

John Boccacino:

Hello and welcome back to The 'Cuse Conversations Podcast. I'm John Boccacino, senior internal communications specialist at Syracuse University.

Amie Freling:

The number one thing is to talk to your roommate, feel out your roommate, see what they like, see if they even care what the room decor looks like and then maybe decide on what your interest. And I tell everyone to head to Pinterest or just Google dorm rooms, or maybe it's just an extension of your room decor at home. I do find that a lot of these dorm rooms, I don't think you need to have a big wallet or a big budget, or you don't have to do a lot of work to make your dorm room special to you.

John Boccacino:

Our podcast guest today is Amie Freling. And we are thrilled to welcome her on The 'Cuse Conversations Podcast. We are getting ready for back to school at the college level. Syracuse University has our welcome week coming up later on in August. And who better to get parents and students alike ready for going back to campus than Amie Freling, who is going to be sharing her insights with us about decorating a dorm room, a topic that is near and dear to both the students' and the parents' hearts as we approach the start of the academic year here at Syracuse. Amie, always a pleasure to talk to you. Thanks for joining us.

Amie Freling:

Thanks, John. What an honor to be invited on part of this podcast. Being a 1989 grad from the VPA, I have a soft spot for Syracuse. And being an illustration and a design major, it was such a blast to contribute to this podcast. I'm very excited. Thanks for having me.

John Boccacino:

To give our listeners some background, Amie, she's a fantastic creative mind. She's an artist, she's a designer. She really has an eye for taking spaces that might be considered blah and making them fancy and customizable to suit your personality. And Amie, tell us a little bit about your studio that you run here in the Rochester area.

Amie Freling:

I am an interior designer and an artist, and I wear several hats. I'm also a social media influencer and home decor blogger. I just have a space in Rochester, actually Fairport, I teach classes in design. I am also fortunate to be one of Better Homes & Gardens style makers, and also HGTV Magazine Style Set. So basically what I post on my social media. And I try to find trending designs and colors and what's cool and I like to share that with everyone on my blog, memehill.com.

John Boccacino:

Just so our listeners know too, Amie, isn't just somebody who talks the talk. She walks the walk with college aged children. I know you had a daughter that went to Ithaca and you went through that experience. So take us into the mindset, Amie. What is it like from a parent's perspective getting ready to send your son or daughter off to school and thinking about making their dorm room home?

Amie Freling:

Right, college today is a lot different from when I moved into Brewster Boland back in 1985. I brought a tapestry and a couple of milk crates and called it a day. Nowadays there are sites for dorm decor. All the stores have back to college decor. We never had that growing up. So I think there's a lot more for these kids out here. And I don't think you need to have a big wallet or a big budget, or you don't have to do a lot of work to make your dorm room special to you.

John Boccacino:

It can be an extremely daunting process in general sending your son or daughter away. It could be their first time away from home. They could be traveling great distances to go to Syracuse University. So there's a lot of uncertainty when it comes to sending your child away for their freshman year. How and where should parents and students start when it comes to the decorating process?

Amie Freling:

Well, we're fortunate enough that we have FaceTime now, right? There's no more writing letters and all that stuff. So we can keep in touch with the kids. But as for where to start in a dorm room, I think it's getting in touch with the school and finding out maybe the size of the dorm room, what furniture is included in the dorm room. You don't want to pack up your desk when it's included. Or is there a nightstand? And those are the kind of things that you really want to start with. You want to see the room probably in the tour of the school before, you can take pictures. And nowadays they have the dorm rooms already decorated and you can get some great ideas. But I think it's about starting with the size and knowing what you can bring and what's supplied for you.

John Boccacino:

And that's a really important point to harp on, the fact that we at Syracuse there are certain things that you can't control. The rooms are what they are. There are certain regulations and parameters. So please make sure you reach out to the Office of Residence Life wherever your son or daughter, daughter is staying, whether it's on the Mount, whether it's at Brewster, Boland, and Brockway, or Sadler & Lawrinson to make sure that you're in compliance with those rules and regulations. Once you find out what you can and cannot do to transform your dorm room, I'm guessing there's a theme that you might want to go along. Where do your thoughts lie when it comes to coming up with a theme and designing the motif, if you will, for the room?

