

High Times at
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Classic by Design



Destination:
San Francisco

Classic by Design: Timeless Interiors Touched by the Past

By Tina Klucsik

Mention the term “classic design” to most people and they’re likely to envision a formal room with furniture, drapery, rugs, and accessories that recall a bygone era. More contemporary thinkers might say that a classic approach to more modern interiors should strictly adhere to the use of chrome, leather, and minimal window furnishings. That’s quite a span of interpretation. So who’s right?

While classic design need not always recall the past, today’s skilled interior and product designers often create tomorrow’s classics by taking their inspiration from the past, melding appropriate, time-honored techniques with modern materials, methodologies, and applications.

The best of today’s designers develop a series of highly personal principles that typically frame their projects. And therein, they say, is the true definition of classic design: It’s timeless, it’s functional, it’s creative, and it lasts. Yet it’s still uniquely personal—to the designer and the client.

The Body of a Classic

According to Lola Watson, a designer based in Minneapolis, MN, and writer of the “Window Fashions Diva” column for *FFI*’s sister publication *Window Fashions*, a classic cannot be embodied in a single style. “A classic’s origins are found in the elements of good design, such as scale, proportion, balance, and functionality, with functionality being the most important,” she says. “Function dictates how the other elements are expressed.

“You start with your basic elements. That’s why I can say it’s a French Country classic or an Arts and Crafts classic. It boils down to those basic features that are the common denominators across all other periods,” Watson says. That’s also the reason a single look does not necessarily embody a classic, she says. “There are many paths to classics—for example, the Barcelona chair is a classic contemporary. It’s as stylish today as the era in which it debuted,” she says.

Watson believes that a classic also does a superb job reinterpreting what has gone before. “The design industry is forced to revisit the past in order to appeal to clients. When discerning which aspect of the past to focus on, the industry looks for aspects rooted in a period’s classicism, not in its trends.”



Lola Watson's treatment of this formerly stark, contemporary lakeside house in Wayzata, MN, proves that classic interiors can transcend time and cultures when the designer follows what Watson calls "attention to the elements of classic design": balance, form following function, and livability. Here she combines the owner's love of Mackintosh Arts and Crafts with his collection of Asian and Native American antiques. Photography by Karen Melvin.

