

How do you decorate your room?

By Jodi Garber
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The walls are bare and institutional, the two single beds are bunked, the closet is too small, and there is only one window.

Welcome to your dorm room.

Millions of young people this month are packing up and heading to institutions of higher learning and crowded living. For those used to the homeliness of, well, home, many dorm rooms appear completely unlivable at first. But given time and creativity, dorms can become more comfortable.

From posters to paint to beanbags to lava lamps, small touches make the home-to-dorm transition more tolerable.

Diversity is the best thing about dorm decoration, according to Kevin Mauch, 23, of Lamar, Colo., a resident assistant at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs.

"Every room has its own characteristic," he said. "Kids in one room are into swing (music), down the hall they're into Gothic and you walk into another room and you can see that these people obviously worship the big marijuana leaf because they have posters all over the place."

BASIC DECORATING TIPS

Cheryl Ammons, an interior designer at The Home Depot on Woodmen Road in Colorado Springs, Colo., knows how tedious dorm living can be. "It is possible to make your dorm room very much like home if you want to," said Ammons, who lived in the dorms at the University of Redlands in California for four years.

Her suggestions for making the room more comfortable: Get a lamp that gives off natural, not fluorescent light; paint the walls if you have permission; and use a throw rug to spice up the room.

Ammons isn't far off, say resident advisers at CU-Springs. Matt Hane, 20, of Fruita said throw rugs are popular in dorm rooms, and throw pillows are, too. "Think light and cheap," he said. "Anything you bring in, if you don't like it, you have to be able to throw it away."

THINK CREATIVE

But making your dorm room your own isn't just about pillows and lamps; it's about personality, too.

"We had an event on campus, and some girls posted all of the flyers on their wall," said Rhiannon Atencio, 21, of Colorado Springs.

She also noticed residents making wall decorations from magazine pages, beverage cans and shower curtains with university mascots.

"I had one set of residents who stapled white bedsheet to the ceiling with Christmas lights underneath," Hane said. "It looked really cool until I told them it was a fire hazard, and they had to take it down."

Many students shop at thrift stores and antique stores for furniture and decorations. "It depends on how comfortable you are with being thrifty," Hane said.

HOW WILL IT ALL FIT?

A little bit of ingenuity can save a lot of space in dorms. "One of the trends here, because the rooms are

so small, is that we're allowed to loft our beds, and people put big futons and bean bags underneath," Atencio said.

Ammons had a similar space-saving tip. "If you have both beds pointing out from one corner, you can build a corner unit: a wood square with legs on it," she said.

If you build the legs long enough, you can even push the beds underneath the table to save more space, creating extra storage or display space. Another space-saving trend Atencio has noticed is, "buying cool little storage units."

The best place to shop for such items?

"I think everybody who lives here shops at Target. It's a bad store, because you go there to buy one thing for your room and walk out with 10," Atencio said.

Debra Fritz, national Target home decor consultant, said the retailer is aiming for the college student market, which is why its dorm-room products are so popular.

"They literally bring in merchandise strictly geared for somebody going back to college," she said.

Other items most dorm residents could not live without include refrigerators, microwaves and stereos. How do these appliances fit in the rooms? Stacking.

"Always buy a smaller microwave than refrigerator," said Hane, who once tried unsuccessfully to help a resident with a huge microwave stack it on top of a smaller one.

As far as furniture goes, Fritz said the butterfly chair and the inflatable chair are popular; both are easy to pack and store.

"You can't ship furniture to school, but the inflatable chairs can

fold up and fit in a suitcase, and the butterfly chairs are also easy to transport," she said.

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT IT

Some dorm-life must-haves that easily can be forgotten include shower caddies and shower shoes.

"If you don't have a shower caddy, your soap will mold into the shower; it's really gross," Hane said. A basic shower caddy costs around \$5 or \$10.

Shower shoes (flip-flops)

can cost as little as two or three dollars at a drug store. Also, if you are not used to showering in a semi-public area, you may want to bring a bathrobe. They also come in handy if you have to walk down the hall from the bathroom to your room.

Most college dorm rooms, including those at CU-Springs, have extra-long twin-sized mattresses that use longer sheets. While sheets usually can be ordered through the mail from your college, you often can find more stylish sheets at stores. Extra-long comforters also are available, but a regular twin comforter will work just as well.

Other important items

include a laundry bag, Fritz says, especially if it is a cool color, plus a message board for your door so friends can leave notes.

Also, make sure to bring dishes: A plate, cup, bowl and some silverware should work for most purposes.

Many students bring computers, stereos and televisions to college. One caution: 4-foot speakers or a big-screen television may be too large for dorm rooms. And the chances of expensive equipment getting broken or damaged in a dorm room are higher than they are at home.

Here's a real tough college

By Tanika White
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LEXINGTON, Mo. - As Lindsey Royal dreams in the early morning darkness, her crisp outfit hangs tidily in the closet, picked out specially for this, the first day of school.

Everything matches perfectly. Baggy pants in pea and olive green. Matching jacket with the sleeves rolled just so. T-shirt the color of stirred mud.

When she arises, shortly before the sun, Royal, 16, will have barely 30 minutes to make her bed, clean her room, brush her teeth, dress, tuck her hair under her hat and carry her laundry downstairs.

It is a race she will have to perfect. Or else.

