



Deck your hall

It's where you throw your keys at the end of a long day. It's where you say hello to old friends... and goodbye. And where you hunt for missing football boots when your kids have got five minutes to get to Tuesday-night practice.

Get your hallway right and you will feel more in control of life, and more positive about welcoming people into your space.

So treat your entrance space to a little seasonal pampering. Here's how ...

Start with floors

- Revitalise existing wood flooring with new varnish in a rich walnut finish... a key look for this season's interiors. Or paint flooring and stairs in one shade of hard-wearing floor paint for a fresh, co-ordinated look.
- Narrow-striped rugs or carpets, with the stripes laid lengthways, instantly update your floors and trick the eye into thinking that your hallway is longer.

Trick the eye

- Hunt around for an undersized armchair or a pretty footstool that will add a soft, cosy element to your entrance, without taking up too much space. Using mini furniture is a trick they use in show homes to maximise small spaces.
- Make a narrow space feel more roomy by painting the shorter wall a darker shade. Try it, it works.

Next, lighting...

- There are times you need a good bright light in a hallway: when you are hunting for keys or checking kids have got everything before they rush to school. Other times a subtle glow is definitely what's required. Add dimmer switches so that you can match lighting to your mood.
- Add low-level spotlights at ankle height to light the stairway, and introduce a little subtle sparkle.
- Put up a big mirror, for bouncing around lots of light, and checking you look gorgeous before you fly out of the door. Leave lipstick and scent in a wooden dish for last-minute touch-ups.

Get organised

- Add a bench with built-in storage for shoes, or a trunk freshened with cedar balls. Adorn with a cushion for softness and colour – hallways can seem bare and uninviting without a few soft touches.
- Paint a section of wall with blackboard paint and encourage kids to create family art. You can scrawl your Don't Forget list there for the morning.
- Or find chalkboard wall stickers in the shape of birds and pigs, and a whole range of cute clocks and unusual coat pegs at Snowhome (01904 671155; www.snow-home.co.uk).
- Hunt down an old-fashioned school desk as a quirky hallway storage solution. Lift up the lid and stash keys, purse, phone chargers and other gubbins.

- Create a well for your doormat as it will trap more dirt and won't be likely to slip. Find a great range of door mats patterned with flowers and stripes, all £19.50, at Bombay Duck (020 8749 3000; www.bombayduck.co.uk).

A little wow goes a long way

- Trendspotters are predicting that homeowners will start to put much more of a stamp on their homes, as people stay put for longer. Try out opulent wallpapers in rich damask patterns, or soothing botanical prints. Experiment with deep Green Blue matt emulsion from Farrow & Ball (www.farrow-ball.co.uk). Add a Mistletoe light garland, £30, from Cox & Cox (Tel 0870 442 4787; www.coxandcox.co.uk), for festive cheer.
- Create a gallery effect. Put up a floating shelf or two, and arrange photos you love. Use frames that are linked by a common theme – all silver, all chunky black, all mirrored – to bring the look together.
- Light a long, narrow space with three identical lampshades or glam chandeliers.