

A Sense of Style

Unit

3

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Learning Outcomes:

On successful completion of this Unit the student will be able to:

- ✓ Explain the importance of choosing a style for a room,
- ✓ Describe the factors affecting this process
- ✓ Discuss different styling ideas.

Introduction

Choosing a style and mood for a room is one of the most enjoyable aspects of decorating. It is also greatly important that what you choose should inform all your decisions about colours, textures, flooring materials, fabrics, furniture and decorative details. The inspirations for interiors can be many and varied. Interiors magazines and books on every subject from decorative tiles to Indian Palaces offer a wealth of inspiration, as does nature, from the colour of autumn leaves to the texture of bark. Inspiration can also come from a single object. An Oriental rug or painting can suggest the colour scheme for the entire room.

When choosing a decorative style, consider the architectural style of the room. Look at such features as cornices, skirting boards, fireplaces, dados, doors and windows and decide if they are compatible with what you would like to create. Architectural features can be kept or replaced, depending on the effect you want to create. For example, an unattractive fireplace might be better removed to make room for a bookcase or an additional sofa. This applies, not only to shapes and forms, but also to the colours and patterns.

Style is often equated with fashion but it means much more than this. Fashion can be linked to any specific object but style is a cohesive and pleasing whole. A style gives a home its distinctive character, one that reflects the lives and personalities of those who live in it. The inspiration for a style can come from anywhere. Some styles are inspired by the landscape – a seaside location, for example, may suggest the use of bleached colours, shell fabrics and driftwood sculptures. Others have their origin in the architecture of the house or apartment, or the interest of the owner. However a style should not be adopted for its visual effect alone. Its success will depend on how well it suits the people living at that place.

On a purely practical level, choosing a style makes the task of transforming a home much easier. By selecting a style we establish the boundaries for our work, otherwise there would be so many colours, patterns and objects to choose from. Whichever style you choose it should be in accordance with every element of the room, from the flooring material to the flowers, should be chosen to harmonize with the overall look. Paying attention to details, large and small, will enable you to create a successful, unified style.

Cultivating a Sense of Style

To possess a sense of style is to possess a sense of suitability; a feeling for what is appropriate in any given situation. It is also an understanding of the factors like colours, proportions and juxtapositions that will all merge together effectively. Many people think that they are not born with that special sense - the sense of style. But actually this is achievable by developing interest in this field and acquiring appropriate qualifications. To move ahead in this regard, as a first step, if you really look at and analyse what both pleases and suits you, the development of your own sense of style follows quickly. Once you have gained confidence in your own tastes and have developed a good eye and attained a working knowledge of the various furnishing styles, all decorative possibilities will open up to you. The profession of interior design is not only for those who are born with that natural flair. But a proper training can open up all the possibilities for an interior designer.

Choosing a Style

There are certain factors to consider before deciding to impose a particular style or styles. Factors like location, climate, setting and architecture cannot be ignored.

Location

Houses located in rural settings look best furnished for comfortable rural living.

Climate and Weather

A house in a hot climate should look and feel as cool as possible. Similarly, homes in wetter, colder and greyer climates must, of course, look and feel warm.

Architecture and Setting

Apart from climate and location there is often another salient feature which has to be considered. It is important to consider the architecture of a room before determining a treatment for it. It may be the view outside, or lack of it; or it may be the fact that the room is very dark or very light; spacious or tiny; high ceiled or low or a room may be beamed or elaborately detailed with cornices and mouldings.

A Sense of Place

If a house or apartment building already has a distinctive architectural style or if it is very affected by its surroundings or climate (such as a home by the sea) then these factors must be considered first before choosing a style for a home. These aspects are so important for a home that they cannot be ignored. But this, however, does not mean that a period home should always be decorated exactly according to its period and that a house by a shore should be furnished by fishing nets. Instead you should go with the flow - be true to the feel of the place as best as you can but at the same time be attentive to the proportions and functions of the place.

The Featureless Room

Although suitability and imagination are of great importance when decorating a room which has some architectural features, or when climate or location dictates the approach, there are also many examples of homes that are the opposite. This particularly applies to the buildings which are almost universally anonymous, featureless and very viewless, and where climate hardly seems to matter. In these houses any style can be superimposed.

Style Mix

Starting with one style, then mixing elements of another one, contributes to the look of today's popular interiors. When mixing different styles bear in mind that the items brought in from another style should mix well and coordinate with the scheme. The combination of classic and contemporary elements looks refreshingly interesting. For example, furniture with a contemporary silhouette sits beautifully within classically traditional architecture regardless of the purpose of the room.

