

Modern Trend Watch: Back to Basics

Trends are going back to school and will be stripped of their style status. We'll show you how to make the grade without them.

By Caroline Barry | 18 August 2008



Christopher Lowell used inspiration from boutique hotels and each homeowner's taste to create this balanced retreat.



The Alpha Coffee Table from Crate and Barrel brings unique design back to basics.

Micro-trends (think antlers, silhouettes of chandeliers, "x" is the new black) are, as always, everywhere, and we'll show you a few of our favorites. But the real, overarching trend of not just the season but perhaps the decade is the big news. Trend watchers say, brace yourself, that there is no trend.

Now some of us may think this is bedlam. We need guidelines, inspirations and aspirations; we can't go it alone. (I'm thinking of the holdouts who still ask every family member, friend and neighbor to sign off on each rug, pillow and lampshade.) But I say, and I'm not alone here, that this is the most liberating thing that's happened in interior design since Italy. And, with the help of a few design experts, I'll explain how following the new "no trend" trend will help you create the stylish space you want.

Christopher Lowell, long-time TV design guru and host of Fine Living's new series *Work that Room*, explains the no trend phenomenon. "For the first time, people are gaining the self-confidence and freedom to do what they want in their own homes," he says.

WORK TOGETHER

And, according to Lowell, women are increasingly being joined by their male partner when making interior design choices. While some of us may wish for simpler times when women ruled the aesthetics portion of the roost and men handled the bills, Lowell says the change is a welcome one that can actually lead to a better designed home.



West Elm's Numbers Rug delivers school day simplicity in a long looped pile that's muted for him and patterned for her.



The Quovis metal table from DWR hits all the right notes. It appeals to either sex and gets extra points for longevity.



A restrained geometric pattern in bright hues, Amy Butler's Midwest Modern Honeycomb seems custom made for a trendless society.

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"Women," says Lowell, "are natural story tellers, and so they gravitate to prints. Men tend to prefer the more tailored looks and straight lines."

We often talk about achieving balanced designs in which each feature or feeling harmonizes with the rest. A good way to achieve that is through the interplay of prints and solids, or tailored looks mixed with exuberant colors. And, according to Lowell, that's exactly what a male-female perspective could bring to a home.

TAKE RECESS

When two halves of a couple are going in opposite design directions, achieving design harmony by mixing tastes can seem impossible. The key is working within set confines, like a specific color palette, and says Lowell, taking a vacation.

You don't have to go far to find a boutique hotel these days, and because they're designed to be unique but engaging to any guest, they're great resources for couples in a design quandary. Lowell urges clients to spend some time in such modern digs and take note of and discuss the things they like and dislike about the design. Back home, it's much easier for them to integrate the elements they agreed on.

Following your tastes instead of any trend, will result in a home that speaks to who you are, and one you'll enjoy long after this season's trends grace the "out" list.

LEARN the BASICS

When it comes to following the "no trend" trend Joel Robare, principal of JR STUDIO, agrees that staying true to your own style compass is what will get you through the twists and turns of interior trends.

"There is a fine line between style and trend, and to understand it means having crossed the line once or twice and found yourself staring at last year's trend while dreaming of the next big thing," he says.

There are environmental reasons for avoiding what's "trendy" too, says Robare. "It's a painful use of resources, and one I do my best to avoid. In the modern design world, new products are introduced as fast as you can say 'polycarbonate color fast Kevlar reinforced stacking table,' but I believe the latest is only the best if it has longevity".

Make a note of that, design students: Look for pieces and styles with longevity. How to tell? Here are the Cliffs Notes on the top long-life trends.

SHOP INDEPENDENTLY

*Robare and Lowell agree on the interplay of technology and design. Lowell explains that it calls out to the male taste for tailored looks and functional simplicity. Robare singles out the style for its ability to mix in with our increasingly tech-run homes. So add a touch of stainless steel or choose grommets on those curtain panels, to help make your home high tech and elegant.

*Go for a mix of "high and low." Today's modern homes thrive on using eclectic furnishings from a variety of resources. Robare encourages clients to splurge on everyday "high touch" pieces like sofas, window coverings, bedding, and dining furniture. Secondary pieces such as extra seating, lamps, pillows, and accessories can come from less expensive sources, providing of-the-moment interest without buyers remorse should styles change too soon.

*Interesting and formidable metal tables and chairs can be found everywhere from high end showrooms to mass market retailers right now. These sturdy furnishings add to a room's eclectic layering and are almost bulletproof additions worth the investment. Finished in powder coated finishes in every color of the rainbow, they bring powerful life into a design scheme, says Robare.

*Other things we love: the surge in numbers and letters as pattern; geometric, two color fabric prints; ceruse finishes (that's a fancy way to say limed or white washed) on dark woods; and green materials.

What to avoid? Robare gave us his list, and we agree: Plastic anything, water features, "brown furniture," Hollywood Regency, stacks of art books you won't read, chenille and "pillow shows."

Ready to start? The most important thing is to embrace your own sense of style and choose pieces you (not your friends and family) really like.

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