

BUILDING SCENE

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Neon's claim to fame: clean line of light

(AP) — Whether your taste runs to funky graphics or subtle lighting effects, neon can help you design rooms with a difference, says Remodeling Ideas magazine.

To appreciate the potential of neon lighting, set aside the mental image of a flashy electric sign. Instead, think of neon in its simplest form: a clean line of light you can color and shape any way you'd like. No wonder neon is moving beyond advertising glitz and into the home.

"Neon is a great light source," says Don Beams, an Arizona designer. "It doesn't get too hot, it comes in a multitude of colors, it can curve, and it can run as a continuous light source, rather than as a spot source. All those characteristics allow you to do a lot of different things in a design."

Brud Jerka, a lecturer at the American School of Neon in Minneapolis, agrees. He sees neon emerging as a fine-arts medium and as an architectural accent. While artists sculpt with neon, "architects use it to emphasize their space," says Jerka, "and it works tremendously well for that purpose."

Here are some suggestions:

■ Turn on the style. Because neon is such a versatile design element, it offers plenty of possibilities for remodelers. Probably the most popular application, though, is still the most conventional one: using neon as a graphic element, with glass bent into pictures or words.

"Anything you can draw, a good neon person can probably bend," says Jerka. As a result, you can hang up a just-for-fun caricature of your spouse, put your name in lights, or turn your recreation room into a 1970s disco. Inspired by the fine-arts side of neon work, some remodelers are going for an uptown look, with curvilinear, sculptural fixtures.

In other homes, neon lighting is taking on a more subtle role as a source of concealed lighting in coves, soffits, and overhangs. If you want white light, neon fixtures offer some practical advantages in these applications. The fixture is as energy efficient as a fluorescent tube, yet the power source will normally last 15 to 20 years, and the light can be dimmed for the exact level of illumination you want.

If you're after a more cutting-edge lighting effect, consider colored light, rather than white, in a concealed application. Jerka recalls one foyer where two colors of neon were concealed behind a wall cove, so they could be used together or separately. With the lights on, "the wall seemed to float," he said.

■ Curves and colors. Because it's bendable, neon is also ideal to emphasize the curves and irregular shapes of contemporary architecture. Neon strip lights can trace the top of curving cabinetry, for example, or follow the ceiling line of an angled hall.

From a functional standpoint, neon is also a good choice for task lighting under curved kitchen cabinets, where fluorescent fixtures can't make the turns.

Of course, the quality most associated with neon is color — intense, high-voltage, and crayon-bright. Beams says he likes exploiting the color but controlling the source. For one dazzling kitchen, he planned a glass-block island with neon backlighting installed in the base. With the neon lighting on, the entire island seemed to radiate blue. With the light off, the island became subdued. "Instead of an interior that's static, you get one you can manipulate," says Beams.

Can neon light ever be too much? Sometimes. Beams suggests you be cautious with concentrated color in too little space. Green or yellow neon lighting in a cozy dining room may turn your dinner unappetizing colors, for example.

In addition, some neon fixtures — usually the portable pink-flamingo types — have transformers that can give off an annoying buzz. The right transformer and the proper design can help you avoid unwanted sound effects.

■ Costs and codes. The cost of neon lighting is comparable to top-of-the-line designer lighting fixtures, because every neon light is custom made.

To execute a neon design, an artisan hand-bends glass tubes to the desired shape. Then the tubes are filled with rare gases that give off color when subjected to high voltages of electricity. Each fixture is fitted with a transformer to step up house current to the needed voltages, usually 2,000 to 15,000 volts. The cost of your lighting will depend, among other things, on the size of the piece, the number of bends, and the type of transformer required.

In some localities, building codes prohibit permanent installation of neon lighting in homes due to the high voltages the lights require. In those areas, you may need to stick with plug-in fixtures or opt for new low-voltage power sources.

In the meantime, if your locality allows it and you opt for permanent installation, be sure your neon lighting is installed by a competent, licensed electrician. The company that fabricates the lighting should provide specifications for safe installation.

■ How to go neon. To get quality neon work and service, Jerka suggests you seek a small graphics-oriented neon house.

Your neon fabricator will help you choose colors for your design from several shades of white and approximately 15 standard neon colors. Many shops offer additional custom colors, which are created with various combinations of coated tubes and gases.



Homes, Georgian style: This home designed by Ron Mayotte, president of Mayotte Associates in Troy, depicts some of the traits of a house fashioned after Georgian-style architecture. Note particularly the columned portico and pediment above the front door. Mayotte notes that the curved-top windows on the bottom floor are a departure from Georgian style architecture.

Clarke said while traditional architecture styles borrow from Georgian and early American architecture, he wouldn't necessarily say consumers are seeking classic Georgian.

(Buyers) like many of the features of Georgian style architecture," he said. "But a true Georgian wouldn't meet their needs."

Strict Georgian architecture doesn't allow for the type of open, free-flowing floor plans most people want today, he said.

Georgian architecture's influence is felt mainly on exterior elevations, where the solid, geometric, horizontal appearance of a house seems to have great appeal.

Ron Mayotte, president of Mayotte Associates in Troy, said most houses being built today are leaning toward more traditional designs. "But I would say it's more Georgian influenced than pure Georgian-style architecture."

"You can't do a good Georgian without spending a lot of money," he said. "Most people don't appreciate (true Georgian style). It's a very quiet architecture."

"Most people don't understand true authenticity," Mayotte said, adding he doesn't know if it's an interest in the architecture itself, or if it's merely another fad.