Amie Freling:

Right. So most kids don't share rooms at home. But some kids do. So I feel like when you get a roommate, the number one thing is to talk to your roommate, feel out your roommate, see what they like, see if they even care what the room decor looks like, and then maybe decide on what your interest. And I tell everyone to head to Pinterest or just Google dorm rooms, or maybe it's just an extension of your room decor at home. So there's lots of different places that you can go for inspirations. I do find that a lot of these dorm rooms, they start with bedding. Maybe you're out shopping and you see this great bedding that you absolutely love and maybe that's the starting point. Or maybe it's the school colors, maybe it's the orange and blue. Those are just kind of the starting points that I say to start with. But definitely talk to your roommate and you got to share that idea.

John Boccacino:

You can never, and especially for the freshman and the first year students that are embarking on this Syracuse University journey for the first time, you can never have enough orange and blue in your dorm room to decorate.

Amie Freling:

And I have tips that I can share that I'll be sharing later on in the podcast about inexpensive ways to make a big impact, where to go, how to reuse and upcycle things. I am the queen of DIY, so it doesn't always have to be expensive.

John Boccacino:

Yeah, let's go down that path a little bit here, because I think there's... And you know this way better than I do, but whenever we're helping out with Syracuse Welcome, you always see that there can be two types of parents with their students. One who sends them with everything in the kitchen sink, and one that sends them with just enough to get by for the fall semester. What are your best pieces of advice when it comes to what to bring with you and how to take that dorm room and try to make it a home from day one?

Amie Freling:

I think the key in a small space, and this is not in dorm rooms, but these are apartments, any kind of living is finding multipurpose pieces. So I bought my daughter storage cube ottomans. So you always have your friends hanging out in your dorm room, and if they're not sitting on your desk chair or your bed, where are they going to sit, on the floor? Storage cubes are a great way that you could store off season clothes or extra sheets and bedding and then have seating for friends. Also consider things like lamps. If you need a lamp for your desk, one that has a USB charger built into it, there's that kind of stuff. Closet organizing, hanging shoe racks rather than the... The real estate in the college dorm closet is quite small, so go vertical. Stuff like that. Rolling carts are great, the craft rolling carts. Say you're going to bring a coffee maker or you want to put your printer somewhere. You can store it on that rolling cart, and then you have all those drawers in there. So those are definitely ways to find multipurpose in every single square inch, you need to consider about that real estate, because you need that.

John Boccacino:

Let me tell you, you're preaching to the choir when it comes to making the most of the space. I had a split double in Saddle and the most valuable piece of advice I ever got was invest in cinder blocks to put under the bed to basically quadruple the storage space. You'd get those lock and load Tupperware storage bins you could slide under there with all your different spare clothing. You could make the most of the storage space, because I think it can be intimidating when you walk in and you see your room.

Amie Freling:

Yeah, and having your desk and all your bathroom accessories. And even if you're going to set up a little coffee maker, whether or not you have a fridge or microwave combo, you'll have food and snacks. You're basically living in a little tiny house with a person.

John Boccacino:

Now we've gone through one of the most important life hacks for the dorm room challenge of going vertical and really working within the space that the room presents itself. How about color? What are

some ways to add pizzazz? Because a lot of the rooms have your typical white walls. They might be a beige outlined closet. They're kind of lacking the bright, vibrant color. So where do we go with color schemes to make things really pop?

Amie Freling:

When I first walked into my daughter's college dorm room, I was mortified. Usually I'm really positive and I'm like, "Oh, it's going to be great. This is going to be excellent." And I walked in and I was speechless and usually I'm not without words. So it really looked like a cinder block. I said, "Maybe we can paint this." So I actually called Residence Life and they told me that I could paint the room. There were approved colors, I couldn't go crazy. So I painted the room. I also used things like removable wallpaper, which before we never had that, but now there's removable wallpaper. And her desk was from the '60s and it had how many years of coffee mugs and stuff and stains. So we used removable wallpaper on the desk to add color. Tapestries, nowadays you can get... Jerseys, hang jerseys for colors. Your bedding. Whether or not you have window treatments or anything. Now there's even magnetic curtain rods. There's so many ways to add the comfort creatures of home into a dorm room. Also, I think an area rug is huge. You're coming in from the shower, you're getting dressed and having a rug from home or a nice clean rug or something that adds a pop a color on the floor is really game changing I think when it comes to decor wise.

John Boccacino:

Carpets and rugs really can make everything feel very homey, feel very spacey and feel like it's your own place. And that's the most important part we continue to hammer home here on the podcast as we talk with Amie Freling is you want to make this feel like home. So the more you can make your residence hall and your dorm room home, the better. Accent pieces too play a large role in making the dorm rooms feel comfy and feel cozy. What to you are the most important accent pieces for a dorm room?

