



FINDING YOUR *style*

With interior design, choosing a distinctive style can mean just working with what a room offers.

BY CATHERINE FANTAUZZI

Good interior design and decorating is as much about practicality, comfort and detail as it is about style and aesthetics. A designer who is asked to improve a home or to plan one from scratch would first try to find out exactly how the occupants live to establish their style, and then determine the best ways to apply that style through decorating.

Choosing a style can be just as intimidating as selecting colour schemes for your home. But, just as with colour, there are certain criteria to follow. Look at what you have now and note what pleases you, trying to determine why it does. Think about why a particular room gives you pleasure.

Some people look hard for that indefinable style, and while they cannot adequately describe it, they can recognize it

when they see it. It may be something as simple as a fireplace mantel that immediately gives a feeling of pleasure.

Unless you are sure of your decorating style, you should become aware of whether an interior space already has some distinctive style or feel. This does not mean that you should furnish it exactly to a period, however beautiful it might be and however much your budget is.

With any house you live in, whatever its architectural detail, the style is really an attitude of the mind, a sense of scale and proportion, an understanding of the overall feel of the surroundings, and a sensitivity both to what best fits those surroundings and your needs.

There are certain common sense factors to consider. For example, country houses

look best when they are obviously geared to country living. Floors, for instance, seem more fittingly rural when they are covered with wood, brick or stone instead of linoleum. Although a country style can offer a certain charm in an urban house, the opposite does not apply – a sophisticated, urban, minimalist look is not particularly suited to a rural home. That's because the idea of country houses is to make people feel relaxed and comfortable, surrounded by natural elements.

There is usually a certain characteristic in each room that helps to set its style. If, for example, a room is heavily

beamed, with a low ceiling, it would be best to select a warm-coloured, eclectic style rather than choose clean-lined, modern furniture.

Another room might be dark. In this case,

it's best to make the room warm and cozy. It also could be made brighter through the use of pale, warm colours and plenty of artificial lighting.

What about a room with a wall of windows and a

great view? This space should not be overcrowded with large pieces, but kept simple so it will not attract attention away from the view outside.

To add style to a room that is boxy and without character of its own, dress up the walls and make the windows more interesting with window treatments. You also could add crown moldings, wainscoting, an interesting floor covering, or unusual artwork.

Whatever the nature of a room, look for any hint that can help determine the appropriate style for decoration. This hint might lie within the room itself, but if the room says nothing to you, it may be possible to find it among decorative inspirations from the past. The styles of many different periods can be created through the use of traditional motifs, objects and art from the past, in conjunction with the best materials of the present.

Up until the 16th century, style evolved



Window dressings and crown moldings can add character to a room, as can interesting fixtures.



DID YOU HEAR...?

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only within the borders of individual countries. But through the voyages of the early explorers and an increase in literacy and trade, an interest arose in classical structures and a new understanding of construction was gained, leading to design innovations. New woods, skills, techniques, domestic items and fashions were introduced. With this enlightenment came the naming of different styles.

Trying to describe exactly what each distinct style looks like would probably take several hundred pages. Some interior decorating styles or themes are popular. Here is a very brief description of the characteristic features of each.

1. There are “national” styles such as English, English Country, American Country, American South West, French, French Country, Italian, Caribbean and Oriental.

2. There are “period” styles, named for a particular era: Gothic – pointed arch and vault shapes, sculpted religious details; Renaissance – rediscovery of the classical and symmetrical details of ancient Rome and Greece; Restoration, Regence, Directoire – decorations are influenced by the discovery of ancient Pompeii, the division of walls into cornices; Federal, Empire – fluted pilasters, pediments, neoclassical columns, elliptical fanlights, and tracery.

3. Monarch styles such as Louis XIV, XV, XVI in France; and in Britain, the Stuarts – William and Mary, Queen Anne, Georgian and Victorian.

4. There are styles named for particular furniture designers, such as Chippendale, Hepplewhite, Adam Brothers and Sheraton.

There are also general terms of particular styles of furniture and decoration,

including: Baroque – elaborate and excessive wood carving and decoration, as in the spirally twisted columns in St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome; Rococo – curves and shells; Neoclassic – simple Greek/Roman classical forms; Art Nouveau – abandonment of all historical references, extensive use of curved contours, and extravagant, twisted ornaments, based on forms drawn from nature; Art Deco – luxurious surface effects and exquisite ornamentation, streamlined, incorporating tropical woods, animal skins and archaeological discoveries from Egypt; William Morris/Arts & Crafts Movement – enthusiasm towards bringing nature into design, concentrating on fine hand-crafted furniture and accessories; Charles Rennie Mackintosh – abstract and geometric design; Bauhaus/Le Corbusier/Modernism – stark lines, uncluttered, glass-walled, limited use of colour, tubular steel furniture;



A Mediterranean theme is used in this kitchen. Above, simplicity and symmetry define this living room style.

Mini-malism – the art of living with the least, as in traditional Japanese interiors; Post-Modernism – the presence and influence of the past on contemporary spaces and elements of design; and High Tech – emphasis on advanced technologies and visible displays of elements of science, computer-oriented themes, aerospace and automated industrial items.

Note that pure decoration in a single period is fairly predictable. Most people, including professional designers, are more at ease with an exciting and varied,



A country theme can be easy to achieve.

eclectic look.

The eclectic (borrowing from many sources) style is a real art form. What is needed for success in this style is a balanced combination of form, scale and colour in order to mix period styles of furniture, paintings, sculptures, materials, objects and lighting to create a whole that is completely harmonious. 🍁

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Photos courtesy: Room Recipes, Benjamin Moore Paints