

TRANSITIONAL

TRENDS

photos by Raymond Andreski



THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

ABOVE: Simple columns and light fixtures give the transitional home an understated elegance.

OPPOSITE RIGHT: Contemporary geometric designs give leaded glass a fresh, new look.

“Right now, transitional design is probably even hotter than contemporary,” says Marshall Wallman, custom home designer for Design Basics, Inc. “In transitional design, you take the stuffiness out of traditional style and the coldness out of contemporary style and mix them together. This creates a very warm, casual, comfortable feeling – with an air of sophistication. In a transitional home, you could have a nice, dressy dinner party or a football party with everyone dressed in jeans and sweatshirts – in the same room.”

“With the Internet, HGTV and so many

trend and design publications available, today's homeowners are highly educated and are confident trying new styles and even mixing styles,” notes Beth Settles, ASID, with Interiors Joan & Associates in Omaha, Nebraska. “Transitional design allows them to select their favorite elements from different styles or to incorporate items they've inherited or accumulated during their travels. It also provides a way to create a fresher look by bringing in some simpler, sleeker elements – without abandoning everything they already own or doing a total remodel.”

“In life and home design, the marriage of opposites is always interesting and filled with challenges and rewards.”

FLOOR PLANS

Almost all new floor plans are transitional according to Wallman. “Even if a plan has a Craftsman or Old World elevation, the interior doesn’t have the separate rooms traditional to those styles. Homeowners may want a few formal rooms – perhaps a dining room or a den, but for the most part, they prefer living spaces connected in one, flowing space. The beauty with that kind of floor plan is that you can decorate it in a traditional or contemporary style, or a blend of both.”

“Spaces in a transitional home are largely clean and straight, with a few curves,” adds Lee Mink, ASID, owner of Lee Mink & Associates Interiors, in Pasadena, California. “You won’t have a lot of nooks and crannies, but you might incorporate archways and radius molding to round the drywall corners.”

ARCHITECTURAL DETAILS

But Design Basics’ Design Consultant Janie Murnane says it’s important to consider how you plan to decorate your home before choosing rounded corners. “Rounded corners don’t provide a clean starting and stopping edge if you want to do accent walls with different paint colors or wall coverings.”

“Overall, the amount of architectural details lies comfortably between contemporary and traditional design,” states Wallman. “For example, a display niche in a contemporary home would, most often, be totally drywalled. In a traditional home, it would probably be framed with moulding. In a transitional home, it might have a single piece of trim on the bottom edge. Another way I’ve achieved this balance is by topping clean, undivided windows with transoms divided by grills.”

While trim is usually a natural wood color in a contemporary home, it can be light or dark – or even painted in the transitional home. “I like to paint crown molding the trim color and paint the baseboard the same color as the walls (in an enamel paint),” Mink comments. “That way, you don’t have a white stripe around the room; it cleans it up a bit.”

“If you want to lean more toward a contemporary look, you might choose a trim color that’s one step lighter or darker than the walls,” suggests Murnane. “Or you might go even bolder and paint all of the trim the color of your accent walls.”



Mink says windows don’t usually have leaded glass or diamond cut patterns. “For the most part, they’re clean, double-hung or casement windows – as opposed to a multi-light window in a traditional home. In my remodeling jobs, I often remove leaded glass doors and replace them with doors with reeded glass (a semi-opaque glass with a vertical stripe). It’s a much fresher look.”

“Interesting effects can be achieved by taking an old idea and adding a new twist,” notes Wallman. “Older homes commonly had etched glass doors with flowery designs; transitional homes may have etched glass doors with a geometric pattern. Or, they may even have leaded glass in a fresh, contemporary design.”

CEILING AND FLOORS

Ceilings may have more impact in the transitional home. “Wood ceilings, exposed truss work and simple beams are appropriate,” Wallman comments. “But I’d stay away from carved corbels or elaborate coffered or spider beams.”

“I like to dress ceilings with color or texture,” remarks Mink. “In powder rooms,



ABOVE: Warm woods, rich texture and repeating geometric shapes create an interesting, inviting great room.
design by Marshall Wallman



ABOVE RIGHT: Shaker style cabinetry is at home in the transitional kitchen.

CENTER: Simplified detailing gives this fireplace surround a quiet pizzazz.

OPPOSITE RIGHT: In a transitional home, a niche may have a single piece of trim on the bottom edge.

