

designer q&a

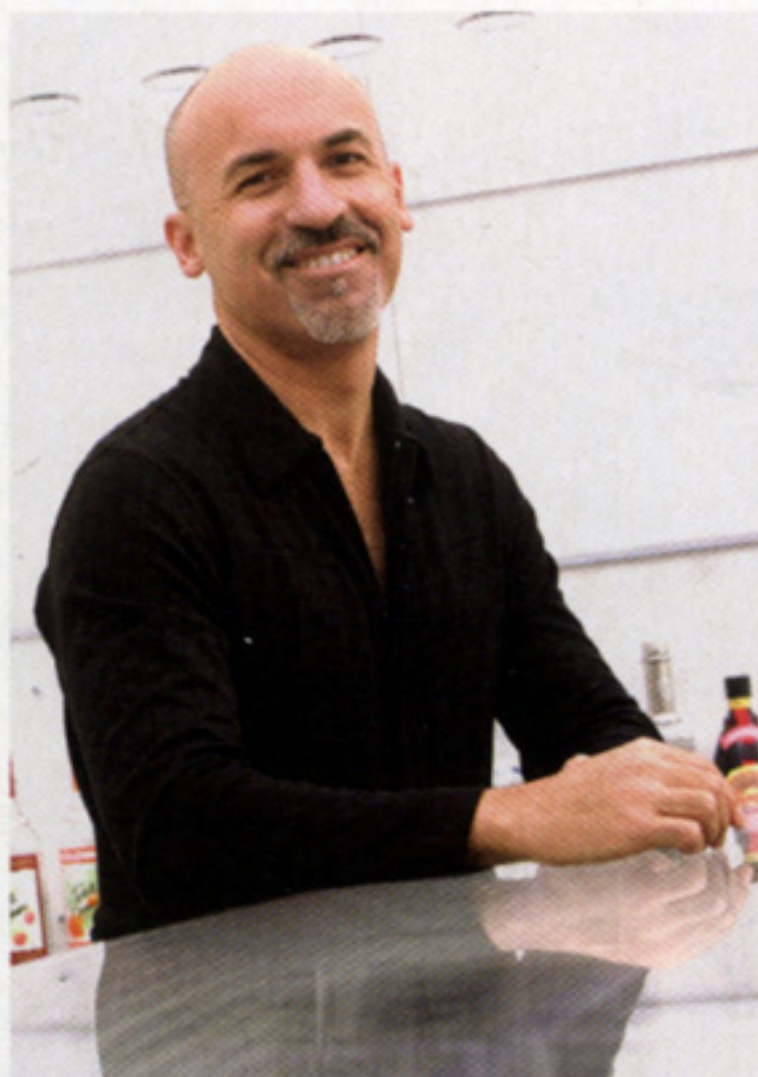
Benjamin Noriega-Ortiz, the interior designer who transformed Lenny Kravitz's homes, offers a few innovative—and refreshingly simple—solutions to common decorating dilemmas

Q The first floor of our home is one big open room. How can I define separate living and dining spaces, and is it OK to use different styles in each?

A One easy solution is to hang translucent drapes, which will create two distinct areas but won't block out any light. I like to hang fabric panels from a cubicle track like those found in hospital rooms; you can get them at hospital supply stores (or try the Cubicle Curtain Factory, 800-588-9296). To ensure that the drapery looks similar from both sides, with few visible hems, ask a seamstress to sew two panels together, creating buttonholes along the top through which you can slide metal hooks; the hooks then attach to the track. The bottom will still require hemming, but a half-inch hem instead of the traditional six inches will make it less noticeable.

In terms of décor, it's fine to do a different style in each room, but try to maintain some consistency. One way to do this is to keep the floor treatment or the color of the walls the same. Also, if you have, say, art deco furniture in one room and modern in the other, you should put a few deco pieces in the modern room and vice versa. You don't want your home to feel like a showroom!

Q I have a tiny bathroom with only one small medicine cabinet that won't hold



"Wall-to-wall shelving makes a room look larger—it becomes part of the architecture," says Noriega-Ortiz.

all of my toiletries. I'd like to add more storage space but don't want my bathroom to seem crowded. Do you have any suggestions?

A First, go through everything in the medicine cabinet and remove the items you don't use every day. This frees up space for essentials such as toothpaste and hand lotion. Then purchase simple white shelves from any hardware store and install them on brackets about a foot from the ceiling and across the entire length of one wall. As long as you put the shelves well above your sight line, the room will still feel clean and unclut-

tered. Anything you don't use on a regular basis—Band-Aids, Nyquil, aspirin—should then be placed in plastic storage baskets and kept on the shelves. I particularly like the white ones at Bed Bath & Beyond (\$5 to \$8; 800-462-3966). And be sure to keep a step stool under the sink so you can reach the shelves when you need to.

Q My landlord insists I keep my walls painted white. How can I liven them up?

A Try hanging brightly colored fabric on your walls. (Solids or patterns will do—fabric.com has a nice selection.) The key is to make each piece as big as possible. To avoid the dorm-room-tapestry look, wrap the fabric around a canvas from an art supply store, pulling it tight and fastening it to the back of the wood frame with a staple gun. Cotton fabrics work best because they stretch. Another idea: Take a color photograph of something really graphic, such as rippling water, and have it blown up to near wall-size (\$8 to \$18 per square foot; at select Kinko's stores, 800-254-6567 for locations). Again, the larger, the better (you don't want the piece to look like a poster), and no matter if enlarging makes the photo blur: The result will start to look more like a painting. Staple the finished photo to a canvas, folding the edges around the frame. Finally, consider placing uplights (\$8 to \$60; at lampsplus.com) with colored bulbs (\$3 to \$15; at bulbman.com) behind your sofa to use at night. Aim them at the wall, washing it in any shade you like. —Sarah Stebbins