Amie Freling:

Well, there's a lot. Nowadays with Etsy and all these websites, you can do everything from take your high school photos and turn them into magnets and temporary wall sticks, to there's a site out there that takes a photo of your dog and turns it into an accent pillow. I mean, who wouldn't love that? Your furry friend that you're missing from home and you have a pillow to put on the bed. So there's stuff like that. You could do a photo collage. Parents make quilts from high school t-shirts. There's so many great things that you could bring from home or even your new school, anything. So there's lots of things. There's flags. Tons and tons of decor, bedding. Everything's specialized now. So it's wonderful. To have a Syracuse bedding would be amazing.

John Boccacino:

Yeah and let's segue that into that bed space. We've already given you one little tip and trick about the cinder blocks to give more storage underneath the bed. What are some other best practices for the bed itself to make it feel comfy, cozy and a home-like atmosphere?

Amie Freling:

So for us, my daughter Chloe, kids sit up in bed. They're in their bed. Their bed is like a sofa now in a dorm room. So for us, we went to Amazon and for \$75 I bought a twin headboard and it sounds like it's a big vanity thing, but the headboard was high, it was upholstered. And we used heavy duty zip ties, and we ziptied it around the bed, which allowed her to sit up in bed, which was amazing. So that was one

great thing for the bed. Also, if you don't use the cinder blocks, places like Bed Bath & Beyond and Target, they have those bed risers. They're basically like large oversized solo cups that you put under the chair. You can raise the bed, you can adjust it. Collapsible. Any kind of the bins you were talking about, laundry baskets, all your duffle bags that you carried all your clothes and everything can get stored in there.

And for Chloe's dorm, when we raised the bed, seeing all that stuff was an eyesore. So I had used very inexpensive panels that I bought at Home Goods, they were like \$15 a pair, and I just folded them up and tucked them under, like it was an extra long bed skirt. And then she just had all that stuff covered and it looked really, really nice. Also, those buddy pillows are amazing to sit up in bed. And having really good bedding and blankets and even a mattress topper makes those college dorm room beds feel comfortable.

John Boccacino:

One of the questions that we're going to get from parents who happen to be listening, they want to know, "Okay, this all sounds great and lovely. But how much?" Cost is always an issue. So break down a couple of different price point options for us. And I guess we'll start off with this. What do you think is a practical budget to be spending for these dorm room accessories?

Amie Freling:

Well, aside from all the shampoo and stuff and the necessities like the list of your computer stuff, I think you can get away with a couple hundred dollars. There's lots of different ways to save money. I'm all about upcycling. Say you need a nightstand or say you repaint a piece of furniture or say you find something at the thrift shop that you want, or a rug, there's so many ways to upcycle and to use even your stuff from home. You don't have to go out and buy everything new. Maybe you want to bring your bedding or your pillows from home or stuff that makes you feel comfortable at home. Even going to thrift shops in Syracuse. We're in Rochester. I go to the thrift shop, I find tons of Syracuse sweatshirts and decor and that kind of stuff. Lots of ways to get the design elements in without spending money. And then there's the other end of the spectrum where you can spend a couple thousand dollars buying appliances and refrigerators and microwaves and having espresso makers and all that kind of stuff. You can really go to town.

John Boccacino:

You want to stick to a budget that works for you. And clearly, if it's going to be stressing you out to spend X amount of money, stick within that budget, have that conversation with your son or daughter about what they want to do for their dorm room. But this is great to know that there's great tips out there. There's ways you can make your dorm room your own.

I do want to ask you a question. You mentioned this earlier, and I think it's a fascinating little psychological experiment. Where do you stand with bringing things from home to decorate your dorm room and maybe having part of that past with you versus some students want to just forge out and create a brand new identity and move forward and not be looking in the past?

Amie Freling:

Well, I think that's like anything, a lot of times starting over in college, you're starting out fresh, new friends, a new view on things. And I think it's all very personal. Some people want to have, like my daughter, the one person she was going to miss was our dog. So we made sure that she had pictures of

him around. And she wanted to start fresh in other areas. I wanted new wall decor or an inspiring bulletin board. Now, there's all sorts of bulletin boards and dry erase boards that have inspiration. We actually found rub decals and we picked out an inspirational quote. So I think it all needs to be very personal. Some people want to bring their high school jerseys, some people want to start fresh.