OPPOSITE FAR RIGHT: Traditional and contemporary fixtures in the same finish work together.

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I sometimes use a metallic wall covering by Innovations (www.InnovationsUSA.com) on the ceiling, coupled with a fabric or fabric looking vinyl on the walls. I used a woven wood blind on a long hallway ceiling in one transitional California home. We mounted the light fixtures right through it and applied molding on the sides and across at regular intervals.”

While contemporary homes generally have a single floor covering in the living spaces, transitional homes often have more variety. “But there has to be a natural place to switch materials, where a space is somehow set apart,” notes Murnane. “One way to get around that is to use inlays. The living spaces might have a wood floor with a carpet inlay in the dining room or under the seating area in the great room. The wood may extend to the entry, where it’s combined with a slate inlay.”

MIXING STYLES

When most people hear “transitional,” they probably envision a home combining traditional and contemporary elements. This may translate into a fireplace surround with minimal carved detail and cabinetry with curved edges, simple corbels and paneled or framed doors (not raised, paneled doors).

But that’s really just one possibility. Contemporary is also frequently mixed with Asian influences notes Lori Carroll, ASID, president of Lori Carroll & Associates in Tucson, Arizona. “This union usually brings a variety of natural materials – stones, dark-stained cabinetry and lighter bamboo flooring. A contemporary/Asian bath might include a wall of river pebbles.

“Solistone (www.Solistone.com) offers tiles with river pebbles stuck in mesh,” adds Murnane. “Grout is applied to fill in the cracks. There are a variety of Asian-inspired sinks, tubs and toilets on the market to



Things to Remember

In the absence of hard-and-fast rules, attempting a transitional style can be daunting. How do you know your medley will be harmonious? The following guidelines will get you off to a good start.

1 Don't mix more than a couple of styles, and stick to those same styles throughout the home.

2 Capitalize on a common element when you're mixing elements. For instance, you might mix different finishes in your hardware and your plumbing and lighting fixtures, as long as they're all the same style. Or, you might mix different styles with the same finish.

3 If you're going to depart from a consistent theme, do it only in separate or private spaces. If you have sleek, contemporary moulding in one room, don't switch to formal, traditional, white painted woodwork – unless it's in a master bedroom. Or, you might use wood trim in the main floor and white traditional woodwork on the upper floor.

4 Find something to pull different elements together. You can get away with a variety of accent wall colors, as long as they're pulled together in a piece of artwork or a fabric that contains all the colors.

5 Carry your chosen themes throughout the home. Let's say you have a contemporary fireplace and the rest of your home is traditional. The fireplace is going to look out of place. But if you mix in other contemporary elements, it becomes evident that the juxtaposition is intentional.

6 Keep expensive elements timeless and neutral. Choose white or bisque plumbing fixtures that will go with anything. Today's pink, baby blue and light green sinks are going to look dated in a few years.

complement the look. The color scheme might include black, red and turquoise."

"Transitional Arts and Crafts is another popular partnership. The cabinetry and architectural details might have the traditional lines but may be stained in a light maple rather than the traditional dark oak."

"I'm doing a transitional Arts and Crafts home in Tallahassee where we're painting the cabinets and trim in cream, sea foam green and light aqua," adds Mink.

With its emphasis on simple, functional beauty, Shaker style blends seamlessly with contemporary design. Historical Shaker homes featured neutral walls, trim with simple, square edges and recessed panel cabinetry – often painted. In the transitional Shaker home, there may be more color on the walls and cabinets are often light or medium-stained cherry, oak or maple.

"Sometimes, a home's architecture is one style and the furnishings are another," observes Wallman. "For example, many San Franciscan homeowners keep all the Victorian details inside their row houses but decorate them with contemporary furniture. The result is lighter and fresher than a traditionally furnished Victorian home."

Regional styles are also paired with contemporary. In Tucson, Carroll often brings sleek, contemporary elements and rustic Southwestern features together. "I'm working on a bathroom right now that has a very contemporary tile on the backsplash, floor and shower wall – paired with cabinets that have copper doors with metal tooling and nail heads. It's going to be very fun and interesting."

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In life and home design, the marriage of opposites is always interesting and filled with challenges and rewards. Combining conservative, traditional or historical designs with fresh, innovative contemporary style requires thoughtful planning and an eye for balance. Done right, the result is clean, timeless and very appealing. ■

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