

COMMON INTEREST

Designing For The 21st Century

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Every time I walk into my local bookstore I am amazed at the number of books that appear under the "self help" category. There is no shortage of books on dieting by geographic region, yoga journeying, purpose driving, or curing your ills naturally. The list goes on and on, but what I always find interesting is that nobody seems to consider home design or décor books part of the "self help" section. The truth of the matter is that "home improvement" is an incredibly effective way to achieve "self improvement." Homeowners are increasingly becoming aware that the connection between our surroundings and our general well-being is a very strong one. We in the design industries call this the "person-place" connection – the fact that our environment affects us deeply, and that we can use that connection to our benefit. With this understanding, people are ever more creating homes that are supportive of individual lifestyle needs rather than just "designing for show." Consider Oprah's adorable Nate as well as the plethora of home makeover shows that transform sad, tired, unaccommodating spaces into highly personalized homes that serve as supportive launching pads for personal empowerment.

A bit of an exaggeration? Well, only when unlimited budget, space, resources, and a crew of 15 expert tradespeople working 24/7 on a bathroom is required...yes. But even with a reasonable budget and some creativity, anyone can create a living space that is designed to enhance personal goals.

Maybe someone's goals include bringing some balance into an otherwise hectic life. It would be reasonable to consider making this person's home serve as a quiet sanctuary from the frenetic world outside. Or maybe an active family would like to have a home that helps



to augment a sense of togetherness at the end of a busy day. This too could be accomplished with some forethought to the design. Consider some of the following design elements and how they might affect the intangible quality of a home:

Connection or separation of spaces:

If two or more adjacent spaces are naturally used together, like a kitchen and family room, or a dining room

and living room, the combination of the two rooms by removing all or part of a wall can help to make smaller individual rooms seem larger, while also helping to bring about a more connective sense of togetherness. If individuals are always engaged in separate activities in separate rooms, their opportunity for even casual connections is lessened. More open floor plans increase these connections naturally. On the other hand, if a large multi-function space such as that in an open loft offers no separation of functions, there is little chance for privacy. Homeowners in this scenario may require more personal space which could be accomplished by erecting additional partitions with a variety of materials or furnishings.

Entrance to the home:

The entrance to your residence is responsible for creating a specific appropriate emotional setting for your home. Your spirit should be filled with pleasant anticipation as you cross the threshold, with a sense of intimate recognition and contentment. Does this resonate with your experience of arriving home at the end of the day? Or is it a different experience altogether? If your arrival is met with the clutter of garbage pails or recycle bins, a mail table overflowing with bills to be paid, or baskets of dirty laundry, then you need to reconsider your entry décor! Furniture can be used to organize clutter in an entry hall, or closets can be outfitted to contain an infinite possibility of belongings. An entire industry has grown specifically out of the need for containing and organizing our "stuff," and has developed some very clever and sophisticated ways of doing just that! Find the ways that help you to conceal the "overflow" in a logical way, and showcase the treasured belongings that could greet you upon your arrival. Being welcomed home by a favorite vase filled with seasonal flowers sends a much nicer message than a reception from a pile of dirty socks.

Use of color:

Light and color provide 70 percent of what we experience in our environment and thus are key components in shaping spaces. Interestingly, design trends show a definite return to bold splashes over neutrals. Ask any paint expert, and they'll tell you how red is the new white, or is it blue is the new black... actually, I'm not really sure which is which. But I do know that anyone who has ever seen red, blacked out, or turned green knows we're prone to making emotional associations with different colors. By understanding the emotional



context of colors we can manipulate the experience of place to our benefit. Imagine how soothing a pale blue room would feel to a person who worked on the Board of Trade all day. Or how refreshing bright celery green would appear to someone who spent a day in a sterile, windowless cubicle. The possibilities for the use of color are limitless.

The considerations above are but a sampling of the boundless opportunities homeowners have to make their homes truly work for them in positive ways. It's clear that we can create surroundings that nourish our soul as well as shelter our physical bodies, and in doing so, consider our homes as tools for personal empowerment. Feeling a little blue? Time to get out a paintbrush – and maybe a hammer while you're at it!