

HOW TO
FIND YOUR LOOK
&
CREATE ROOMS
YOU LOVE

YOUR
Home
YOUR
Style

DONNA GARLOUGH

RIZZOLI
NEW YORK

CHAPTER



DEFINING YOUR
AESTHETIC
FIGURING OUT WHAT YOU LIKE



DESIGN
REVELATION

№ 1

Props Change Everything

It happens all the time. Friends say, “I want a colorful home!” or “I love how bright, bold, and cheerful this room is!” But the colorful homes they love in magazines and on TV are often more muted in real life than they are in print or on your screen. As you review pictures, take note of what, exactly, is bringing color to the space: Is it a bunch of red dahlias on the white kitchen counter, a matching red colander on the open shelves, and red tea towels draped over the counter stools? Those are nonpermanent touches, probably put there by a stylist right before the shoot. Try to distinguish between what “lives” in the space (like furniture, curtain fabrics, and paint) and what’s just there for the pictures. If it turns out you like your color in nonpermanent splashes, consider taking that same approach to styling your own home—and think twice before painting that cherry-red accent wall or buying a ruby-hued sofa.

➤ Pinterest and Instagram may keep design inspiration at your fingertips, but there’s no replacing the power of print. Look beyond home-decor magazines alone, and don’t be afraid to take cues from catalogs, travel mags, fashion issues, and more.

So how *do* you define your look? How do you identify the pieces you’ll love in your home as well as in the store?

Easy—pretend you’re your own design client. When most interior designers take on a new project, there’s usually a bit of homework required by the customer. The homeowner is asked to save and share images from magazines or the Internet, which the designer then interprets when designing the complete new space, before layering in his or her expert advice and ideas. But who’s to say you can’t approximate the homework-and-analysis process by yourself and cultivate a little design awareness of your own?

Start by identifying twenty to thirty images of spaces you love. And I mean *love*: not over-the-top mansions or resorts you’d like to visit someday, but rooms you can see being part of your own home and lifestyle. Don’t worry about whether they go together or how much they cost, just browse and save. For example, when I was working on my house, I flagged bedrooms with loads of built-in storage, sitting rooms with funky antique chandeliers, sofas and love seats that I wanted to curl up in, and kitchens where I could see myself cooking a meal and pouring wine for friends. I even saved photographs of hotel rooms, libraries, and lobbies.

Once you have a good collection of rooms you love, it’s time to decode your picks: As you look at each image, consider what it tells you about where you stand on each of the following factors.



THE 20TH CENTURY A

FACTOR Nº 1

YOUR COLOR TOLERANCE

Chances are, most of your saved shots will fall into one or two of these categories. (If they don't, set them aside in another folder or location where you can reference them later. They might help inform the nuances of your decorating approach after you've determined your broader strategy.)

- **LEVEL 1: A Blank Slate.** Most of the rooms you like are nearly color-free, built around one pale shade like white or cream, or one dark shade, like charcoal gray.
- **LEVEL 2: Neutral Territory.** If these rooms were a closet, they'd be a mixed but muted assortment of white, black, gray, and beige, perhaps with a little navy or camel built in.
- **LEVEL 3: Careful Contrast.** Whether it's a pair of bold lamps, a set of pillows, or a dramatic canvas on the wall, your favorite rooms are mostly neutral but punctuated by a strong accent color.
- **LEVEL 4: Lovely Layers.** You're not color-shy, but you don't like a lot of variety, either. If there's blue on the walls, there's also blue on the pillows, rug, and wall art. You might even do some upholstered seating in a non-neutral shade, but you like to keep colors in the same family.
- **LEVEL 5: Lots of Pop.** These rooms have a bit of indigo here and some spicy orange there. You like the vibrancy that several strong hues can bring to a space.
- **LEVEL 6: A Bevy of Brights.** You're fearless when it comes to color, and your favorite rooms are splashed with a near-rainbow of shades.

FACTOR Nº 2

YOUR FAVORITE FINISHES AND MATERIALS

Do all of the rooms you love contain marble? Is gnarly driftwood in all your spaces, or is everything painted white? We often gravitate toward the same features repeatedly. So look closely: Maybe you're a sucker for kitchens with brass hardware or vintage-inspired details like Edison bulbs. Maybe all of your rooms contain antiques. Make a list of these features, and let it be your conscience when you get distracted by pretty things in stores or online.

◀ The most interesting interiors incorporate their owners' passions in understated ways. Here, outdoor chairs adorned with rope knots lend a coastal home a subtle nautical vibe.

FACTOR № 3

YOUR FORMALITY LEVEL

Do you want your home to feel like a wave, a handshake, or a hug? This is not a trick question: Some people adore spaces that feel worthy of high-end magazine pages and dinner parties (aka the wave), while others want spaces that beckon you to take off your shoes and flop down on the sofa, drink in hand (aka the hug). Some people want something in between. Once you zero in on a formality level, you'll be better equipped to make decisions on things like seating and decor.

FACTOR № 4

YOUR DESIRE FOR DRAMA

If you tend to choose rooms with standout architectural features, moody lighting, and statement decor pieces (think a bold pillow that jumps off the sofa, a breathtaking rug, or a chandelier that owns the room), you've got an appetite for drama. However, if you like rooms that feel more balanced and soothing, you crave harmony. Knowing this will help you decide how much pattern and color to bring into your space and how you can play with scale (say, a huge light fixture or a big mirror in an interesting shape) to create more or less visual impact.

FACTOR № 5

WHETHER YOU'RE A MIXER OR A MATCHER

Are you drawn to rooms that feel as if they were consciously put together around a pattern or color scheme? Do rooms feel more "right" to you when the art coordinates with the painted wall behind it and when the pillows and window coverings coordinate? You're a matcher. If you'd rather look at a room and say "That's such a surprising, unique, or quirky pairing," you're made to mix. Knowing this will help you jump more easily from one decor decision to the next and build your room in layers that align with your ultimate home goals.

➔ A tiny powder room becomes a major statement space when clad in a bold marble-effect wallpaper. While a big print isn't for the faint of heart, sticking to a "safe" palette (blue and white) and just two metal finishes (weathered brass and shiny chrome) makes it easier to pull off a funky yet pulled-together look.





▲ If your tastes lean modern but you've accumulated items with a more traditional feel, displaying them in spare arrangements—white bookshelves, lots of negative space—and mixing in pieces with cleaner silhouettes can give them a more contemporary feel.

Where you stand on the above factors comprises your design style. Regarding color, I'd consider myself a level three because I gravitate toward neutrals but *loooooove* a rich color statement, like a navy wall. My favorite materials are velvet, linen, marble, and brass, as well as textiles with a handmade texture, like worn antique rugs or hand-dyed pillows. My formality level is a handshake—I like a pretty formal look, but I don't want things to feel untouchable. Drama? Bring it on. And I'm definitely a mixer; I admire the coordinated-pillows-and-curtains thing from afar, but my home is more of a layering game.

Admittedly, this is a lot to keep in mind when shopping—much more than a simple phrase like *Scandinavian minimalism* or *Parisian chic*. But it's also more useful. Putting in the time to think about where you stand on these factors will arm you for more efficient, less fraught decision-making, both online and in stores. It can be helpful to keep your answers to the following quiz handy, whether as a crib sheet in your wallet or a screenshot on your phone. That way, the next time you see a table, lamp, or pillow you think you love, you can consider it in the context of what you really want in your home. Eye on the prize, right?