

## Is the Term “Master Bedroom” Politically Incorrect?

Designers, architects, and real estate agents say it's time the call the room something else.

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What do "primary bedroom," "owner's suite," and "master bedroom" all have in common? More than one might think. These distinct real estate terms all refer to the same domestic space: the largest bedroom in a home, likely with an en-suite bath. Of the three, "master bedroom" is the one currently being reexamined, leading many industry professionals to phase it out of their lexicons altogether.

The Black Lives Matter movement, which was reinvigorated this summer following the murder of George Floyd, has led many fields to face internal reckonings of their own. Companies, managers, and employees are considering how to create inclusive work environments and dismantle systems of white supremacy within their respective industries.

Design and architecture are not exempt from these conversations, especially as a field that's [predominately white](#). Many believe that an important step is removing loaded language from the vocabulary of the institution. "Master bedroom" is a [problematic term](#) for its ties to slavery, implying a concept of dominance and ownership with which a modern-day room need not be imbued. Some claim "master" just refers to size rather than a slave owner's quarters. Still others acknowledge this legacy of the term, but question whether a linguistic update is an important use of time and energy—might [addressing other areas of racism](#) and treating domestic workers with dignity take priority over a terminology refresh?

Though there is no singular consensus, leaders in the field are reconsidering their language choices. We asked designers, architects, and real estate professionals to weigh in.

“While there are certain benign connotations of the word master (e.g. in academia, a Master's degree), the more typical association with the word 'master' is a person who controls or dominates another person, which is an incredibly negative connotation and one that should not be perpetuated in the nomenclature of real estate. Words do matter and NYRAC [New York Residential Agent Continuum] encourages every residential agent to discontinue using master, employing the words 'primary bedroom' instead.” —**Cathy Taub, founding chairperson of [NYRAC](#)**”

"I think it's great that people are acknowledging things in this nation's history, but as a firm, we are still calling it the master bedroom. I am an African American woman, and I feel like we still have a lot further to go with recognizing our nation's past. I get it, but is it ultimately enough? Changing vocabulary is a baby step, but I don't feel it's a step that is needed to right wrongs. There's still a lot more awareness and healing that needs to be done." —**Tiffany Brooks, principal of [Tiffany Brooks Interiors](#)**

"In some ways, the basic idea and program of a singular hierarchical 'master suite' has become outdated in modern home design. Instead, modern-day clients are often interested in exploring a more democratic and consistent approach to these spaces that may extend beyond the singular. As a result, we are finding ourselves identifying these spaces as 'primary suites,' as it is not unusual to have more than one." —**Duan Tran, partner at [KAA Design](#)**

"I think eliminating gender bias and systemic racism requires looking at vocabulary. If we take a look at language and how it's been shifting over the past few years—we ask people for their pronouns now—why wouldn't those changes be reflected in the words that are related to design and architecture? As a bi-racial woman, I believe language is super powerful and should be used to uplift one another and support each person in our society. If it is not doing just that, then it should be changed, no exceptions." —**Sarah A. Abdallah, founder and CEO of [Functional Creative Design](#)**

"I don't think that it should be changed because it was never a pejorative statement. The term master bedroom refers to size—it has everything to do with square feet and multiples, it has absolutely nothing to do with racial anything. For anyone changing it, I think that's silly. And nobody believes that Black lives matter more than I do." —**Elaine Griffin, owner and principal of [Elaine Griffin Interior Design](#)**

"We can call it whatever we want, but it's the behaviors and the dynamic of the way that household is being run which is ultimately more important. That's really the bottom line. I think people want to solve things with words, and then break the law with behavior. Where does the au pair sleep when she or he is living in the house with you? The servants quarters? I mean, we have to talk about all those words. The labels don't matter—behaviors matter, intention matters, integrity matters, morals and ethics matter. I think the naming of things can be a real cover up." —**Leyden Lewis, founder and creative director of [Leyden Lewis Design Studio](#)**