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DEMYSTIFYING DESIGN

Three designers focus on comfort, simplicity and style



Jeffers Design Group bedroom

LOS ANGELES HAS ALWAYS BEEN KNOWN AS THE MECCA OF EVERYTHING glamorous. Whether it's fashion, cars, or even lunch, LA has always set the standards for what's hot. So it's no surprise that homes and, more specifically, interior design, has always been big business in Tinseltown. In a place where styles seem to go out faster than they come in, finding what you want can be a confusing endeavor. In this day and age, more and more Angelenos are scaling back as the less-is-more attitude saturates the marketplace. The area's top designers agree that comfort and simplicity are what the public demands. The overly decorated has given way to open spaces and understated functionality.

Countless design magazines jam the shelves and entire television networks push styles ranging from ultra-modern to shabby chic. With all this information, deciding on a look can be extremely overwhelming. Thankfully, California's hottest designers give us inside tips on how to make your house a lively, exciting place that reflects the look of the moment: understated simplicity that's driven by your personality.

Creating your perfect sanctuary begins with a simple question: If the interior of your home were a window into your inner self, what would it say about you? Do you consider yourself an adventurous traveler, stylish snapper, or laid-back homebody? Understanding who you are gives designers crucial insight into what look will make your space livable. "The furniture is really the last part of the job; it's the result of your research," stresses LA-based designer Chris Barrett of Chris Barrett Design. Whether you're going for complete renovation or just making a few simple changes, the most important rule of thumb is to infuse parts of your personality into the design of each room.

Barrett, a California native and a favorite of stars like Charlize Theron and Matthew Lillard, says her high-end clients are request-

ing down-to-earth elegance. "People want a place that is about comfort. They want something friendly, imaginative, and unpretentious." Barrett believes this look is easy to achieve with just a few important pieces. "I would have a coffee table that you could put your feet on. I would have really neat, comfortable sofas. I tend to use a lot of antique rugs...even though they're incredibly expensive, they invite you to walk on them. I like to insert a little bit of history in every room. If you have old pieces mixed with new pieces, somehow that feels more comfortable."

With almost 30 years of interior design experience, Sae Firestone is proud to say she doesn't have a signature look — her style is more about "listening to her clients." Firestone caters to the rich and famous, with clients ranging from Donald Trump to John Fogerty. The CEO of SFA Design finds a common thread woven throughout her eclectic clientele. "People want their own style, not what's been seen in somebody else's home," says Firestone.

Firestone incorporates psychology tactics to uncover her high-end clients' unique individuality. Using a "concept book," she compiles up to 150 interior images to serve as a sort of designing Rorschach test. From something as simple as a facial



Three interiors by Chris Barrett Design

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raction, Firestone can gauge people's likes and dislikes. Armed with this vital information, only then can she proceed to develop a tailor-made floor plan.

Firestone's elite clientele are also returning from stays at five-star hotels with their own ideas. Travelers are asking for toasty hotel comforts like luxury steam showers, glass faucets, and light fixtures to be emulated in their homes. Next time you check in, check out your suite. You just might get some interior inspiration.

Another name to look out for is Jay Jeffers, of Jeffers Design Group. Jeffers has been delighting our neighbors to the north, but come this fall, he'll bring his brand of "funky sophistication" to Los Angeles. The San Francisco-based interior designer has his eye on LA because "Angelenos are more willing to take risks. They're a little bit more interested in what's going now."

Jeffers contends that a well-styled abode should be 100 percent personality-driven. This rule holds true for clients interested in making complete renovations, or just a few simple changes. "If you do a wonderful home that has wonderful architecture and put some furniture in it and don't really take time to finish it all up, it's not really a well-designed home," he says.

The key to unlocking your inner personality is easy with the

right accessories and art. A perfect time to collect interesting pieces for the home is during your travels. Look for one-of-a-kind items like painted landscapes, small end tables, or other distinctive knick-knacks that can fit nicely on bookshelves and mantles. These small treasures can, at least for a moment, whisk you back to your getaway and serve as great conversation starters.

Jeffers also advises people to go for a timeless look rather than one that's trendy, trendy being a "dirty" word in the world of interior design. "My clients definitely don't like to hear it...they immediately think 'what's it going to be in a year!'" The young designer opts for high-quality pieces made from good craftsmanship and then adds his own brand of whimsical accents. He also suggests using a mix of color to bring new life to a room. This fall and winter,

he'll be painting walls warm tones like chocolate brown, tan, and tomato red, then accenting the look with shocking colors like electric pink or bright tangerine.

Living in high-pressure LA, it may seem hard to keep up with ever-changing interior styles. But take advice from the pros and look inside yourself to find the design that's perfect for you: one that'll always be "in"...until you decide otherwise.

— Heather David



Jeffers Design Group living room



A sample of SFA Design's work