

RECENTLY I MET A CLIENT AT HER

home which was over one hundred years old and designated a historical site. The home was situated on a huge lot an imposing brick two storey with a wrap around veranda. I could feel the sense of history when I walked in the door, saw the details of the home as I explored the rooms. The house still had the original hardwood floor, the beautifully carved banister, and all the fine points that are present in an older home that provide it with such character. It made me think about today's modern home, and how we all strive to create a unique space in a standard build.

How does one create character in a basic home, on a budget, and still be functional?

Begin with trim. The best way to add charm to any home is architectural trim work. There are many different styles and types of trim but the ones that we are most familiar with are; baseboards, crown moulding, chair rail, door casing, and wainscoting. Many varieties of wood can be used however, the most common being oak, pine, birch or maple. Another option is medium density fibre board commonly known as MDF, which is much less costly and more uniform than some types of wood as it is manmade unlike pine, where there are knots or birch where there is a wood grain. Standard trim is available at all big box hardware stores, however if there is a unique style you desire or are trying to match existing trim, you will need to visit a moulding store which carries a wide variety of styles.

Today's homes are built with very simple trim work because it costs the builder much less in resources and takes less time than an elaborately trimmed house. Trim work can enhance a simple space, enlarge a smaller space and define an open concept. It can frame out a room and provide a visually appealing detail. The budget and style

Simple elements create a home's character

by **ADENE LUCAS**

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of the home will determine the amount of detail in the trim and how it is applied. Also keep in mind the bones of the house and honour the rule that less is more.

Harmony is another element which can add character to a home. Rooms are far more interesting when they complement each other rather than match. Does one room lead nicely into the other? Is there a natural flow through the house? Is the furniture placed so the room feels comfortable or is it an obstacle course with one entrance point in and out? While touring through this historic home I felt a complete sense of calmness and peace. Each room complimented the next and yet they were all unique. Some homeowners try way too hard to have every room just perfect, no quirkiness,

everything matching right down to the custom cushions that tie in with the area rug and drapes. Of course that is a nice cohesive look, but when each room looks like a mirror image of the next, it's not that interesting as there is no character, just a very smoothed out look. It almost has an air brushed feel. The absence of perfection is what creates character in a home.

Balance can add or take away from the personality of a home. It is one of those factors that you don't really notice at first, but if the room is not balanced it feels wrong. If all the heavier pieces of furniture are weighted to one side, the room will feel lopsided. When all the furniture is around the perimeter of the room, against the walls, it may look balanced but it will feel cold and unwelcoming. Think of a house party where the guests are all mingling in a room, it has a warm feeling of energy and life, whereas when people are all along the periphery and not in the hub it feels uncomfortable and awkward. Create balance along with harmony by placing your furniture in groupings, off the walls and in conversational settings.

Less is so much more when it comes to creating a welcoming feeling room that you love to spend time in. In this historical home the owner had a beautiful collection of vases, fine china handed down from past generations and each item had a story. They were all beautiful pieces of art, all with a history, and simply one of a kind. Yet they were crammed in a china cabinet and collecting dust. I decided to use certain pieces that added to the feel of each room without overdoing it. One piece at a time until the cabinet was thinned out and the room looked finished.

The final result was that placing items sparingly throughout the home really added character to the room. Even if you have a collection of tea cups and saucers, rotate the collection, don't display everything, just highlight a few and pack up the rest until the next season. There is no need to cover every surface. Also vary color shape and texture to add visual interest. If you don't have an old collection and lean more towards contemporary design this plan is very easy to implement. The same goes for family pictures, less is always more. There is no need to have every room filled with family photos, it becomes overwhelming to the eye and starts to look visually busy. A few family photos have much more impact than a collection around every corner.

A chenille throw on a leather sofa, placed on a wool area carpet. All these different textures can add feeling to a room. It is often overlooked but key in creating a room that you love. Much like balance, you may not see it right away but you will feel it. It also adds weight just like balance does. Rough textures add weight while smooth textures feel lighter. Think of wood versus mirror as an example. Wood has a heavier texture and carries more weight than a piece of glass furniture. Texture can add interest in any space. Think of a rustic cabin. Rustic is the adjective that describes the texture - wood logs, stone fireplace, hardwood floors all textures that create a feel.

At the end of the consultation I felt that I learned a lot about design and respecting ones house and what it's capable of. This client hired me because the previous designer disliked everything she had and thought she needed modern touches. It left the homeowner without much design confidence and rooms that had art on the floor for over a year because the homeowner was paralyzed with indecisiveness due to a "professional" that had been too judgemental and overbearing without respecting the house, the contents and most importantly

the homeowner.

When I left that home after hanging all the art, repositioning the furniture and accessorizing, I felt pleased with the result because the owner was finally in a home that reflected her style and taste. I recalled previous clients hoping that I never made anyone feel inadequate in their own design abilities or talked them into an idea that wasn't their style. A home is something that is uniquely you, it evolves, it grows and it has character simply because you created it. Of course you can always improve upon it but listen to yourself first and if you love it, it's right.



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