

Home design merges past and present

(NU) -- Each season fashion designers try to convince consumers that styles have changed -- last year's short skirt is out and ankle length is in; lip gloss is back in, so toss those matte shades; and last year's passion for pink is over; and now you've got to have something, anything! in guacamole green.

Fortunately, home styles evolve slowly and typically don't see such dramatic transformations from year to year.

According to Melanie Wood, corporate vice president of design for Mannington Resilient Floors, and vice president of strategic planning for the Color Marketing Group, there's much more melding of styles past and present in home design, with new design "elements" being introduced each year rather than entirely new styles.

"At Mannington we've identified four prevailing directions in home design for the next few years," Wood said. "These directions can be interpreted for country, traditional or contemporary homes. It's the specific accessories and patterns -- for fabrics, flooring or wallcovering -- that translate the design directions in a specific way."

Natural attraction

The first design direction is "Garden Tranquility." This style captures the essence of nature, from formal gardens to casual retreats and country lanes, Wood said.

"As we seek refuge from the hectic pace and stresses of today's world, we gain tranquility through the serenity of nature."

The trend is ecologically driven and can be expressed in a variety of ways: a Zenlike interpretation with a single flower, lush romantic floral motifs, or relaxed bouquets of herbs and wildflowers. In addition to flowers, important home design elements include vines and branches (for centerpieces and drapery tiebacks), garden statuary or ornaments, garden gates and birdhouses. For flooring, natural stone, brick or floral and leaf motif resilient floors work well.

Around the world

The "World Traveler" direction embraces a sense of adventure and worldwide design influences.

It represents an eclectic blending of cultures, which results from extensive travel or a desire for an exotic home environment. Specific elements may include African animal prints, faux animal skins and fabrics, Old World artifacts and globes, leather or wicker travel cases, Asian porcelain and Oriental rugs.

Back to the future

From historical preservation to art deco renovation, "Past Tense" is a home style that takes its direction from the past.

It's evident in the growing home renovation market and can be found in anything retro: early Roman architecture, the Italian Renaissance, Victorian romance or a nostalgic look at the 1940s or 1950s.

Dressed up or played down, personal collections, antiques or reproductions are signature elements to this style. Ideal flooring surfaces include marble, granite and retro patterned resilient flooring such as the Diva design from Mannington's Silabar collection.

Right at home

The fourth home design direction, "Casual Spirit," is a relaxed style that says "welcome." According to Wood, this unabashed expression of self and soul can be drawn from a number of sources, but all have a common thread: cozy,

put-your-feet-up comfort that is both refreshing and invigorating.

Design inspiration can be as diverse as a stone cottage in the south of France, evoked with a long farm table and blue and white ceramic ware, or a farmhouse in Iowa that is the inspiration for using garden tools as folk art. A fishing cabin in North Carolina may provide the idea for a stylish display of fishing nets and poles.

The key is decorating accessories loaded with personality, whimsy and fun.

Each design direction can be personalized to suit specific lifestyles and design tastes, and they'll be easy to live with next year and the year after that.

Matthaei Gardens holds trail tours

Explore the University of Michigan Matthaei Botanical Gardens Conservatory and the gardens' outdoor trails with a docent guide each Sunday during the month of April.

The Matthaei Botanical Gardens are at 1800 N. Dixboro Road in Ann Arbor, 2-1/2 miles north of the Geddes Road intersection. Call (313) 998-7061.

Docent-led conservatory tours take place 2 p.m. Sunday. "What's in a Family?" is this month's theme and highlights the similarities of plants belonging to the same family. Find out why these plants may appear to be a world of difference apart yet oftentimes can be classified together. Participants should sign in at the front lobby reception desk prior to the tour. Conservatory admission is \$2 for adults.

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