

Traditions with a Twist

When merging classic with contemporary interior design, throw away the rule book.

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What's the key to unlocking a bold style that is out-of-the-box?

Mix it up.

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Contemporary design — from soap dishes to sofas — is more ubiquitous and affordable than ever before. While that's not a bad thing, it's all too common to see living rooms that say very little about the people living inside of them. But take heart. It's never too late to infuse your home with character. And the good news is that it's not as pricey as you might think to create a remarkable interior that is anything but cookie-cutter.

So what's the key to unlocking a bold style that is out-of-the-box? Mix it up. Traditional pieces can be delightfully fresh when you use them to balance or soften contemporary acquisitions. Adding a touch of modern can give a classic room renewed confidence and wit. The first step? Throw out tired rules about which styles and eras are allowed together.

To get started:

1. Take inventory of the furniture, artwork and decorative items you own and love.
2. Preserve and revive heirloom pieces.
3. Collect art — contemporary, abstract, Old World, classic — whatever you like. Keep your eye out for one large statement piece.
4. Collect what you love, both old and new, from your travels, estate sales, etc.
5. Make a design file with magazine clippings of eclectic combinations you like.

Next, here are some tricks for making changes:

Floors. For the ideal canvas, stain your wood floors deep ebony or choose a warm, neutral low-pile carpet. For a stunning statement of old-meets-new, choose a classic black-and-white tile pattern.

Walls. Paint walls pale grey or cream (perhaps with matching window treatment or woodwork), creating a clean background for special pieces. Use color on your walls as a dramatic backdrop for white or black furniture. Consider choosing an updated damask or floral wall covering as the perfect surprise in an entryway or dining room.

Wood Pieces. If it's not in prime condition, paint wooden furniture a unifying color (try white) to contrast with floors and walls.

Upholstered Pieces. Reupholster existing furniture in updated fabrics (European and commercially designed patterns, new vinyl offerings, large-scale contemporary floral prints or animal prints). Use bold, unexpected textiles for smaller pieces such as chairs and ottomans.

Light. Frame the view with neutral draperies on metal rods, with or without Roman or natural woven shades. Make greater use of natural light where possible or consider recessed ceiling fixtures or wall sconces. Renew classic ginger jar lamps with updated circular shades and architectural finials.

Accents. Marry antique tables, secretaries and chests with 20th century pieces such as an Eames lounge chair or a streamlined sofa. Mix finishes using metallic, wood, fabric, stone, glass or mirrors. Refresh your space by pairing down collections and unnecessary accessories. For collections you truly love, group items together for an interesting focal point.

Finally, don't dismay if things never seem finished. That's another rule you can let go of because an interesting home is inevitably a work in progress. Have fun with yours! ❖

