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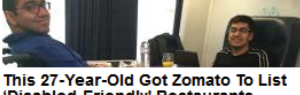
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Carter Oosterhouse

Lifestyle expert, Author, 'Carter's Way'

Understanding the World of Interior Design

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more.

I would have never imagined this was the way things were going to turn out in my life, but I have graciously accepted it. And even more, I was proud of every job I had, even when I was making .60 cents an hour. The point is that I loved every job that I've had and a big reason for that is my parents. They instilled one part strong work ethic and one part caring in me. For some reason that concoction seemed to work. Because today I added another title and its Author, of my very first design book.

With the numerous jobs that I've had I found out along the way that I love to teach. And Interior Design is no different. I'm able to work on this craft continuously through my shows on HGTV and day time talk shows like the the *Rachael Ray Show* and the *Today Show*. That's why I came out with my book *Carter's Way*. Its a field guide to the ever so misunderstood world of Interior Design. Think Rosetta Stone with style and taste. My goal is to empower people to reach beyond their conscious design ceiling just as I did with every job I've ever had..

What follows is an excerpt from Carter's Way.

Carter's Way Explained

I once had someone ask me about my show Carter Can, "How do you do it? You go into a room and suddenly you pull it all together, and it looks great. It's like magic." It's not magic. It's a simple process born of design basics and lessons learned from experience. Instead of magic, I use Carter's Way.

I'm not a formally trained designer. That's why, when I started working on my own TV show, I knew I needed a simple, adaptable design process that would work for all the different rooms we tackle over the course of a filming season. Not only is one home different from the next, everybody wants something different out of their living spaces. However, as much as every room is unique, there are in fact certain basic principles guiding any successful design. I developed Carter's Way around those universal guidelines. For ease of use, I break down the process into three interrelated parts: customized style, commonsense practicality, and realistic environmentalism. I look at these as legs on a triangle. Each one touches the other two, and there is no triangle without all three combined in the correct way.

They aren't step-by-step. Every point in developing a design--every decision you make--involves each of these in some way. Take buying a new couch for instance. The practical issue of cost will narrow the style options you can consider. You'll want a couch with a look that fits your customized style, works with your existing furniture, and that appeals to your own tastes. If you're a smart shopper, you'll put your environmentalist cap on when you check if the upholstery produces any volatile organic compounds that would compromise the air quality in your home. See how all three play a part in one simple choice?

All that said, let's start by looking closely at the idea of "customized style."

Customized Style

Style is the subjective part of the design process. Your personal tastes will differ from mine, which will be different from another person's. That's why I call this component "customized" style. You'll create your own unique look that has a strong foundation in the timeless principles that guide sound design. Just like every home--no matter what architectural style it is--has to have a foundation, every interior design stands or falls on a few universal principles. As long as these are in line, you can put your own stamp on your home design.

Color

You've probably been exposed to the basic principles of color many times, but just in case you haven't, here's a refresher. Individual colors can be divided between warm (reds and yellows) and cool (blues and greens). They can also be divided into receding and advancing colors. Dark or warm colors advance--they look like they are closer to you. Cool or light colors recede, or appear to be farther away. (Useful effects to know about when you want to visually change a room's shape or perspective!)

Interior design involves grouping colors into "schemes" that can be complementary (those that sit across from each other on the color wheel), analogous (those that sit next to each other), or monochromatic (different shades and tints of the same color). There are more complicated color schemes, but these three are the root of all of them, and you can play off them in your own design. Neutrals--brown, taupe, beiges, and off-whites--work with any other colors, as do black and white (technically called "achromatic"). A shade is a base color with black added to it, while a tint is a base color with white added to it (a tone is the color plus gray). All the particulars aside, you judge color by the way it looks in the actual space--there's no other way to do it. Whether you're looking for new wall paint, wallpaper, sofa fabric, or tile, manufacturers have made the process easy by collecting and organizing samples by color and combinations.

Lighting

Even though every room has its own lighting needs, there are three basic types of interior lighting used in any room. Ambient lighting is the term pros use for general light. It's the overall light that spreads throughout the space and fills in shadowy areas, making the room safer to navigate and more inviting. Ambient fixtures include ceiling-mounted units and floor and table lamps. Task lighting is any light used to aid in a specific function. Undercabinet lights in the kitchen and a desk light in a home office are examples of task lighting. Accent lighting rounds out a room's lighting scheme, emphasizing decorative features or drawing attention itself. Frame-mounted art lights and cove lighting are examples of accent lighting.

Properly lit rooms usually include all three types of illumination to play up the strengths of the room's design and make the space easier to use. Lighting fixtures not only supply the illumination you need, they are also decorative elements. We'll talk more about lighting and fixtures particular to individual rooms in the chapters that follow. For now, understand that no single light source provides all the necessary lighting for a room; you'll need a combination if you want your design to look its absolute best.

