

STYLE | DESIGN

Too Many Pillows and Other Common Bedroom Mistakes, According to Interior Designers

From ill-proportioned headboards to badly tucked corners, the bedroom-decorating errors design pros see most often—and how to fix them



VIVID DREAMS A kaleidoscopic quilt and offset-stripped pillowcases brighten a Chenequa, Wisc., bedroom by Jessica Jubelirer. PHOTO: DOUGLAS FRIEDMAN, STYLING BY MIEKE TEN HAVE

By [Nina Molina](#) [Follow](#)

March 15, 2024 5:00 pm ET

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YOUR EIGHT SOLID HOURS of sleep each night relies in part on a well-made bed, which can be a surprisingly involved affair. Shams, covers, headboards and nightstands ideally harmonize with mattress, wall colors and layout. Here, designers name the most common muddles, and advise how to do up a soothing cradle.

Bland Bunks

Beds kitted out in white sheets, pillow cases and duvet cover—especially when flanked by white walls—squander the opportunity to bring warmth into a bedroom, says Cleo Murnane. “It looks unfinished,” said the Los Angeles designer.

Instead: In a lakeside home in Chenequa, Wisc., Jessica Jubelirer started with a vivid, block-printed quilt depicting cabbage roses on a cerulean sky—then topped it with striped pillowcases and an abstract floral bolster. Unexpected colors and textures give what can be a sterile space personality, says the Montecito, Calif., designer.

Find vibrant patterns and bold hues too energizing for slumber? Jubelirer says even sheets in tame tones like light blue, taupe, olive or khaki add more charisma than white linens do.

A Plethora of Pillows

“Your pillows should not occupy half of your bed,” warned Glenna Stone, an interior designer in Philadelphia.



Only a pair of maroon lumbar pillows decorate a duo of standard pillows in a Rye, N.Y., bedroom by New York designer Emily Del Bello. PHOTO: GIEVES ANDERSON

Instead: Five pillows for a shared bed should do it, says Heather Peterson, a Minneapolis designer, obviating the need to tear down and rebuild a Mount Everest of decorative pillows every day. Each person gets two pillows—one firm, one soft. A single decorative square or lumbar version finishes the ensemble. “You can put your pillows in a sham, but use a sheeting fabric that’s soft enough to sleep on,” she said. If you itch for more decor, stick with a maximum of three or four throw pillows, said Stone.

Ill Proportions

The trend for sky-high headboards seems to have hit a glass ceiling among designers, except in a high-ceilinged room. “When the headboards are too tall it can feel grandiose and absurd, like they are made for Marie Antoinette,” said Michael Hilal, an interior designer in San Francisco. But good luck propping yourself up against overly low headboards that extend less than 18 inches above the mattress. They can also make a room feel empty. Other mistakes that throw a room’s composition out of whack: puny pillows on a big bed and too-low side tables.



A medium-height headboard proportionally cradles a king-size mattress in a Philadelphia bedroom by local designer Glenna Stone. PHOTO: MARK ROSKAMS, STYLING BY GABRIELLE LANGDON

Instead: “A good standard headboard” rises 48 to 50 inches from the floor, said Murnane. Modern, platform headboards can be lower, around 44 to 46 inches, she said. “Much taller than 56 inches feels dated.”

Pillows for sleeping come in sizes that pair with mattresses: standard, queen, king. Too-small will leave awkward gaps. As for nightstands, Barrett Oswald, a designer in Larchmont, N.Y., stresses their tops should be level with or slightly higher than a mattress.

Strange Arrangement

Placing a bed kitty-corner rarely works. “It makes the flow of the room awkward and leaves a giant gap behind the bed,” said Stone.

Kate Ballou, of Hendrick Interiors in Washington, D.C., warns: Don’t position a bed along a rectangular room’s long wall. It creates an awkward rectangle of floor space.



An earth-toned queen bed faces sliding doors that frame a courtyard in this Palm Springs, Calif., bedroom by Los Angeles design firm Laun. PHOTO: LANCE GERBER

Instead: In a narrow room, Ballou set the bed lengthwise against the short wall. This left a more usable square of space for a built-in desk and bookshelves.

A word about lifting one's spirits when not dead to the world: When possible, position beds to face windows to optimize views and sunlight, says Rachel Bullock, co-founder of Los Angeles design firm LAUN. In a Palm Springs, Calif., bedroom, the team set a queen bed to take in a lush courtyard beyond sliding glass doors.

Sloppy corners

Messy bed corners leave a bedroom feeling unkempt and chaotic, says Anki Spets, founder of New York-based bedding company Area.



Crisply tucked covers elevate a room by San Francisco designer Michael Hilal. PHOTO: LAUREN EDITH ANDERSEN/SEN CREATIVE

Instead: “If the art of making hospital corners never found its way to your repertoire, now’s the time to master it,” said Donna Mondi. Search the simple technique on YouTube. Crisp corners “bring a tailored elegance,” said the Chicago designer. “A well-made bed is the ultimate free upgrade.”

Up Sheets Creek / Designers on the silliest bed-making mistakes they've encountered



ILLUSTRATION: CHRIS LYONS

“Beds are expensive. But using reclaimed items such as **barn doors as a headboard** isn’t the answer. Hang a beautiful textile on the wall or fill the space with art.” —*Heather Peterson, interior designer, Minneapolis*

“I have a very discerning client with a beautiful king-size bed, but they **refuse to upgrade their pillows** from standard size. The scale is completely thrown off and the bed looks unsophisticated.” —*Kate Ballou, interior designer, Washington, D.C.*