a huge fan of *Your Home and Garden* and spend many hours trawling through current and past magazines dreaming of my home in its finished glory. I have attached a photo of my ugly fireplace. I need help. Is there any way to transform this ugly but functional feature when I don't have lots of money to spare?**

**Mel Buckley, Hibiscus Coast**

Oh Mel... ugly but functional, now there's a combination! I won't lie, it's certainly a challenge you have set me. I see you having two choices.

1. Get rid of the bricks behind the wood burner and replace them with a fire resistant and more modern product like steel, gypsum plasterboard or cement board. These products can be painted in a colour that will tie in with your room and interior style. Be warned though... a fresh 'behind' may only highlight your old wood burner and its more 'retro' features. This leads me to the other option.

2. Demolish it and start a fresh. Older wood burners can be as inefficient as an open fire and can produce air pollution. It may work out cheaper in the long run to spend the money and replace it with a new fancy pants, efficient, and better looking model. I have been eyeing up some hotties from Pyroclassic (pyroclassic.co.nz). New Zealand designed and made they are the most efficient on the market and come in over 100 colour choices, which really spins my design wheels. My disclaimer is that I have no idea about what the rest of the room or house style is but at least it will give you some ideas to progress forward! Good luck and we look forward to seeing what you come up with!

**I'm struggling to decorate an open shelving unit I have in our living room. Our computer sits on the floating desk shelf and there are three other shelves above that. What I find is that junk like bills, school newsletters, pens, and broken**



**toys get thrown there with no order and look untidy and unorganised. What can you suggest to help me sort out this space as it's making me very frustrated every time I look at it?**

**Anna Lovejoy, Wellington**

I'm a Virgo Anna, and I hear your pain. Surfaces often get dumped on and left in disarray. I have one word for you. Organisation. Luckily there is a wealth of product available to us to help combat the war on dumping grounds. You are especially at risk with your open shelves as knick-knacks and treasures will have nowhere to hide. Invest in storage, and not just any storage – make sure it's good looking, suits your style and adds to your interior mix. Think a little outside the box (excuse the pun) and use things like decorative bowls and tins instead of boring functional items. Re-cover shoe boxes in fabric or wrapping paper, paint plant pots in your favourite colour scheme or get crafty with copper leaf to modernise a tired vase. There are also cool washable paper bags that come in all shapes and sizes that will hold anything from pencils to peonies. So, clear the decks and start adding your new storage ideas as well as mixing it up with treasured collectables and sentimental ornaments. Beautify your once frustrating space and turn it into a pleasurable place to be productive!