

BRIDGE FOR DESIGN

ECLECTIC INTERIORS

A successful eclectic interior should reflect the life and taste of the owner

What is an eclectic design? Well, to me, it's that particularly English look which evolves as houses and furniture are passed down from generation to generation, which is then added to and enriched over many years. A home in which there are contrasting periods of furniture, materials and colours, tends to look much more dynamic and engaging than one in which everything is matching. A three-piece suite is a good example of just how mundane and unimaginative using the same fabric in the same colour in the same style can be.

Uniformity in design can look both contrived and soulless. Too much 'perfection' is boring. (Dare I say, the great Robert Adam was extremely inventive and skillful, but I find some of his work a little dull). Interiors which are meticulously planned from the outset cannot develop and grow with the people who live in them and they often end up feeling sterile. I find a lot of American interior design too rigid and I would never want to live in a contemporary minimalist home. Biodiversity is always more interesting than a monoculture and an eclectic design has a vitality because it allows an interior to absorb change and evolve.

From a designer's perspective, the eclectic look can be a deliberate design style or the result of curating a client's existing and diverse collection of furniture and art. The latter may be more of a challenge than starting afresh, but it is also far more interesting. But how should styles, periods, materials and colours be mixed successfully? The short answer is to be bold and confident while never forgetting the need for balance and comfort.

Put pieces of furniture together which come from completely different periods and make the contrast obvious and unapologetic. It's easier to do this if you reinforce the contrast by choosing furniture made from different materials. For example, place a contemporary glass and steel

table next to an antique chair. Godson Coles, the antique dealer, does this very well - mixing old and contemporary pieces, both of which would make a strong statement in their own right, while taking care that there is still a balance. The result can be electrifying.

A restrained and uniform colour palette can be beautiful and harmonious but it can also lack a spark. An easy way to add some life to a scheme is to look at your first choice of colours on a colour wheel and then introduce accents in the complementary colours opposite them. The contrast will immediately bring your palette alive. However, don't get too carried away, as your choice of colours can also be a useful way to unite disparate styles of furniture and art.

To create a successful and vibrant eclectic interior, things do not have to match, they have to balance and contrast. So, put the soft with the hard, the shiny with the matt, the bright with the dull, the Rococo with the post-modernist.

Practicality and comfort are important aspects of any design and both can inform an eclectic look. Contemporary chairs and sofas are often more comfortable to sit or lie on than period ones, yet

many period desk chairs and bookcases are still very practical.

Ultimately, eclecticism has no rules - that's what it's all about. A successful eclectic interior should reflect the lives as well as the taste of the people living in it. That, in itself, will help the scheme to hang together and make sense. Be brave but considered and choose things which please your eye, stir your memory and capture your experiences.



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OPPOSITE: Studio Indigo were asked to reconfigure this London home. The drawing room illustrates how their design gave the owner's antiques, sculptures and contemporary art new relevance by allowing them to work as a whole. Photographer: Luke White