Once a certain style home starts selling, other builders and architects latch on to the style until it stops selling.

Frank Carnovale, president of Carnovale Associates in Troy said the swing away from contemporary and Tudor architecture has been going on for about two or three years.

"It might be a reaction to all the plainness and box-like architecture we've seen in recent years."

See GEORGIAN, 2E

Architects have Georgians on their minds

■ Georgian-influenced architecture is catching on in this area with people who see the style as a symbol of long-lasting quality and a reaction against boxlike architecture.

By GERALD FRAWLEY
STAFF WRITER

Contemporary- and tudor-influenced architecture are still the norm for southeast Michigan, but a glance at some area architects' drawing boards reveals just a touch of the traditional.

Georgian-influenced architecture is becoming increasingly popular as buyers look for something different.

Popular in the early 1800s, Georgian architecture emphasizes symmetry, geometric form, and formal order.

It concerns more than just mere formality of planning and designing; it evolved from a concept of living in which comfort, convenience and privacy were of growing importance.

Popular in New England and along the East coast, Georgian-style homes have a very formal appearance with two or three stories and classic lines. Predominantly horizontal in appearance and often built from red brick, the Georgian home has a portico with columns and a formidable pediment at the entrance.

Windows shapes are repeated throughout the house. While the windows may vary in size, they are proportionate. In true Georgian architecture, a window pane and the window itself would be proportionate.

Robert Clarke, president of CBI Design Professionals Inc. in Bloomfield Hills, said classic Georgian and early American architecture is becoming popular because the style symbolizes quality in many people's minds.

"People see historic as being sturdy and well built — something that will last and that's what people like these days."

Traditional style open to variety of forms

(AP) — With a few well-chosen features, you can capture the welcoming look and feel of traditional style in your new house.

There are many shades to traditional style. Some "traditional" rooms could be described as elegant, some as classic, and a few could be called homey or rustic. It all depends

on your tastes. But there is a common thread among traditional designs: Elements from the past meet the present, melding for timeless appeal.

Keep in mind that it doesn't matter that your house was built just last month. You can create a time-honored atmosphere in any room. Study the characteristics typical to tradi-

tional style, then experiment with some of your favorites. Just remember not to overdo a good thing.

Here are some tips:

■ Structure with style. You're fortunate if your home has inherently traditional architectural elements, such as tall double-hung windows and high ceilings. But what if your home lacks those celebrated features? Create your own architecture.

Some things you might try adding include detailed moldings around doors and windows, at the ceiling and around the fireplace. Chair rails and tongue-and-groove wainscoting add traditional interest to walls. Insertable window grilles create the illusion of multipane windows from a bygone era. Shutters, corbels, and paneled doors and walls can do the trick as well.

■ The material world. There are materials that can make a room appear substantial and permanent — cornerstones of traditional style. Look for elements that come from nature and include them as surfaces for floors, walls, ceilings, and countertops, as well as in furnishings. Favored materials include wood, brick, marble, and stone.

Metals can evoke an enduring sense of the past, too. Tin, wrought iron, brass, and copper are just a few

of the possibilities.

■ Good hues. For accents, try rich, deepened colors that look as if they've aged for a century or two. Think warm, rich hues: jewel tones, cranberries, golds, and Williamsburg blues, for example. You'll appreciate mellow colors that make you feel comfortable.

■ Don't underestimate the power of neutrals to bring out wood details or to provide a subtle background for furnishings and fabrics.

■ Tactics with textiles. From homespun to exquisite to sumptuous, fabrics can soften the look of your traditional room. Your choices are practically limitless for upholstering furniture, draping windows, and covering pillows, chair cushions, or table linens.

Select from solid colors, florals, elaborate patterns, simple prints, or stripes. Many of them can fit into a relationship with the past.

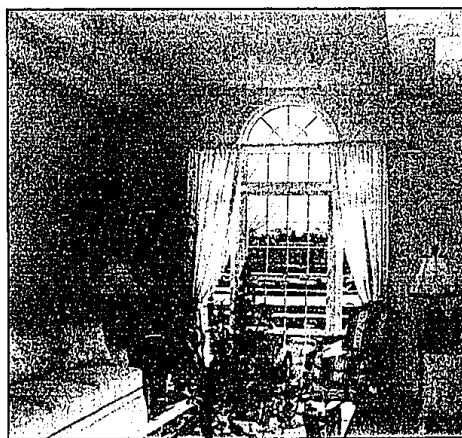
■ Furnish with flair. New or old, furnishings can make your scheme lively and interesting. Except for the most contemporary pieces, your options are almost unrestricted.

Try including handsome wood cabinetry with paneled or glass doors. Or, experiment with open shelves for display.

Furnishings also can provide an opportunity to introduce a finely crafted or intricately carved piece into a room. Richly upholstered, overstuffed pieces work, as do graceful wingback chairs and finely curved chaise lounges. Don't forget to visit antiques stores and flea markets, for some unusual finds. Or, snoot through grandmother's attic.

■ Little things mean a lot. Use a selection of accessories as finishing touches to your traditional room.

Whether quaint, primitive, or exquisite in their appeal, antiques and collectibles help personalize any traditional room. Cherished family heirlooms speak eloquently of your traditions by evoking memories from the past. Plush pillows, portraits, prints, and paintings that depict a bit of history can create an atmosphere of integrity and beauty. Area rugs can add an essential element of warmth and are another way of bringing color, pattern, and texture into a room.



Traditionally speaking: Inherently traditional architectural elements include tall double-hung windows and high ceilings.