Styling Ideas

Creating a Traditional English Look

Furniture

This style combines flavours from different historical periods that have become classics over the years. The shapes in this style setting are typically very graceful. Curving lines are very common. Furniture is usually constructed of dark wood in mahogany, walnut or aged oak and has finely crafted details. Carpet is the most common choice for floors to emphasize the opulent feel of this scheme and is generally used throughout living and sleeping areas. Classic chequer board tiles and rich wood or parquet flooring are all suitable for kitchens and halls. Brass or gilded accessories, from picture frames to candle stick style lamp bases and even light switches, add perfect finishing touches.

Lighting

Traditional lighting fixtures of metal, glass and porcelain with elegant shades look wonderful in the traditional home. If you want to add a touch of glamour to this traditional style, a beautiful chandelier is a good choice.

Soft Furnishing

Lean towards more tailored fabrics for your windows with co-ordinating fabrics on the upholstered furniture. Floral patterns, tone-on-tone stripes and textural patterns can be found in variety of materials from damask to cotton. The choice of fabric again will depend on context and degree of formality or informality you want to project.

Architectural Features

Important architectural details in traditional style include fine mouldings. Adding decorative features like crown moulding and chair railing, is a great way to anchor the style.

Colour

Colour can be used to establish the level of formality. Deeper wall colours, like deep red or green hues, suggest a higher level of formality. Lighter colours and neutrals, on the other hand, can infuse a more contemporary feel to the scheme. In order to mix the style well with the contemporary settings and to achieve an up-to-date feel some modern accessories can be added, but these should co-ordinate well with the scheme.

Traditional Style Tips for Style Mix

- The overall scheme should be very co-ordinated but not excessively “matched”.
- Antiques or antique re-productions work well in a traditional setting because they refer to the past.
- Consider including a few contemporary style items for a more up-to-date feel. For example, try a contemporary unframed work of art above the fireplace mantel in a co-ordinating colour scheme to the rest of the room.

Contemporary Style

Black, white and other neutral tones dominate the contemporary style scheme. Well planned accent features and accessories can be added to achieve a dramatic look.

Furniture

Sleek lines are very important for this style. Choose clean lined modern furnishings and accessories. Avoid furniture with carved legs, which set a more traditional approach.

Soft Furnishings

This style emphasizes the architectural features, drawing attention to the shape and line of the window itself. Therefore the best option may be natural roll up blinds mounted inside the window frame. They filter light and also introduce an element of texture. Simple roman shades can also be considered.

Texture is a very important element in contemporary interior design style. Without texture the scheme might end up looking a little boring. Texture provides the perfect complement to the sleek, smooth surfaces of wood, metal and glass that tend to dominate this setting. A modern vase filled with coarse twigs, for example, can provide visual relief to the smooth surfaces around it. Similarly, a jute area rug can add a textural element to a smooth floor.

The appropriate combination of various design elements can establish a very interesting and refreshing environment - one that marks its place in the modern world.

Contemporary Style Tips for Style Mix

- The natural textural fabrics like jute, cotton and linen work very well in a contemporary setting.
- While choosing a colour plan consider its impact also.
- Incorporate furnishings with geometric shapes.
- Contemporary interiors work best with complementary architecture. This would set well in an urban or industrial loft but might look out of place in a Victorian mansion, for example.

Oriental Style

Calm and tranquil, oriental style is the perfect grown up choice for those who need to relax themselves after a hectic day.

Modern interpretation of Oriental Style

1. Curtains are usually avoided as being heavy. A straight-hung fabric panel is an ideal treatment for the window. Or you can go for roman blinds or wooden venetian blinds.
2. Low level furniture, such as futon, bed, seating and floor cushions are appropriate for this style look. Japanese or Chinese styled seating works well. Sofas tend to be cube shaped and have tight backs rather than loose scatter cushions for the most streamlined effect.
3. Dark wood like wenge or black ash and mahogany are ideal for making the necessary dramatic contrast with light walls and floors. Cherry is also commonly used in the richer, more traditional Chinese inspired schemes.
4. Keep accessories to the minimum. Include delicate prints and wall hangings that feature birds, lotus blossoms or bamboo leaves, for example. Paper lanterns and lamps on the floor help to create a soft glow.
5. Plain rather than pattern is the general rule for the modern Oriental look. But if some interest is required to be created with pattern, chinoiserie is an oriental-inspired style of decoration, which demonstrates motifs like birds, dragonflies, pagodas and temples for a more ornate finish with highlights of gold.

Colour

White or off white walls are the standard background for the modern Oriental look; this is to establish a dramatic contrast with the dark wood furniture. Palest blossom pink and soft bamboo green are ideal for adding pretty femininity. The easiest modern palette is the mix of creams and bamboo beige with accents of silvery grey and sage green.

