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# The art of ILLUSION

Interior designers and experts reveal how to add magic with paint effects, mirrors and hidden elements





hriving on creating homes that surprise and delight, interior designers and experts in their field use their skills to make the most of any space. To add to the impact of a scheme, they employ a host of artistic and design devices to introduce the illusion of more space, enhance natural light or conceal surprise features.

# Mirror mirror

Antiqued mirror glass specialist Dominic Schuster understands how mirrors can be used to trick the eye and transform a space. "Placement is crucial," he says. "To maximise the impression of space, place mirrors opposite windows or close to other sources of >





Long, vertical mirrors can draw the eye upward, making a room seem taller, while horizontal ones can make a narrow room appear wider' Dominic Schuster, antiqued

mirror glass specialist



light, which will not only make a room feel instantly brighter and more open but will also reflect outdoor scenery giving a sense of depth." Long, vertical mirrors can draw the eye upward, making a room seem taller, while horizontal ones can make a narrow space appear wider. Large, unframed panels of mirror can create a seamless look, blending into the walls and creating the illusion of a larger room.

When cladding a wall in mirror, Emma Deterding, founder and creative director of Kelling Designs, says, "You want to make sure that the reflection isn't just a blank wall and actually adds something more to the space. Hanging lights in front of mirrors is another great way of reflecting more light back into the room, making it feel bigger and brighter - just be sure to check that the light has a flat back so that it can be fixed directly on to the mirror, with no reflections of fittings, wires or anything else unsightly."



TOP & ABOVE LEFT Panelled doors open and slide into side pockets to reveal a surprise bar in this design by Tamsyn Mason.

ABOVE In this design by Guy Goodfellow, decorative artists Mathew Bray and Matthew Collins painted and stencilled the columns to look like marble inlaid with decorative mosaic. RIGHT Guy Goodfellow and

Pictures and curtain poles can also be hung directly on to the surface of the mirror, creating a floating illusion, but care needs to be taken to find the precise position before the mirror is cut for fixings.

While framed mirrors can also be used to make a room feel larger, Dominic Schuster has more suggestions. "Mirrored furniture, including smaller pieces, can be a lovely way to introduce more light and interest into a room, especially in spaces where it isn't feasible to install entirely mirrored walls or large panels of glass," he says. A mirrored back to a bar cabinet or an alcove can add depth, while antiqued, gilded, smoked and bronzed finishes can introduce glamorous warmth and softness.

Art of deception

Paint effects and murals are also useful in creating illusion, as is trombe l'oeil, an artistic effect which deceives the eve into thinking a flat surface is three-dimensional. Known for richly layered, expressive interiors, Guy Goodfellow enjoys using decorative paint effects to add imaginative elements to his designs. In his drawing room for WOW!house at the Design Centre, Chelsea Harbour

creative director Steven Rodel.

> Paint effects can be used to add unexpected detail, enhance a mood or add playful interest'

Guy Goodfellow, interior designer



'Central to this transformation is a bespoke bookcase that conceals a hidden entrance to a snug'

Lauren Gilthorpe, interior designer



this year, painted and stencilled columns created the look of real marble inlaid with decorative mosaic. "Paint effects can be used to add unexpected detail, enhancing a mood or simply to add playful interest," he says. "Unless you are a confident artist yourself, it is important to work with a painter whose work you admire, because, while you can explain the look you want to create, you also need to give the artist some freedom of expression to create real magic."

As well as adding fun and character, paint effects can be used as an alternative to sourcing rare, unusual or impractical materials, while murals and trompe l'oeils can add decorative delight. Interior designer Jo Aynsley of Jeffreys Interiors commissioned an artist to paint horses on a merry-go-round, making the most of a curved wall and adding charm to a child's bedroom design. Studio OD opted for a painted trompe l'oeil design to suggest real wall panelling, ceiling detailing and shelves filled with books in a new-build room which was previously largely featureless. Romanos Brihi, co-founder of Studio Vero, chose a hand-painted design to resemble marquetry, adding something unique to the walls of a contemporary living room in a recent project. "It is such a vast space, we wanted to find a wall finish which brought the room to life," he says. "The technique plays with the scale of the room and the colour palette of blue, teal and off-white shimmer in the light that pours in through the windows."

