

## ***Identify The Four Main Decorating Styles And Choose The One That You Love!***

"Style is fashion". Interior style is fashion for the home. We all want to embrace a decorating style that is our own. At the same time, though, we want our interior spaces to flow - to feel together. This comes through deliberate design choices.

Understanding your general decorating styles will help you when you are shopping for home furnishings. Once we connect with a general decorating style, particularly for larger furnishings like sofas and case goods, we can go on to accent and embellish our rooms with smaller furnishings and accessories influenced by different styles.

We are going to cover the main characteristics of 4 main decorating styles. These styles are:

- *Casual*
- *Formal*
- *Traditional*
- *Contemporary*

## **The Casual Style**

Casual design is comfortable and homey, and elements from this style are easily incorporated into other comfortable styles such as Shabby Chic, Rustic, Cottage, French Country and American Country.

With a focus on comfort, a casual room is homespun, not fussy. These interiors are inviting, but never luxurious, ornate, or elegant. In some casual homes, you may get the feeling that the residents have collected linens and furniture over time, while other homes reflect a more modern look, with newer pieces. Either way, the feeling is casual and homey.



**Main Elements:** The principle elements in casual interiors are:

- The use of horizontal lines
- Oversized furnishings, that is typically sturdy, rectangular, and "chunky"
- Petite and tall pieces are not ideal for a casual setting
- Casual furnishings tend to sit low to the floor, and old and rugged furniture is often mixed with newer pieces
- Wicker and rattan accents are perfect additions
- Wood stains on furniture tends to be light in color or painted in flat finishes

**Tables:** Casual tables are chunky and of a large scale, and many of the surfaces seem rugged and worn.

**Flooring** is a key ingredient in setting the casual interior stage. Light woods are often used. Floor cloths and area rugs are popular. Carpets have low pile such as sisal or Berber. Tile, stone, or stained concrete are seen as well.

**Accessories:** Casual interiors leave room for a lot of accessories, which include wooden or iron candle holders, fragrant candles, books, textured throw pillows, sofa or chair throws (or afghans for a more country look), and other accessories that lend themselves to a homey feeling. You might see collections arranged on a table or corner shelf. In many casual homes, you may see a touch of whimsy, such as grape leaves on drapery rod finials, or lamps made from jars or birdhouses.

**Room Design:** Balance throughout the room arrangement is important, but not critical. Perfect symmetry is rare. For example, rather than seeing two identical chairs flanking a fireplace, with identically framed artwork on the wall above each chair, you may instead see two chairs that are roughly the same visual weight. However, they may be different in shape, color, and even texture. The wall above one chair may display a large picture in a chunky, rugged frame, while the other wall may boast a grouping of two smaller framed pieces with a painted plate. Visually though, the space taken up by each display will be roughly the same, therefore there is balance. If a comfortable, inviting, homespun space is important to you, you may find the elements of the casual interior pleasing.

**Window Treatments:** Casual window treatments include shutters, blinds, and shades for privacy and light control, and gathered valances and drapery panels add softness.

**Upholstery:** Casual upholstery fabrics are soft and sometimes textured, but most always of low luster (not shiny). Slipcovers are common, as are simple fabric details such as ruffles and cording. Solids are used as well as soft prints, checks, and colorful florals.

## The Formal Style

Formal decorating is very often seen in historical buildings, hotels, and period homes. Much of the white house is done in formal style, as are many grand hotels, governors' mansions, and other royal residences.



**Main Characteristics:**

- Symmetry and line are important in formal interior spaces.
- Very tall vertical lines are accentuated by features such as tall windows and high ceilings.
- Many formal dwellings display elaborate architecture with beautiful moldings, high ceilings, and elegant plaster ceiling detail.
- Extravagant, dazzling crystal chandeliers call attention to the grandness of it all.
- Elaborate porcelain, china, and crystal light fixtures add to the style. Overall, there is a museum like quality to the rooms.

**Wood Furniture:** Formal fine wood furnishings such as china cabinets, buffets, chairs, dining tables, and sofa tables are almost always darkly stained, quality woods in a polished finish. Rarely if ever will you see painted wood finishes. Carved details accent the straight lines of the furnishings, and gold leaf or gilt adds interest. Antiques and quality antique reproductions fit into these spaces very well. Marble tops as well as damask runners may adorn accent tables. Armoires, headboards and footboards, and shelving units tend to be very tall, playing up the key element of vertical line. Furniture alignments are meticulous, and the use of right angles in placement is quite common.

**Flooring:** The flooring choices include highly polished woods in medium and dark stains, glazed ceramic tile, polished stone such as marble or granite, high quality wall to wall carpeting, and Oriental and French rugs.



### **Design Elements:**

Perfect symmetry is a trademark of the formal style

Mirror images are common. In a bedroom for example, matching dark wood side tables supporting identical crystal table lamps might accent each side of the bed. In a living room, a pair of tightly upholstered Louis XVI chairs may be seen on both sides of the fireplace, with original art in perfectly matched frames hung on the wall above each chair.