Walls

In modern oriental style, the walls are incredibly easy and cheap to decorate as off white emulsion is the most common choice for the whole house. If it sounds boring remember that dark wood furniture set against white looks incredibly dramatic. The Chinese tend not to use much wall decoration, keeping pictures to the minimum; delicate prints of lotus blossoms, birds and scenes taken from ancient Chinese lifestyles.

Floors

Simplicity is key when choosing flooring for this style. Smooth textures with a slight sheen, such as laminate, marble and stone all help add to that airy, spacious feel and are easy to keep clean.

Fabrics

The Oriental look is minimal but this does not mean at all that you can't add texture and pattern with fabric. Texture and pattern are essential for this style to avoid blandness. Imagery inspired by nature, such as birds and bamboo, is most common and looks delicate and subtle.

French Chic Style

French chic is elegant, romantic and ornate and is therefore perfect for those who opt for a touch of luxury. It combines the muted colours of the Art Nouveau movement with ornate furniture of 18th century France. It works best in spacious and well lit homes.

Key Characteristics of this Style

1. Scrolled metal furniture in delicate designs is appropriate for this style. Look out for silver, soft gold or bronze rather than heavier looking wrought iron.
2. Fabrics such as velvet, chenille, silk and linen, whether plain or with delicate self-patterns are all appropriate for this design scheme.
3. Pelmeted or swagged window treatments are ideal with shimmering voiles or organza sheers.
4. Smooth textures, from sleek laminate flooring to velvet cushions and cool marble for work tops in the kitchen are key to this style.
5. Mirrors are used to reflect light and candle lights to enhance the sense of luxury.
6. Careful choice of accessories is another distinctive feature of this look. 'Less is more' in this French look. Whatever is displayed should be of top quality.

Colour

French style owes much to the Art Nouveau movement, sharing the same colour scheme. Its sophisticated palette of silvery grey tinged pastels ranges from icy blue to sage green and mauve. No one colour should be dominant; use only harmonious tones for that expensive

look. In this style ceilings can be painted in any soft colour other than white. Avoid brilliant white as it will create a harsh effect and will kill the softness.

Walls

Matt painted walls in light colours suit this scheme best. But silk emulsion or even pearlescent paint used in limited areas is a wonderful way to add glamour to this style.

Floors

Flooring in this style should look and feel luxurious.

Ethnic Style

Ethnic style creates a warm and cosy atmosphere, providing a surprisingly lived in feel that is ideal for a laidback family home. Ethnic style covers a wide variety of interior choices from different parts of the world but mainly focuses on the Moroccan and Indian interiors.

Key Characteristics

1. Vibrant colours are the feature of this scheme.
2. Boldly coloured fabrics such as silks and muslins are used lavishly in this style.
3. Rusted wrought iron scroll-work screens or window shutters are suitable for this style.
4. Cool tiled floors or natural floor coverings such as sea grass.
5. Glass star-shaped ceiling lights and candles.

Colour

Moroccan style tends to use brilliant white quite heavily on the walls, then layers on lots of earthy tones and finally completes each room with just a few accessories in the bolder jewel shades like sapphire and emerald, for dramatic contrast. Indian style on the other hand rarely uses white or neutral shades, tending to mix clashing shades on every surface.

Walls

Brilliant white walls with rough plaster are the best and most authentic backdrop for Moroccan style. Matt finishes are essential, not only for walls, but for other surfaces also. Indian style however is quite the opposite in the choice of colours for walls. Dramatic highlights of gold and silver are common on decorative panelling.

Furniture

In Indian schemes, dark wood and rush seating in the form of ornately carved daybeds and colonial-style armchairs are common. But these are not very practical options for everyday life. Low level sofas can also be added but in deep upholstery shades. These can then be

accessorized with lots of embroidered and beaded wall decoration.

American Country Style

This style has two strands: the Shaker style and its modern interpretation, known as New England style. Both these styles create very homely and very practical interiors. Shaker style takes its name from Shakers, a religious community formed in the mid- 18th century in America. New England style is a bolder and more up-to-date version of the Shaker look.

Key Characteristics

1. Natural wood flooring decorated with plain or checked weave rug.
2. Cross-stitch hand embroidery.
3. Gingham and check materials used in subdued amounts for subtle interest.
4. Clutter free floor space.

Colour

The traditional Shaker palette is made up primarily of creams and greens, with reds and blues introduced in the form of accessories such as patchwork, making it perfect for a soft, tranquil colour scheme. The modern New England interpretation of this style is far more bold and lively. It focuses on vibrant red and blue tones. This style takes the accent colours from the Shaker palette and makes them the main colours in the scheme, focusing on bold shades of red, white and blue for the real American feel.

Walls

Rustic simplicity is crucial in American country style. Walls are kept as plain as possible to act merely as a backdrop for the limited colour palette. White washed walls in matt finish paint are the most common finish for the American country home. American country scheme would be incomplete without at least one peg rail. A hand stitched patchwork sampler in traditional red, white and blue with hand or heart motifs makes a charming wall hanging.