"Let's go! Let's go!" screams Sarah Martinez, 19, of Lawrence, Kan., as she strides through the Wentworth Military Academy hall where Royal and her hall mates scurry to get ready. "What is wrong with you? You know what time you're supposed to be downstairs! Why do I have to keep telling you?"

Royal sucks in her breath, throws her laundry bag over her right shoulder and steps out into the cold hallway, joining a single file line with the other new cadets. The Rat line.

All 16 Rats are wearing the same camouflage outfit, down to billowing pant legs tucked snugly into ungiving boots. Every left arm swings in time with every right leg, hurried and purposeful.

"Move it!" Martinez yells, as the recruits in training thunder downstairs to stand outside, side by side with their feet shoulder-width apart and their hands clasped flat behind their backs.

Boot tops are glistening. Laces are tucked.

Hearts are pounding. It is 0620 hours, and Royal and 239 other cadets, both old and new, will do more before school starts than most students do all day.

Wentworth Military Academy and Junior College, founded in 1880, is one of the nation's oldest military schools. Students as young as 12 and as old as college sophomores come to the school to be enveloped in order, discipline, respect and honor.

In addition to a rigid military structure, the school prides itself on strong academics that guide 95 percent of its graduates to college.

Classes start each day at 0800 hours - 8:00 a.m. An optional before-school study period and a mandatory evening study period eventually become as

habitual for the cadets as reveille and taps.

And a tightly made bed with unwrinkled sheets and hospital corners begins to look as normal as a messy room used to.

It all begins on the first day, which for this year's students was one week ago. Three ear-piercing cannon blasts, not bells or buzzers, sounded the start of the school year.

That's appropriate, said John Tubbert, 17, a junior from Leawood, Kan., who has been at Wentworth two years.

"It has power. It has prestige. It's

real symbolism of the start of a real military school."

Cadets had to be on campus at least four days before the official start of school so the Old Boys - cadets enrolled longer than one semester - could train the Rats in the Wentworth way.

It's not your traditional learn-

your-way-from-class-to-class,

m e m o r i z e - y o u r - l o c k e r -

combination, get-on-the-yellow-

bus-and-go-home school.

There's the marching. The

commands. Learning who

outranks whom. How to salute,

when to salute. The cleaning,

folding, straightening, polishing.

Early to bed, early to rise. Push-

ups, sit-ups and jogging. Incessant

yelling.

Just the repetition of it all.

"Elf!" Pause. "Elf!" Pause. "Elf!

Aight!"

(Which is "left, left, left, right" to

civilians.)

"Elf!" Pause. "Elf!" Pause. "Elf!

Aight!"

The school brings them in a few days early so that by the first day of classes, Rats should have the routine down pat. It isn't easy, though. Many

tears are shed and tempers flare in

the learning process.

"I was shocked," Kim Kachner, a college freshman from St. Joseph, Mich., said of her first few days. "I didn't realize how military it would be."

Everybody was doing things I didn't understand. I called my mom and cried."

And why not? Cadets shower

communally, there are no doors on

bathroom stalls, and all the niceties

of home are long gone.

"Do you remember television?"

Kachner asked one of her fellow

Rats. "That thing that looks like a

box with pictures on it?"

David Nevels, 12, of Blue

Springs, Mo., was so disoriented

and homesick on the first day of

classes, he couldn't bring himself

to eat breakfast with his company.

"I'm just not hungry," the

seventh-grader shrugged, as scores

of other cadets scarfed their chow

in relative silence, save scraping,

chomping and

slurping.

Homesickness is not nurtured at

Wentworth. Even on the first day.

Alan Buckrucker of Kansas City

is the same age as Nevels and in the

same

company - Foxtrot. But he is an

Old Boy, having been at

Wentworth since the sixth grade.

Though he is smaller, he has the

right to order Nevels around.

And does.

Nevels doesn't like it much.

Buckrucker revels in it.

Buckrucker says he will make no

allowances for Nevels. "I just don't

believe in it (homesickness)," said

Buckrucker, the product of

two military parents. "Everybody

has to get away from their parents

at some point."

School officials say homesickness

usually wears off after two or three

weeks, once the routine becomes

second nature and the Rats bond

with their

Rat buddies - walking in line

together, getting reprimanded

together and memorizing their Rat

facts together.

"I (sir//ma'am) am (sir//ma'am) lower (sir//ma'am) than (sir//ma'am) a (sir//ma'am) snake's (sir//ma'am) belly (sir//ma'am)," is one line of five pages of facts Rats must recall on demand. Once the facts are memorized, Rats earn their hat brass, which gives them Old Boy privileges for one day.

They can call their parents, drink soda and talk to other Old Boys at meals. They can travel from point to point without having to walk the Rat line - a narrow line with sharp corners. And they don't have to ask permission to speak, scratch or otherwise move while standing in formation.

If a Rat breaks one of these rules before earning the hat brass, physical training usually is the immediate punishment.

"Give me 10!" company commander Martinez yelled to Brooke Staples, 15, of Laurel, Miss., who forgot she was supposed to call the hall to attention at first sight of her commander.

"One, ma'am ... Two, ma'am" puffed Staples, who as a high school freshman is one of the youngest girls ever admitted to Wentworth. Girls usually aren't admitted until their junior year.

Just as Staples reached push-up number 10, Martinez walked away, missing the Rat's barely audible "Permission to recover, ma'am?"

Five seconds went by. Six, seven.

"Did she speak?" Staples whispered, arms straining, cheeks flushed.