In a formal home, you will see pairs of accessories. Porcelain figurines, crystal candleholders and crystal vases with beautifully balanced floral arrangements, and silver urns adorn side tables, étagères, and large, elaborate mantles.

Attention to detail is signature in formal interiors.

Formal design is dignified, stately, and ornamental. However, today's residential formal interiors have a bit more of a relaxed appearance than you would see in the strict formal style. They are not as "stiff" and structured, but still take on an elegant, embellished, and regal appearance. They are beautiful yet livable.

**Window Treatments:** Formal window treatments are very elaborate and embellished. Queen Anne swags and cascades finished with tassel fringe or bullion trim look exquisite in formal settings. Long drapery panels over beautiful sheers or Austrian shades finish the look.

**Upholstery:** Sofas and chairs tend to be very tightly upholstered in smooth, luxurious fabrics such as brocades, damasks, and a variety of jacquard weaves. Most formal fabrics and trims tend to have sheen to them. Silk, satin, glazed cotton, taffeta, and velvet are popular fabric choices for the formal home, as are intricate patterns, tapestry, and embroidered details. Colors vary from deep and rich greens, Burgundies, blues and rich neutrals, to subtle shades of lighter colors.

Soft accents such as sofa and chair throw pillows tailored with gorgeous fringes, braids, and trimmings, help complete the design. Dressmaker touches such as Maltese crosses, tassels, box pleats, bullion, and double cording often adorn bedding, table skirts, and upholstered pieces.

## The Traditional Style

Comforting, and classic, calm and orderly, traditional style is the "in-between" of casual and formal. It is somewhat predictable, and never fussy, with nothing too wild or out of the ordinary. Not as stiff and formal as the formal styling, and not as homespun as casual styling, Traditional is the "homier" version of formal, and is "just right" for many homeowners.



### Main Characteristics:

- Traditional interiors support classic lines and understated details. Lines are somewhat straight, but are accented with obvious curves. The look is functional and peaceful.
- Symmetry is important, and furniture is usually centered in the space and arranged on a straight axis.
- Traditional is more relaxed in its elements, not as "perfect", or "rigid" as the formal style.
- Traditional leans more towards balance rather than strict, perfect symmetry.

In traditional interiors, you will see a mix of vertical lines with more restful horizontal lines, with soft, smooth, edges that blend into the space. There is a mix of furniture heights. Some pieces may be tall while others sit low. Wood stained furnishings are medium and dark in tone, and a mix of wood stains is acceptable. Straight lines are mixed with curves on wood furnishings, and carved details may be seen on desks, secretaries, tables, and chair backs.



### **Design Elements:**

Walls in traditional styled rooms usually have medium to light tones. They are painted or wall-papered in a flat finish, with light or white ceilings.

Tones are muted, and neutrals are often used.

Separate semi-formal dining area, sometimes with built-ins for china are common. For homes without built-ins, tables and chairs normally match the china cabinet or buffet, and wood tones may be medium in color instead of very deep and rich as in formal spaces.

**Flooring:** Traditional flooring echoes the wood tones in the rest of the home, often in medium shades, although some lighter wood floors can work well. Ceramic tiles are unglazed. You will find area rugs in both living and dining rooms, and ceramic tiles in kitchen and entryways.

**Accessories:** Traditional accessories include beautiful glass or porcelain lamps, china, urns and vases, and floral arrangements. Wall sconces in traditional settings are often coupled with framed art. Lampshades used are somewhat plain or neutral in silk and other fine fabrics. Occasional and moderate trimmings on lampshades can help to finish the look. Collections of quality leather bound books can be added to create visual interest to a library or study, and brass detail also adds sophistication without becoming too ornate. Knobs and handles on furnishings are likely to be brass. Accessories show up in groupings that are either symmetrical or balanced in scale and weight. Gentle curves embellish a few well-selected accessories. Throw pillows and bedding are unfussy and classic, with some trimmings.

Traditional design is calm and classic, sophisticated yet understated. It is timeless.

**Upholstery:** Upholstery and other fabrics are mostly understated and blend well. Cottons, linens, and jacquard weaves such as damasks work in traditional spaces, and silks are sometimes used. Fabrics may be plain, floral, or printed, but are usually without too much texture or shine. Plain, mid-tone colors are common, with accent pieces such as pillows and throws adding interesting pattern. Understated floral patterns are used occasionally. Leather upholstered pieces may show up in masculine rooms such as a study or cigar room (which are rooms likely to exist in traditional homes). Sofas and chairs have more clean lines without fringed skirts.

**Window Treatments:** Traditional window treatments may feature tied back, gathered panels with sheers, or pinch pleated traversing draperies. Variations of the pinch pleat are common. Popular and beautiful window treatments for traditional interiors are European pleated floor length draperies on

wooden rings that hang from a fluted wooden rod. Box pleated top treatments also work well in traditional decor. Upholstered cornices usually have a shaped, curved bottom, finished in self-cording or a simple contrast banding. Cornice fabric colors are medium in tone, sometimes in subdued floral patterns or somewhat casual damasks.

