

LOVE THE ONE YOU'RE WITH



Mix and match art but tone colours



Lego fan? Get playful with big handles and pulls

Just because your rental property isn't your 'forever' home, doesn't mean you can't put your stamp on it, writes **Nathalie Marquez Courtney**

I STILL remember the first piece of 'real' furniture I bought. A beautiful mid-century sideboard, its sleek, warm lines lent a grown-up, retro feel to my rental living room, which was otherwise filled with a hodge-podge of basic Ikea buys, second-hand bits and a way-too-big brown leather couch we'd nabbed for nothing on *FreeTradelreland.ie*.

The sideboard changed everything. I had been renting for over 10 years, never really committing to an interiors style or 'wasting' money investing in anything — I would no doubt be moving out in a year, what was the point? But over the years, I've learned that renting doesn't have to hold you back from creating a home you love. That sideboard has moved with me, and will no doubt have pride of place in any future home I live in, whether it's bought or rented.

When it comes to decorating a rental, the real question is: why wait? You should be able to express your style and personality no matter your living arrangements.

Medina Grillo agrees. The Birmingham-based author started her blog, *grillo-designs.com*, in 2015 to share her creative ideas and show people "that you don't have to have lots of money to create a space that you can love". The blog became a book, *Home Sweet Rented Home*, packed with clever, affordable ideas on how to personalise not-so-permanent spaces. "There can often be a negative outlook on renting, so I wanted to give a voice to the more positive aspects of it," she says. These include being able to live in an area you may not necessarily be able to afford to buy in and not having to worry about fixing or replacing costly home appliances like dishwashers and boilers.

IRISH RENTERS
The concept of making a rental home your own is taking off in Ireland as well, partly due to the fact that we're all renting for longer.

"There was a time most tenants I would have been dealing with would have been in their 20s," says Owen Reilly of Dublin-based estate agents Owen Reilly (*owenreilly.ie*). "But the average age of our tenants now is 33. These tenants tend to have more developed tastes and are more inclined to tailor the space to their own style. We increasingly see more tenants bringing in more of their own things — whether it's soft furnishings or furniture."

Dublin renters are also staying put longer. "Our average tenancy lasts about 26 months and so people are more likely to ask about re-painting or even replacing carpets," says Owen. A huge proportion of Dublin city renters come from mainland Europe and the US, where renting is much more the norm, and don't necessarily see renting as a stop-gap before buying. "We've



Fake it till you make it, €54
You may not be able to put in a window, but luckily this faux plant doesn't need any light. Artificial cheese plant in ceramic pot; Marks & Spencer



Medina Grillo: "Home is more than four walls."



Curate spaces for a gallery wall



Make every inch work for you

definitely noticed an increasing demand for unfurnished properties," says Owen. "It's still a niche market, but I'd say there is twice as much demand as there would have been 10 years ago."

And while standard rental rules — no changes without permission and everything must be reversible — still very much apply, Owen feels that there is an appetite for a more open-minded approach. "The key to a successful residential is to be flexible," he says. "More and more, I'm advising landlords to treat the tenant as a customer. Landlords who aren't flexible could struggle in this changing climate." In short: You don't have to settle for bare magnolia walls and scuffed pine furniture. There is some wiggle room.

Well handles, €11 each
Give an Ikea cabinet an upgrade with some on-trend paint and these cool luxe door knobs; prettypugs.com



EXPRESS YOURSELF
While Instagram is full of scroll-stopping interior DIY projects, the vast majority seem to be taking place in properties that people own, and so many of the ideas can't be tried by renters, who live with varying degrees of restrictions.

"There are actually a lot of people who are renting and decorating, but they often feel they're not part of the interior design industry, because there are so many restrictions as to what they can and can't do," says Medina. "But there is a huge community of renters who have done amazing things to their homes. Because we have such limitations, it forces you to be really creative and think outside the box with how you choose to decorate."

Medina's own space is a prime example of a renter's creativity at work. She has transformed her home into a colourful and stylish space, all without jeopardising her deposit. Some of her most popular updates include refreshing her dowdy kitchen by removing the top cupboard doors to create a cool open shelving effect, a DIY bench for the hallway, and even wallpapering her floor. "A lot of people were very baffled by the idea," she laughs. "But when I moved in, the floor was disgusting, scratched old lino. Wallpapering it was cheap and effective. I applied

floor varnish over it so it lasted two years and didn't damage the floor underneath."

Quick fixes like these are great for renters, who may feel stuck with things they want to change without spending too much money. Medina created the #HowIRent hashtag on Instagram to share these ideas with the wider renting community, and to show people that you can make a rental space a home. The hashtag now features over 5,000 posts from around the world and has grown into a video series hosted by Medina (*howirent.com*), giving house tours of chic and inspiring rental spaces.

Her advice for renters? "People feel like if you can't put nails onto the wall or if you can't paint, then

Pull up a seat, €619
Renting your home doesn't mean you can't invest in forever furniture. So Simple Tom armchair in Vintage Mustard; DFS



RENTAL SPECIAL

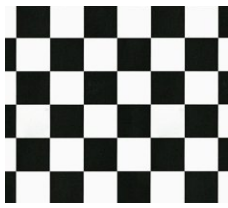


Brighten up floors with stick-on tiles

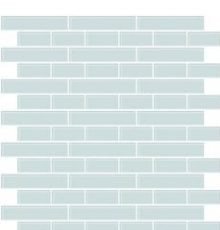


Take off cupboard doors for updated open shelves

Roll with it, €55
This self-adhesive paper is easy to install and remove and can brighten up a dull floor. Monza roll of contact paper; *astekhome.com*



Stuck on you, €20
These peel-and-stick tiles can transform a boring backsplash. Sea Glass self-adhesive tiles; *dunelm.com*



what's the point? But it's about being creative and trying to find other ways to inject personality and colour."

RENTER-FRIENDLY UPDATES
The past few years has seen an explosion in ingenious home updates that are fully reversible. "From small things like Command strips — which let you hang art without having to nail anything in — to things like removable wallpaper, stencils and stick-on tiles, there is so much you can do now," says Medina. "Even something as simple as changing the knobs on a piece of furniture or adding new legs to an Ikea couch can make a big impact."

"A home is more than four walls," she says. "It's a feeling, and we should really be trying our best to invest in creating a home that we can love and that we can feel safe and happy in."