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DESIGN 101

Can modern be mixed with traditional? Where should the bulk of your reno budget be spent? Interior designer Patricia Gray reveals the answers to common queries

By Patricia Gray

Interior designers are repeatedly asked the same questions by homeowners, and even though my own work has garnered awards, been featured in *Architectural Digest* and includes designs for distinguished clients like John Travolta, I still feel that the basics need to be well explained. Here, I offer answers.

1. When completing home renovations, how do I allocate the budgeted money to use it most effectively?

Ask yourself why you're renovating: is it to increase resale value because you plan to sell your home in the next couple of years, or to make it more livable for yourself because you plan to stay for many years? If you're reselling soon, renovations don't need to be as customized and personalized. This translates into focusing on fewer details and not choosing the highest quality that you can afford for those details that aren't major selling factors. Kitchens and bathrooms—specifically master ensuite bathroom and powder room—sell a home, so allocate the most budget for these areas.

The quality of the home is established by the kitchen; if you don't spend on top-quality additions when renovating it or don't update it at all, it's like accessorizing an expensive dress with sneakers—the home loses its impact. The kitchen dramatically affects other areas. For example, a client decided that their family and dining room furniture needed updating, but hadn't considered the kitchen that was separated by a wall from these adjoining rooms. By removing the wall and adding an island to open the space, they now spend all of their time there, not initially realizing that the space—as much as the furniture—required attention. Consider that meal preparation and eating are two prime times that busy families spend together. Properly designed kitchen-dining spaces also create the atmosphere for guests to congregate.

2. What other items should I consider spending more on?

Buy flooring once and buy good quality. Choose hard surface finishes—wood or porcelain tile

—and then lay an area carpet over top. You may be reluctant to make the initial investment in hardwood, but it actually saves both money and the environment. It is far better for resale, a priority for most buyers. You'll have to replace carpet in traffic areas every five to 10 years, which creates environmental and financial waste. Place wall-to-wall carpet only in low-traffic areas, such as bedrooms and secondary hallways. Use natural wool—it looks richer, its durability offers many more years of wear and it is more eco-friendly than synthetics, and prices have decreased due to demand.

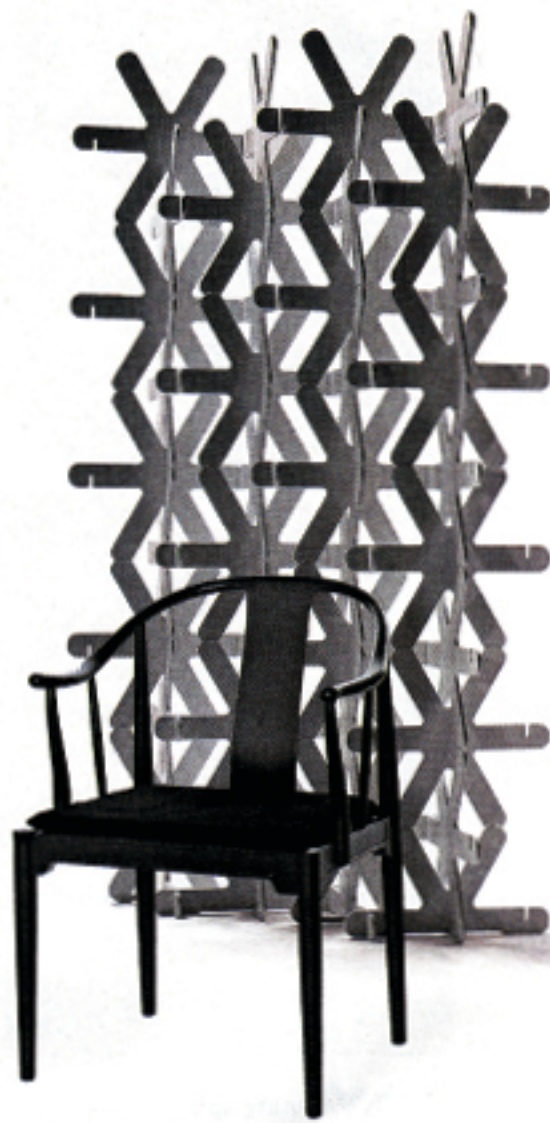
3. How do I include the latest trends, my own personality, and classic investment pieces and not end up with a chaotic style?

Incorporate the latest trends and colours in accessories that can be periodically changed, such as cushions, vases, flowers, artwork or a throw on a sofa. Invest in the best quality you can afford for foundation pieces including the sofa and dining table. These can incorporate your own personality and don't have to be traditional, but investment pieces do require a neutral colour and a style that you can live with for 20 years. It's important to choose these large pieces correctly, which may require professional assistance. I have often had to work around an unsuitable, recently purchased sofa, which affects the entire room's design because it sets the tone for everything else.

4. Everyone is knocking down walls to make great rooms. Will open spaces be stylish in 10 years?

As our lives become busier, I feel that eating together—our primary social outlet and family time—will become more important. Most homes

can accommodate a great room, and if you experience issues with noise or cosiness afterwards, then it hasn't been designed correctly. Many people who include a great room also have a separate area for quiet times. For example, for a recent renovation to an 80-year-old Tudor-style home, the back half of the house was redesigned with an open-plan kitchen, casual eating area and family room. The front of the house remained traditional with a separate dining room on one side of the



entrance and living room on the other. Acoustical and privacy issues can be addressed separately, but first your needs must be identified. Everyone needs their own personal retreat: a den, hobby room or designated space in the master suite can accommodate this.

5. Should architectural design influence the choice of furnishings? For example, is it OK to choose very contemporary furniture and colours within a traditional home?

Generally, clients have already decided on either a contemporary approach or a traditional one before buying or renovating a home. I have completed homes with very modern architecture that the client wanted filled with antiques and traditional furnishings, and the juxtaposition of contemporary with traditional works beautifully. A very classic home can also have contemporary furniture. Combining traditional and contemporary pieces works well in any home because the richly designed traditional pieces add warmth to modern minimalist ones, and modern pieces update and add character to classic ones.

6. If I choose a culturally strong theme for one room (for example, Japanese or Moroccan), including wall colour and furniture, does it look disjointed if I don't continue it elsewhere in the home?

Rooms should flow within a home. That said, you can inject different themes through wall colour and accessories including art, collectibles, antiques and toss cushions. Many clients have collected pieces while travelling that we incorporate judiciously throughout the home. Paint colour can be used to complement a room's theme and then carried through to other rooms or be complemented by similarly coloured accessories. ■

Patricia Gray has been an interior designer for 28 years, working with clients in U.S., Canada, Japan, Singapore and Africa. She has recently furthered her studies at the Faculty of Architecture, University of Ferrara, Italy. Patricia Gray Inc., 604-681-6523, www.patriciagrayinc.com.