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## Piecing together the perfect dorm room

Personalize your space with color, comfort and organization

By Susan Hall

Special to The Courier-Journal

College freshmen soon will move into dorms that may feature 56-inch plasma-screen TVs, microwaves on each floor and Web sites indicating how many washers are not in use.

But their rooms could have cinder-block walls, vinyl tile floors, a single light fixture and only three electrical outlets.

For two people who don't know each other to live in a space "smaller than a bedroom is an eye-opening experience," said Eric Orth, a senior accounting major at the University of Louisville.

Now a resident assistant at Threlkeld Hall with a single room, he's a big fan of the camaraderie and convenience of dorm life.

Of the room, though, he said, "It's all what you make of it."

Dorm rooms "aren't just a place anymore where you plop your stuff while you study," said Jeff Gawronski, product development manager for dormbuys.com, a Louisville-based online dorm furnishings site.



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Eric Orth, who resides at U of L's Threlkeld Hall, set up his dorm room much like a living room. (By Michael Clevenger, The C-J)

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"(Students are) realizing it doesn't have to be a drab place. They're very creative," he said.

It's also a huge market for retailers. College students spent \$3.6 billion last year on dorm and apartment furnishings, according to a 2005 survey from the National Retail Federation. That was a 38 percent increase over 2004.

The retail trade association estimates the average incoming freshman spent more than \$1,100 last year on back-to-school merchandise, including electronics.

Dorm decorating is "all about the allocation of space so that it doesn't seem like an itty-bitty cracker box," said Angie Palmer, district merchandising manager for Bed, Bath and Beyond.

Because most universities levy heavy fines for making any permanent changes, though, decorating relies on your own portable style.

So we asked some local "experts" how to create a functional yet comfortable space.

## Find a workable layout

Stacking or "bunking" beds or elevating them on lofts is the best way to save space, Gawronski said.

Orth, from Paducah, set his room up like a living room with his futon facing a TV and stereo. He said he had much the same furnishings when he had a roommate. They bunked the beds in front of the windows with one desk beside them, then had the two long walls for the second desk and futon.

Amber Hensley, a Louisville junior double-majoring in business and communications, said she likes to use the movable wardrobes at Bellarmine University as room dividers so both people have more privacy. Wardrobes backed up against the desks can separate an office space and sleeping space.

Linda Adler, extension specialist for home furnishings at the University of Kentucky, suggests students start a list at home of items they use. That includes comfortable seating.

In his room at UK, Matt Walton, a Louisville sophomore majoring in psychology, said the beds were on lofts with desks underneath. Despite their two dressers, he and his roommate added a love seat.

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"Coming in from class, you just want to collapse, and climbing up on the bed got really old after a while," he said.

Christina Diaz, a Louisville sophomore majoring in musical theater at Northern Kentucky University, said she put a lot of thought into her small bedroom. She shared a four-bedroom, two-bath suite with common area.

She decorated in greens and put flower twinkle lights around the window, but put up only two posters.

"I wanted my room at college to be very calm and uncluttered, and I think that really helped my stress level. My room in high school was always a disaster," said Diaz.

Orth said extra lighting is essential.

Rugs can warm up tile floors, but even over carpet, they can add color and define a space.

Bring in color, personality

Bedding offers an easy way to add color, Adler said.

Most dorm beds require extra-long twin bedding, which usually means buying something new.

Adler said citrus colors are popular, while Palmer said the season's hottest combo is teal, army green and pink.

Tension rods are a great way to hang curtains or other fabric without damaging walls, Palmer said.

Get organized

Items with multiple uses help maximize space. An ottoman also could provide storage as well as serve as a coffee table. Collapsible items are popular and are easier to transport, Gawronski noted.

"Grab-and-go" totes just make sense for shower and laundry items, Palmer said.

She said bed lifters are popular for creating under-bed storage, as well as over-

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## Deck the walls

Adhesives that don't damage walls let you hang posters or tapestries.

Walton said he and his roommate hung posters of the Red Hot Chili Peppers.

"I also wanted college to be a time when I blossom intellectually, so I hung a poster of Tiananmen Square -- for social justice -- and a picture of Einstein," he said.

Hensley also likes to keep family photos nearby.

"You know, sometimes you just miss your mom," she explained.

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