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Mixing It Up

Melding furniture styles can create flair

by LauraMarie Carmody

Contemporary, classic, antique, retro - a vast assortment of furniture styles, colors and designs offer a multitude of choices when it comes to decorating a home. If you've been asking yourself what looks good and what doesn't quite work, the answer lies partly in individual taste and personal style, according to Scott Tjaden, allied member, ASID, interior designer and owner of Tjaden Interiors.

"Buy what you love," he says "It almost always goes together."

That's not to say you can throw just anything together. Furniture should coordinate in some way while complementing the area.

"I love pairing a 19th-century commode with a modern art painting," Tjaden says.

"You can do the same thing by buying a very classical, traditional piece but hanging a Picasso print over it.

"It all comes down to what complements what," he continues. "The yin/yang. Usually by pairing old/new or wild patterns/solid colors, you appreciate both items because of the severity of the difference between the two."

Experts agree there should be a connection between the furniture and the room itself. "Contemporary environments such as new lofts can absolutely hold traditional pieces," Tjaden says. "One wonderful traditional piece such as your grandparent's grandfather clock against a Frank Gehry chair - the clock becomes something else, a piece of art."

While some experts say it is important to keep the number of different wood types and colors to a minimum, Tjaden disagrees.

"If we look at history and castles of Europe, we notice that all the rooms have all sorts of period furniture in them including all different types of wood," he notes. "If the Queen of England can get away with mixing woods, you certainly can."

As for size, different styles may dictate the scope of each piece and how many pieces can be arranged in any given room, Tjaden says.

In addition, he points out that certain furniture just may not fit into a home - literally. "Small rooms take smaller-scale furniture," Tjaden says. "Big rooms need larger/taller furniture." He uses the three bear idea: daddy, mama and baby. "Big (the armoire), medium (the smaller-scaled furniture) and baby (the accessories). That formula is never wrong. It's professionally called visual hierarchy."