Floors

Natural materials are the only choice for this style. Real wood floor boards are without doubt the most suitable option for this homely style. Adding woven cotton rugs help break up large expanses of wooden floor and makes this choice more practical for the family home, too. Flagstone flooring is another option.

Fabrics

Natural fibre fabrics like wool, cotton and flax are all suitable choices. Pattern is kept to a minimum with checks and subtle hand embroidery to add interest.

Furniture

Pale maple or cherry furniture is used in this scheme. Handmade wooden armchairs, rockers or double chair benches with webbed seating are popular with this scheme. The modern alternative also allows the introduction of home comforts such as cosy squashy sofas, or even denim and leather upholstery for contrast.

The choice of a style greatly depends upon the function of the room and how the room will be used. Consider a few more styling ideas in this regard.

Simple Style

This is a key style in modern times. It is softer and comfortable. The simple canvas should have few colours and plenty of natural surfaces. It is enough to choose three shades of white for walls and wood work. However, introducing stronger highlight colours, such as taupe, sand or oatmeal, or even reds blues and aquas, add impact while retaining a clean and uncomplicated look.

For flooring think of the natural textures. Sanded floor boards that are varnished, bleached, painted can be chosen or the whole floor can be covered in coir, sisal or jute. Rugs can be used to add colour, pattern and texture. For window treatment wooden shutters, linoleum blinds, plain or linen rollers or unlined curtains are all ideal.

Complement the unbroken lines of the room with furniture in classic shapes. Use painted furniture for a smart look. Add textures through wicker baskets, wooden artefacts and handmade ceramics. Nature is important in the Simple style interior- use flowers in single varieties.

Comfortable Style

This is the most flexible style. Walls can be kept neutral to make seasonal changes easier, or painted in simple colours that inject personality and provide contrasting background to furniture. Floors can be hard, such as varnished boards, and if used should be covered with patterned rugs to provide soft surfaces to walk upon. If carpet is being used, it should be a textured one so that it can be covered with a rug.

Classic window treatments can be chosen such as full length curtains or roller or roman blinds. Large scale patterns are also used, such as big checks and wide stripes

Furniture should look as inviting as possible. Comfortable sofas and chairs should be chosen. Hard edges and sharp corners should be kept to the minimum. When it comes to furniture choose an informal mix, from dark wood to painted rattan. What matters is that the pieces should complement each other.

Walking into an over bright room is not relaxing, but there should be enough light to read or play games by. As far as accessories are concerned, anything can go as long as it adds to the

mood. Use exotic foliage plants and simple bunches of flowers to enhance the comfortable atmosphere.

Pretty Style

If you want to achieve a romantic look, choose Pretty. Things in the Pretty room are soft to the touch and pleasing to the eye. Pinks, corals, greens, peaches, yellows are the colours used in a Pretty room. These colours are used with off whites or creams. Wall papers are an easy way of achieving the Pretty look. It can be used as an all-over design or as a border against a painted surface. Choose carpets in soft plain colours. Rugs are also used for added interest. The Pretty room suits curtains made in gingham checks, large floral or delicate motifs; for a truly romantic look frilled edges can also be added.

Use tie-backs to emphasize the curves of the fabric, and echo these in the shapes of the furniture, hardboards, and cushions. Choose rounded lamp bases or pleated or embroidered shades. Embellish curtains with ribbon, braid, fringing or tassels.

Antique or painted furniture would be the best choice. If using painted furniture it can feature the patterns such as trailing florals or leaves that echo a motif in the wall paper or fabric. For accessories blue and white china, decorative photo frames and bunches of freshly picked flowers can be used. Scent is essential in the Pretty room: sweet peas or lilies are the perfect choice.

Decorative Style

A cohesive use of patterns and textures is the remarkable feature of the Decorative room. Walls can be kept plain. Colour is used confidently but is restricted to a few complementary shades so that the impact is stronger. Richly patterned rugs can be used on wooden floors. Alternatively decorative designs can be stencilled on to varnished floorboards. Highly patterned carpets are also suitable.

For window treatments, choose curtains with decorative headings or simple curtains in luxurious fabrics such as velvets. As well as mixing different patterns vary the scale too. Co-ordinated wall papers and fabric makes this easier. Furniture can be old or new or a mixture. Accessories with interesting antique boxes, decorative baskets, porcelain bowls, coloured glass and silver photo frames can be used.

Suggested Further Reading:

- ✓ *The Color Scheme Bible: Inspirational Palettes for Designing Home Interiors, (2012), By Anna Starmer*
- ✓ *Interior Design, (2003- 3rd Edition) by John F. Pile*