But it's all about making your child feel comfortable in their space and being the best person that they can become. And I feel like especially in the pandemic when my daughter was in school, she was in her dorm room, that was her space. She needed to feel comfortable. At the end of the day, she was in her dorm pretty much all day studying and it needed to be comfortable for her. And I felt good sending her off knowing that she had the comforts of home and she had photos of her friends and her family and homemade cookies from home. So that was good. But there's lots of different ways. And it's all about finding your comfort zone because you might like a different style from your roommate and that's okay. It's about you feeling good about yourself as a student.

John Boccacino:

I want to go to the other side of the spectrum. What are some of the biggest mistakes you think you've seen students and parents make when it comes to decorating their dorm room?

Amie Freling:

Well, it's about bringing too much to school. Thinking you need absolutely everything all on that first day. It's bringing a lot of food in and bringing lots of clothes. My daughter likes shoes. I said to her, "Chloe, you don't need 20 pairs of shoes. You're going to wear your sneakers. You got flip flops. You need your boots in the winter. And when you do something or go out to dinner, a pair of shoes." So I think it's really paring down and deciding exactly what you need right away. And I think I would start there. The dorm room can evolve over time. You might find new interests or maybe you go to a concert and you get a poster or maybe you like something different. So there might be some changes and it can be an evolving thing. And you might just bring something you're like, "You know what? I just really don't need all that, Mom."

So the bookstore, you don't need to bring five packs of pens anymore. So I think it's just finding the essentials and starting from there. And there's always Thanksgiving break or Amazon. I didn't even touch on Amazon. Kids can start decorating their rooms even before they graduate from high school. Start an Amazon wishlist, or maybe you start a wishlist at Target and for graduation people buy you dorm stuff or dorm decor. Maybe they buy you a new suitcase or that rug or the new bedding that you want. So there's lots of different ways that you can always add to the room. It's better to add than to subtract.

John Boccacino:

Really great bits of advice to take in for parents and for students who are getting ready for a Syracuse Welcome for the fall semester. You can go to memehill.com to find out more information about what Amie has to offer. There's all their social media links, including a fantastic Instagram following. We are talking, of course, with a social media influencer here on the podcast. And Amie, before I let you go, I have to find out how in the world did you get interested in this line of work?

Amie Freling:

It was very crazy. I jumped on Instagram, maybe, I don't know, 15, 16 years ago when my daughter was in middle school and she wanted to get on Instagram. And I said, "Well, Dad and I talked about it and

you can get on social media as long as I get on and I see what's going on." And so for months I was watching these tweens post Starbucks and all these fun things. And I said, "I'm just going to start posting what I do every day. Where I go, what I buy, what I like." And it basically just snowballed. It was at a time where Instagram was relatively new and I caught the eye of Home Goods. I would shop in Home Goods and I would tag them and they said, "We love your style and we'd love to share." And then I became an ambassador for Home Goods. And I still blog for Home Goods today, 15 years later.

So it's just following what you like and being you and sharing your style. And I just love it. And I also was fortunate enough to redo a dorm room at Syracuse University at my sorority, Kappa Kappa Gamma. We redid the president's room and that was just a white box and we made it quite spectacular. That's also on my blog. You can search up Syracuse sorority room and dorm room, and you get lots of ideas. Also, I have a really helpful checklist for those going to school. So you know that you don't forget anything. There's all the essentials and then some extra stuff on there, and loads of inspiration. And feel free, absolutely feel free to reach out to me via email or social media with any questions. And I love, love, love sharing my followers' work. So if you have dorm room questions or you want to share how you decorated your dorm room, I'd love to share it with others.

John Boccacino:

It's been a fascinating conversation here on a topic that has evolved quite a bit since we were Syracuse University students out there. Amie Freling with memehill.com has been our guest. Amie, we really appreciate you making the time, sharing your tips with us. Keep up the great work and thanks as always.

Amie Freling:

Oh this is so much fun. I'm so excited for everyone to get back to school and enjoy campus and have fun on the quad. It is pretty much the best four years of your life. I know there's a lot to look forward to after graduation, but nothing's quite as special as spending time at Syracuse. Thanks again for including me. Go orange.

John Boccacino:

Thanks for checking out the latest installment of The 'Cuse Conversations Podcast. My name is John Boccacino, signing off for The 'Cuse Conversations Podcast.