

Greater New Orleans

Stuck in a style rut? 12 ways to move toward modern



You can update a room without changing the furniture by simply switching out traditional knobs and pulls for something more contemporary, like these from Topex Design. *(Marko Poplasen, Photo courtesy of Topex Design)*



By **NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune**

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If you had asked me five years ago whether I could see myself sliding toward a more modern interior, I would have shaken my head so vigorously it would have flown into the nearest basketball court and scored a three pointer. I had established my style. And I liked it.

I had culled a collection of French country pine pieces, Old World European carved tables, tall dining chairs covered in tapestry fabric and oil paintings.

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It took me half my life, and much of my income, to get to that point, and I was certainly not going to start over. I truly wanted to believe one could be done decorating.

Meanwhile, the world around me was moving on.

I might have stayed stuck in my time capsule of style for many years more, but for a three-pronged dose of change that caused me to review everything: A new man, a new home, a new life.

None of which I saw coming. As a result, today my home is a transitional mix of contemporary and traditional. Modern pieces sit alongside some of our combined traditional furnishings, a look that feels like a fresh start with some nods to the past — which seems fitting.

It hasn't been easy. As DC and I began to blend our lives and our respective fully loaded homes, I pretty much thought, "Oh, he will love all my stuff," and that would be that.

In fact, I think he said pretty directly, "I don't want to move into a house that is all your stuff," which kind of felt like the ice bucket challenge.

"You want a do over," I said.

"I want to create our home," he said.

Turns out, men come with opinions.

So I started gently probing the edges of what kind of look he liked.

And so began a not altogether comfortable process of shedding, evolving, compromising and shopping.

As we shopped, we joined the rest of the western world, which is leaning toward a cleaner, simpler more modern aesthetic. More West Elm, less Ethan Allen.

Style trends, of course, beg the chicken-and-egg question: Do manufacturers dictate what consumers buy or respond to what they want. Answer: Both.

But what is clear is that moving toward modern from a base of traditional furnishings is tricky. In fact, creating what professionals call an eclectic interior, which is a mix of styles, is the hardest look to pull off — but also the most interesting.

If you, too, have a house full of traditional furnishings and find yourself leaning toward a cleaner aesthetic, here are some ways you can tiptoe toward modern without throwing the table out with the chairs:

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- **Start with what's tired:** Look at your furnishings with a fresh eye and look to see what is worn out, outdated or broken, said interior designer Barbara Kaplan from Phoenix, Ariz. Start there by replacing it with a sleeker version.
- **Start small:** Injecting a contemporary rug or piece of art or a modern lamp or sculpture is a safe way to start moving toward modern without getting rid of furniture.
- **Trade heavy for light:** In Arizona, where Kaplan lives, Tuscan style has been popular. But lately, homeowners are tiring of the large, heavy, dark pieces. "They want to shed the heaviness and darkness, which feels oppressive, and exchange that for pieces lighter in weight, color and line.
- **Keep contrast in mind:** As you move toward modern, don't put heavy with heavy or dark with dark. Add items lighter in weight and color. The contrast injects a more minimal feel.
- **Switch out ornate handles:** Simply changing the knobs and pulls on a traditional or vintage piece with more streamlined ones can quickly inject a touch of modernism.
- **Paint furniture:** Transform heavy, dark wood furniture by painting it a lighter, brighter color. As you do, consider removing decorative moldings.
- **Reupholster:** Recovering a traditional chair in a modern fabric is a great way to bridge looks.
- **Clean the windows:** Swap out heavy, elaborate window coverings with lighter, simpler straight-lined ones or none at all.
- **Cut the fringe:** Where possible, lose the embellishments, the fringe, the added detail, a hallmark of traditional interiors.
- **Find a common denominator:** Two pieces — one modern, one traditional — can work together if they share a similar finish or color.
- **Go slow:** Modernizing a traditional home can get tricky. Edit carefully and use your critical eye, as it's easy to cross the line from well-curated interior to hodgepodge.
- **Balance as you blend:** Incorporate a little bit of modern in every room, so the mix is consistent throughout the house. Pair an antique bed with modern art, a vintage chest with a modern sculpture. "The best rooms have an element of surprise," Kaplan said.

Syndicated columnist Marni Jameson is the author of two home and lifestyle books and the newly released "Downsizing the Family Home – What to Save, What to Let Go" (Sterling Publishing 2016).

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