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Originality in Interiors



The challenge in interior design, says Dallas Lyon, is to make a room look not like "it's supposed to look" but be "how it was meant to be."

COMBINATION OF FUNCTIONAL AND BEAUTIFUL

BY JOY OVERBECK
PHOTOGRAPHY BY DARREN EDWARDS

For Dallas Lyon, good design always can be instantly recognized by its uniqueness. Depend on her, she says, never to create an interior that looks like it was picked up whole and airlifted from the showroom, complete with ottomans and fireplace tongs. Whether the client's preference is modern, Western traditional, 18th-century English or some other style, she says she always adds excitement by tossing an element of surprise into everything she does. Maybe it's a red Chinese lacquered buffet happily making itself at home with a spare, contemporary table and chairs in a Mountain Star dining room; or perhaps a sleek Baker sofa jazzed up with the unexpected dash of a Navajo blanket throw. Monochrome rooms with boring fabrics to match? Never. "The challenge is to make it all work together, to look not like it's supposed to look but like it was meant to be," Lyon says of her "mixology" philosophy. "It's the instincts and ability to try something — and if it doesn't work, try something else. It's very important that it be functional, as well as beautiful. It maybe be a gorgeous chandelier, but if it doesn't light up the room it's not going to work."

Nothing extreme or predictable

Finding exactly the right accent piece or fabric can send Lyon either to a lengthy roster of favorite furniture shops and antique stores all across the country, or to her sketchpad. If she can't locate what she has in mind, she designs it herself, leading her to come up with custom cabinetry, chairs and sofas, fabrics and light fixtures — even artwork — to add the distinctive touch she seeks.

Perhaps because about half the work her small boutique firm does is for remodels, Lyon says a laser focus on one particular look is tantamount to instant obsolescence when that style is no longer the rage. And having seen lots of rages come and go in the more than a decade she's been in the business has taught her to value a classic vernacular: nothing too extreme, nothing too predictable.

Lyon says she will diplomatically steer a client who is heavily enamored with French Country style away from typical toile prints featuring frolicking goat herders and opt instead for checked and other fabrics.

"Trends are always changing," she says, "so I feel I try to guide them into a more timeless, classic look than being stuck in a specific genre."

Many, many conversations, lunches and shopping expeditions later, Lyons and her client together will have evolved the perfect expression of taste and style for the home, the very look the client had in mind all along. The French Country theme will have gained an unexpected twist of contemporary or a splash of rustic, for example, that assures its charm will still be fresh years from now.

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Lyon Design Group, with an office in Edwards, has created interiors throughout the Vail Valley, as well as Florida, Washington D.C. and the Lake Tahoe area.

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'From the dirt stage up'

Lyon's journey to a career in interior design has survived with interesting detours. She hails from Virginia, studying dance and theater at James Madison University before arriving in Vail with ambitions to become a ski bum. Waitressing first paid the bills. She eventually enrolled at Colorado State University, studying construction management and architecture — which gave her a sense of the overall building process that serves her on a daily basis — as well as earning a degree in interior design. Working "from the dirt stage up," she says, allows the designer to make helpful suggestions, such as where an art wall could be located, instead of a door or an overlooked space utilized for bookshelves. She suggests finishes that will meld with the proposed interior design scheme, as well.

Part of the fun is the challenges posed, such

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as a recent commission to remodel an 8,500-square-foot home in Arrowhead.

"The client brought the very traditional artwork and furniture from her Dallas house that been in the family for generations," says Lyon, who designed the millwork, paint finishes, iron railings and lighting to bond the disparate elements. "My job was to make it all work in a mountain-themed home.

'Wide-open creative process'

Like many of her colleagues in the Vail Valley, Lyon worked for Slifer Designs for several years before launching her own firm, Lyon Design Group, in 2001, with an office in Edwards. That's where she, an ASID-certified designer, works with associate designers Emily Stautner and Jen Friestad, who also manages the office. Along with the traditional array of interior

design services, the full-service firm offers expertise in lighting design, specifications, art and accessories, hospitality, space planning, renderings with AutoCAD and staging homes for sale.

Clients often turn to Lyon Design Group to create interiors for their additional homes in locales such as Florida, Washington D.C. and Lake Tahoe, Lyon says. The people-oriented designer loves the fun of her work and enjoys getting to

know her clients, who often become good friends.

"The designer is really the director of an orchestra," she says. "When I get ideas in my head but can't find answers, I seek out whoever can make that fixture or chair or dining room cabinet or carpet pattern come to life. It's a wide-open creative process with an end result that gives the client something fantastic that they'll never see at the neighbors' place." **VH**

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