

ASK THE DESIGNER: Defining Your Style

By Jean Bisnaire
Niche Decor

?I love to read design and décor magazines but I don't always understand the vocabulary that they use. Can you please help to explain what some of the different styles are??

Magazines and books can be a great source of information and inspiration, but you're right ? it's often expected that the reader will already have an understanding of the terminology being used. There are a ton of widely differing styles, all of them with a history and vast amount of applications. The following is a breakdown of the five most frequently utilized styles that I encounter in my daily practice:

Modern: There is a common misconception that, in design, modern refers to ?of the moment.? This is incorrect. Sometimes called ?midcentury modern,? this style refers to a look that was created during a specific period of time: the 1920s-1950s. Use of natural materials such as wood, leather, teak and linen are prominent. Molded plywood and plastic is very popular in modern furniture, as well as polished metal. Furniture is very open and raised off the floor allowing for an airy feeling. We often describe a modern look as retro. Think: Mad Men.

Contemporary: Unlike modern style, contemporary style is ever changing. It's fluid. It refers to what is popular and being used right now. Contemporary design can be very eclectic for that reason, because it is ever changing and borrows pieces and styles from all different eras. Right now a contemporary home would incorporate straight lines, sharp corners and sleek metals and solid surfaces. There would be bold, high contrast solid colours. Finishes would include natural elements like fir and cedar or stone. Twenty years from now the contemporary look could be something completely different!

Traditional: This look takes its inspiration from the past but it's not meant to be formal and stuffy. It's really about comfort. It's warm and welcoming while hosting refined furniture, stately colours and a strong sense of order. This look is about symmetry and balance. Furniture is generally arranged in formal groupings centered around conversation. Rather than sharp angles you can expect to see soft edges and skirted furniture in a traditional space. Colours are often conservative, such as creams and taupes, and wood finishes are mainly done in rich tones. You may also see details such as statement molding and trim, exotic rugs, refined window treatments and collections of accessories such as china, figurines or books.

Transitional: These spaces blend the warm and inviting elements of traditional style with the clean profiles and streamlined look of contemporary to create a casual tailored space. Transitional rooms are often tone on tone using warm neutrals and understated patterns. Furniture consists of simple silhouettes, gentle curves and rigid lines as opposed to ornate details and carvings. Because bold colour is not generally a feature of this style, when it comes to textiles we rely on texture rather than hue: loose wovens and quilted fabrics are a beautiful addition to any transitional room. Look for natural fibers such as leather, sisal and rattan. In terms of accessories, there are usually minimal accents. Less is more.

Rustic: This particular style has become as popular in the city as it is in cottage country. This is because of its cozy natural warmth, organic shapes and textures and its connection to the outdoors ? something we often crave in our busy city lives! Elements you'd expect to see in a rustic space include barn inspired features and repurposed objects such as crates used as shelving or old horseshoes turned into towel hangers. Rustic spaces often use warm earthy colours- greens, browns, reds and grays like plants, soil and stone. Fabrics in these spaces are generally sturdier: wool, burlap, cotton and linen.

These are just a very few of the many different existing design styles. You can easily find out your taste by pulling together an inspiration book of images you're drawn to ? you'll begin to notice a theme in style preference. Remember it's about what speaks to you and what you're comfortable.

Feel free to send me your comments or questions to askjean@nichedecor.ca