

ASK THE DESIGNER

Surround Yourself with the Things You Love

By Jean Bisnaire

?I have various pieces throughout my home that have been passed down to me and have great sentimental value ? I just don't know how to incorporate them into my current décor. Help!?

This has to be one of the most common questions that I hear when meeting new clients. Pieces of furniture or decor have varying levels of sentimental value for many. ?It was the first thing we bought together? or ?we've inherited it from my in-laws? and my favourite, ?it's made of solid wood and they just don't make good furniture like this anymore?.

The way I see it, it's your life and you owe it to yourself to surround yourself with things you love and things of significance in your life. Don't keep something around because of the guilt associated with throwing it away ? there are many ways in which you can work it into your current decor.

I remember a client who had a vintage mahogany stained upright secretary desk, the kind you see at all the auction houses. She wasn't crazy about it but had a sentimental attachment to it.

Not wanting to throw it out she placed it temporarily in the living room. Five years later it still sat there untouched collecting old forgotten bills and receipts. When we decided she needed a desk in the kitchen I mentioned to her that the secretary would be the perfect thing and took it away for refinishing.

The exterior was painted in Farrow & Ball's Strong White and the inside was Farrow & Ball's Cooking Apple Green. The result was a bright rejuvenated piece of furniture that felt like it belonged again. The refreshing colours gave the desk a whole new appeal while adding character to the room not to mention a new story to tell.

Having a piece refinished or reupholstered is the quickest and easiest way to refresh and update it. You can even add surprise elements that make the piece that much more special ? for example, I had a set of a client's nightstands refinished to a darker finish for a more current look. Knowing she loved the colour red and her pair of Christian Louboutins, I had the interior of the drawers finished to match.

This touch of personality breathed new life into her nightstands and gave her a new story to tell. Consider putting a fabric with a modern pattern on an old Berger chair and you instantly have a new statement piece!

Not all vintage furniture needs to be refurbished. In today's design world, mixing the old with the new is still very much a look that has a lot of appeal. It's actually on the trend list for 2014. Contrasting vintage pieces with modern elements gives your space an eclectic and classic look which becomes distinct to your style.

A room that incorporates contemporary wallpaper or textiles in a modern palette will ensure that your heirloom dining set feels more stylish and less drab. You can even surround a traditional dining table with more modern chairs to change the feel completely.

Adding brighter, cooler colours can also help with the old musty feel.

Don't be limited by a piece's original intention of use. A dining sideboard or buffet can be just as functional in a sun room or as a media stand in a great room. A collection of vintage plates can create more of an impact hanging on the wall as art. Small collections can also be displayed as art when grouped together in shadow box frames. The possibilities are endless!

In a world of mass production, great antiques can bring an element of artistic value to the room. Think of the energy they carry and the history they have and remember how simple it can be to incorporate them into your current décor.

What are you doing to create a casual elegance to come home to?

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