



Design For Older Homes

New residents often move to Oak Park/River Forest because they appreciate the true architectural design and sound construction of the homes in the area. “Once we settle into these homes, we are faced with the wonderful opportunity to decide to what extent we want to honor the architectural integrity of our home when designing our interior spaces,” says Leeann Heining, owner of Fringe Home Design.

As we approach design work for our clients, we believe the client’s intention or desire to reflect the home’s architectural style is an important first consideration. We’ve found that people tend to align into four different approaches on this subject:



Purists – These are the folks who want period antiques or seek out top-of-the-line reproduction furniture that matches the architectural style of their home. They choose reproduction wall paper and rugs then accessorize with authentic pieces or collectibles. The purist will purchase a Prairie School or Victorian style home and dream of furnishing it in an authentic manner.

Respectfuls – People who want to respect the design, but have to meet the needs and costs of a modern lifestyle, usually filled with kids and active social lives. They prefer readily available furniture styles that complement the architectural style and are more likely to select contemporary color schemes and fabrics. They’ll keep a favorite piece of furniture that doesn’t quite fit the rest of the design approach, but they like it.

Value Focus – These folks follow the look but are not interested in the cost of pure design. They are happy enough with rugs, lighting and furniture from lower-cost alternatives.

My Style – These creative souls have no desire to mirror the home’s design. They may choose a contemporary or eclectic interior design style for an older home, and are quite happy with it.

“A first step in discerning your approach to the interior design of your home, is evaluating which of these avenues you prefer to take,” adds Heining.

When it comes to honoring the home's architectural style, there are several practical design tips everyone can use:

- Σ Play off of the architectural details found in your home when selecting furniture, fabrics and accessories:
- Σ Doorway arches can be reflected in various furniture pieces and also in the shape of artwork and mirrors
- Σ Molding detail and ironwork shapes can be repeated in fabrics and wall papers
- Σ Colors and ornamentation used in fireplaces design can be matched in fabrics and paint color. Many fireplaces in older homes are large and the focal point of the living room layout. Remember to choose artwork and accessories in the same size scale of your fireplace mantel.
- Σ Detail in windows, especially the shapes and colors found in art glass windows, can be carried through in upholstery fabrics, paint colors and rugs.
- Σ It's especially important to make a great statement in the foyer of the home. A terrific console table or bench is essential along with dramatic accessories and artwork. Your entryway sets the tone for the entire house and defines your style for all guests.
- Σ Dramatic stairways provide unique opportunities for special treatment of art, photo groups, small tables and benches on landings.
- Σ Many of these homes were not built with family rooms, and if they were, the rooms don't easily accommodate today's furniture size and entertainment requirements. Entertainment centers and even custom-built bookcases and shelves are often necessary to place (and then hide) TVs and stereos.
- Σ Older homes have beautiful, traditional style windows which create a challenge when designing drapery treatments. Odd shapes and sizes, as well as, colorful art glass need creative solutions to accentuate them to their fullest potential. Pre-made drapery panels simply don't do justice to these unique windows, which means the best solution is to have custom-made treatments. Such treatments can represent a major percentage of your overall interior design investment as they require meticulous detail and expert craftsmanship.
- Σ Room sizes don't easily accommodate today's larger scale furniture. You'll find yourself having to design around smaller spaces, radiators and unique window designs.
- Σ Older homes most often have wood floors which require area rugs for rooms and hallways. Spend money for good quality wool rugs in main living areas, and buy changeable rugs for hallways and children's bedrooms.

- Σ Bedrooms in old homes are typically small and therefore don't offer enough closet space to accommodate today's wardrobes. Armoires and dresser storage pieces, along with clever storage ideas, help solve this problem.
- Σ Original tile kitchens and bathrooms reflect the color tastes of the 20s, 30s and 40s, like lime green, yellow, peach and lavender. Heininger suggests showcasing and complementing the color (versus trying to avoid it) through paint colors, faux finishes, window treatment fabrics and art.
- Σ Lighting plays an important role in highlighting your furnishings and artwork. Few rooms have ceiling light fixtures, which require more lamps or the installation of recessed lighting in the ceiling.

Whatever you do, don't throw away those original light fixtures as the next homeowner may be a purist!!