

The right touches tie a home together



STEVEN SIVAK

One sign of a successful project is when all of the parts come together and make sense as a whole. In a recent phone conversation with a potential client, I tried to explain, among other things, that while there are many nice faucets on the market, just one or two could be a good match for her project. This issue came up because I was trying to explain my plan "B" contract whereby the client is responsible for picking out all

of the finish items, which include plumbing/electrical fixtures and cabinetry. (Which, by the way, saves a typical client about 5 percent of the cost of the home.)

My point was that while "X" might be a nice Georgian faucet, it would make no sense in a Victorian house and that one must be careful to avoid selecting such a faucet because one merely "likes" X. Good architects can make sense of the whole and can usually "tie it all together."

In order to avoid making such a "blunder," one must know not only what style the house is but also what the details are that are used in the house. If the house uses reveals as a standard large-scale or exterior detail,

there may be the opportunity to use the same detail at a smaller scale, for example at the baseboard-to-wall detail or as a drawer-pull detail.

Even the colors that are used in a house may not be random—for example, the early Post-modernist architect Michael Graves had a reason and an explanation for every color on his projects (and these were complexly colored projects). Some colors related to the sky and some to some imaginary distant landscape, but these same colors would relate to the exterior palette and the building materials that were being used.

Sometimes I have this habit of introducing a certain material

and/or color and using it in certain areas and intentionally reusing it in other areas. An example of this in the house that I have been writing about every month is the black cast epoxy countertop material. This material also happens to be the interior window sill material. Floors are maple and so are all of the cabinets—even the bathroom cabinets.

Tying it all together can also incorporate the use of horizontal and vertical elements that actually do tie the project together. Elements in one part of the house can be related to other parts in distant corners through this age-old technique. These

"lines" can be reveals (subtractive) details or applied trim (additive)—either one works well to unify a project. A consistent use of geometry can also be used to tie a project together.

Geometry can help tie a project together by repeating certain elements over and over again, the arduous part is not to bore the viewer with too many repetitions. An arc can be found to have a major function or scale but can also reappear again at a smaller scale or even in the light fixtures in the room for which they are applied.

If you are designing a project yourself, keep your eyes open for

opportunities to make the project consistent with itself. Compare all of your choices with each other and ask your friends if they think that the choices are harmonious. Changes are easy now before the fixtures are installed or bought.

On the other hand, you could always call a good architect.

Steve Sivak is a licensed architect in private practice and an adjunct professor of architecture at Lawrence Technological University in Southfield. He specializes in well-crafted residential and commercial architecture and can be contacted at (313) 769-8502.

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