ABOVE Studio QD added playful character to this holiday house bedroom with painted panelling and bookshelves. ABOVE Jena Quinn and Lucy Derbyshire, co-founders of Studio QD.



OPPOSITE RIGHT Interior designer Lauren Gilberthorpe. ABOVE A hidden door in this bespoke bookcase opens to access a cosy snug in this design by Lauren Gilberthorpe. RIGHT Jo Aynsley of Jeffreys Interiors. FAR RIGHT Jo Aynsley used the unusual curved wall of this bedroom to create the illusion of a magical painted merry-go-round.

### Secret entrances

Concealed doorways are another way to introduce illusion to a design. "A hidden door will always add an element of intrigue," says interior designer Lauren Gilberthorpe, who reconfigured the ground floor of a house by transforming a neglected boot room into a snug, tailored for family movie nights and quiet relaxation. "Central to this transformation is a bespoke bookcase in the living room – it not only serves as an elegant storage solution but also conceals a hidden entrance to the snug," she explains. A fun, secret space like this can be what Gilberthorpe describes as "a private retreat away from the hustle and bustle of everyday life", but it can also be eminently functional – hiding away wardrobe storage or an appliance-packed utility room, for example.





ABOVE Victoria Wormsley, founder of French-Brooks Interiors.
LEFT French-Brooks Interiors designed a jib door to blend into the backdrop, so that the eye is drawn instead to the key features of the room – in this case the painting above the bed.

Jib doors benefit from being concealed in a wallpaper, panelling or with a skirting board which runs across the opening'

Victoria Wormsley, French-Brook Interiors



Lucinda Martin.

ABOVE Adding to
the elegance of this
bedroom design
by Lucinda Martin,
the position of the
curtain poles and
design of the drapes
create the illusion of
extra height.

There are practical considerations to creating the surprise of a hidden door. It could be built into bespoke joinery, as in Lauren Gilberthorpe's design (p101), or flush-fitted into the wall, without an architrave, as a jib door. "They benefit from being concealed in a wallpaper, in panelling or with a skirting board which can run across the opening, otherwise it can be hard to conceal them in a blank painted wall," advises Victoria Wormsley of French-Brooks Interiors. "They can even be hung with art so that they completely blend in." A jib door can be particularly effective if using a panoramic wallpaper to create the illusion of a beautiful view or a painterly scene, as the 'picture' need not be interrupted.

Be aware, however, that jib doors are more susceptible to knocks, chips and signs of wear, so Wormsley recommends they are not used for busy doorways. Also pay attention to how the door should be opened, as she explains: "The most secret way is to have a spot which you can press to magically open the door, but this may not be practical, as not everyone will know how to open it and the decorative finish will get damaged over time." For this reason, many designers opt for a small handle, often with a back plate to avoid handprints reaching the wallpaper. Note that the handle can almost disappear from view if the wallpaper design is highly decorative. Alternatively, glass plates over the push-to-open latches can protect the surface of the wallpaper.

## Clever tricks

More techniques to deceive the eye into making a room feel larger than it is to use wall-hung cabinetry to free up floor space, a popular trick in bathrooms for vanity units and storage cabinets, while window treatments can be designed to enhance the height of a room. By hanging a curtain pole well above the window frame – but balanced with the height of the ceiling – curtains will be longer and the room will appear taller. "Curtain or blind design is crucial to creating the illusion of symmetry and elegance," says Lucinda Martin, who positioned the curtain poles three quarters of the way above the window in a recent project, with drapes made so that the front side of the fabric is always on show. "These curtains are made in three parts and fixed directly on to the pole – an illusion on three levels, as it were!"