## The Modern Style

Modern interiors can be seen as fresh and exciting with highly refined, minimalist furnishings influenced by 20th century modern art and architecture. These interiors are easy to distinguish from other interiors since they have an urban edge and streamlined look.



The common elements are:

- Clean lines
- Bold color mixed with neutrals
- Sculptured furnishings and accessories
- Bold or large scaled art
- Clear statements are made with furnishings, accessories, and the use of color and texture.

### Main Characteristics:

Furnishings consist of large scaled pieces, sometimes in neutral colors, with clean, smooth lines and bold color accents that add "pop".

Black may be used to anchor the space.

Line is extremely important as seen in shapes, curves, tall ceilings, and exposed metal ductwork. Contrast is also a key element.

Repetition of line, form, and color across design elements is indicative of Modern design.

**Lighting** is an important ingredient in the Modern home. Deliberately planned accent lighting places emphasis on art, sculptures, and accessories. As in formal interiors, there is a museum-like quality to modern settings, but with crisp, clean unembellished lines. The focus in contemporary rooms is on the space around objects, so that furnishings, art, and accessories have "breathing room", as if they were on display in a gallery. Because of this, Modern homes can appear to be stark or even cold. Color and texture are used to add warmth. In well designed Modern interiors, individual pieces have their own space and still contribute to the whole.

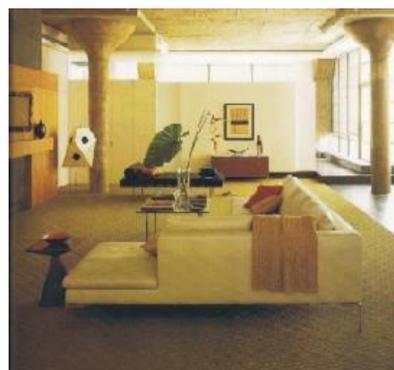
Modern spaces are “no-frills”, and ruffles, fringes, and florals are just not a part of the design. The look is absolutely uncluttered. In addition, the use of pastels is rare, since color is used to emphasize boldness and contrast. You will see black against white or bright red and turquoise against white, for example, but rarely if ever will colors blend and fade into the background.

**Flooring:** Modern Flooring materials such as tile, wood, laminate, or vinyl have sleek or smooth surfaces. Carpets can be incorporated into designs, but they have low pile. Area rugs feature bold patterns or unusual and interesting textures.

**Accessories:** Modern interiors support a few, well placed accessories. Art and sculptures are placed on columns or pedestals to “show” them. Big, bold and dramatic looking plants are lit from behind or below, and are placed in large, simple or textured containers covered in dirt and layered with interesting rocks or items with texture. Each piece is on display with plenty of space surrounding them. Wall hangings and wall art are held in simple, sleek frames of metal or solid black painted wood. Grouped pictures appear as one large piece of art.



**Lighting:** Lighting is extremely important in Modern rooms, and lighting is designed to contribute to an artistic statement. Both reproduction and original art are well lit. Free standing and attached light fixtures in chrome or metal have a sculptured appearance. Uplights are used for plants and some accessories. Recessed, cove, and track lighting give added depth to the museum like quality of the rooms.



**Design Elements:** Many people confuse the terms “modern” and “contemporary” when thinking about style. Both are current and up to date, but modern is actually a specific style that emphasizes line, space, and that museum-like quality. The term “contemporary” on the other hand actually means “of today”, or “of the day”, and is more of an interpretation of style. It is an up-to-date version of any particular style. Generally speaking, contemporary designs are family friendly with fabrics that wear well. Lines are soft and there is an emphasis on comfort. Colors are medium in tone, and are rich, warm, and soothing.

**Upholstery:** Modern upholstery has clean lines, and sofas, chairs and ottomans have exposed legs (no skirts). The pieces “say” something. Many modern furnishings appear sculpted. Suitable fabrics for large upholstered pieces lean toward neutrals and whites in sleek fabrics like leather, or in textured solids with interesting weaves. Upholstery is pulled tight.

Upholstered chairs and accent pieces as well as throws or pillows (which are used sparingly) work well in bold prints and exciting colors to create the contrast that signifies modern design. Bold geometrics and animal prints such as leopard and zebra make good choices because of their natural contrast.

**Window Treatments:** Modern window fashions follow the theme with clean lines. Hard treatments such as vertical blinds and other veined treatments work well as do new treatments such as drapes of “string” that have sculptural qualities. Some windows are left bare for an industrial look.

Now that you are savvy on the basic characteristics of the four common decorating styles, see if you can put this knowledge to work for you. In the weeks ahead, browse through decorating and design magazines. As you look at the photos, try to discover the elements that relate to one of the specific decorating styles you learned about in this seminar hosted by BOGARI. Is the room in the photo traditional? Does it lean towards casual? Keep in mind that today’s interiors can represent a mix of several styles. Look for specific clues to help determine the general, OVERALL style of the room, even though some of the room’s elements may be characteristic of another style.

If you need help with the final step of actually selecting colors, furniture or accessories visit us at BOGARI, and bring along your notes on the room you are decorating, its function, purpose and the mood you want to achieve. We will enjoy working with you.

Source: Furniture World Magazine

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