Layout

The layout of the room--where and how furnishings and other elements are positioned--determines how livable the room is, and how pleasing the interior design will be to the eye. Good layout is part art and part science, and it's a huge and critical part of any room design as far as I'm concerned. The space needed for proper navigation through a room is the science, and I've included guidelines throughout the chapters that follow. The more difficult part of layout is composition, which is all about proportion, scale, and balance. Furnishings need to balance one another, and be in balance with the dimensions and appearance of the room.

Maybe you've seen a small bedroom stuffed to the gills with a "bedroom suite" of furniture bought as a complete set. That's an example of design imbalance, and a case where removing furniture might improve the room's layout immeasurably. Another example is a roll-arm overstuffed couch that a homeowner has paired with a dainty glass-topped coffee table. Everything you place in a room has some visual weight. You need to make sure that no one side of the layout or one area of the room carries a lot more visual weight than any other.

Because getting the relationship between furniture just right can be a bit of a challenge, I always recommend experimenting. As long as you're willing to move furniture in and out of a room and play with different configurations, you'll eventually find your way to a balanced, attractive arrangement. I'll discuss examples of good layout practices in the chapters that follow.

Theme

You can choose a standard theme such as "modern" or "country" that defines exactly how the room will look. More often than not, though, I find homeowners have their own ideas about theme and style. You'll probably want to define it in your own way, which is fine. Just be sure you are clear on what your "theme" means in terms of actual decorative elements. Dark and dramatic? Light and airy? Bright, witty, and full of energy? Are you the type that collects antiques, or are you more of an IKEA person? Do you like lots of comfy furniture and bric-a-brac filling up your space, or do you like an emptier nest, a place with a few well-chosen pieces and very little extraneous decoration? Define your theme to guide the decisions you'll make in your remodeling or design project.

The best way to develop room-specific ideas that embody your theme, tastes, and style is to keep a "style file." Collect sources of inspiration. I do. All the time. Sometimes I see a room in a magazine--not necessarily a design magazine. It could be a really cool ad, shot in a nice room. Sometimes it's just the cabinets or bed that strikes me as really handsome. Other times, I like the way a room is lit, or the appliances grab my attention. Room designs are put together in pieces, and collecting ideas that catch your eye for which pieces might go where is a great way of defining the particulars of your theme and style.

Beyond these basics, there are many techniques for establishing personal style in a room design. These include how you arrange wall-mounted art, what kind of storage you incorporate to prevent clutter, and the types of decorative accents you choose. Style indicators vary room to room, so that's how I cover them in this book.

Practically Speaking

The issue of customized style goes hand in hand with the second element in my process: commonsense practicality. It's easy to get carried away when you start looking at all the beautiful things you could include in a room design. The world is full of beautiful and impressive home furnishings. Catalogs are stuffed with fun and unique accents. Whole new floors, ceilings, and wall surfaces are waiting for you down the aisle of any large home center. Practicality brings you back down to earth. The most important and most practical piece of any design project is the budget. I've seen homeowners run out of money halfway through a room design; that makes no sense and it's the opposite of pretty. And frankly, I have been in some incredibly expensive homes, with million-dollar rooms, and some of them were the ugliest spaces I've ever seen. Just because you have money doesn't mean you have style.

Budget

You should start any design or remodeling project by deciding how much you can and are willing to spend on the design. Make this your line in the sand and don't go over it. A little discipline is necessary if you're going to have a stylish room that suits your home and your pocketbook. Keep track of costs as you go along. Budget is sure to narrow your choices, but it will also help you prioritize the elements of the design (do you want that great hand-painted tile backsplash or the new kitchen table?). You know what else? I find that budget (we're always on a pretty tight one on each of my shows) can light a fire under your creativity. Many times, I'll find ways to make something I've envisioned for a room, when the budget just can't accommodate a brand-new purchase. I'm an experienced carpenter, so it's a little easier for me, but most people have it in them to construct small projects. I've also found that when a certain high-end material is too pricey for the project at hand, a little investigation often turns up an alternative with a similar appearance and much lower cost. I do this on my shows all the time.

Manufacturers know budget is an issue. That's why you can buy polyurethane wall moldings in place of pricier wood or plaster versions, and why inexpensive laminate floors look convincingly like wood, stone, and other materials. I know budget is not exactly a fun part of the process, but it is essential. You'll thank yourself later when your room comes together beautifully without breaking the bank.

Natural Light

Sunlight exposure is a major practical consideration. Television and computer screens set up opposite a bright, sunlit window are bound to feature glare spots, while furniture placed in a bright sunny spot should be dressed in fade-resistant upholstery. On the other hand, indoor plants positioned in a full-shade corner may quickly die. Wood, fabric, or laminate materials should never be placed too near a heat source such as a radiator, because the finish can fade and the surface will degrade over time.

Your Room Over Time

How the space will be used is a big part of practicality. It might require getting out your crystal ball and looking into the future a bit. It may be difficult to envision your newborn as a toddler, and then a rambunctious adolescent with friends and pets. It's worth thinking through, though, because that progression should play a role in the upholstery and surface treatments you choose, and any furniture you buy. I'll help you think through all these practical considerations in discussing specific areas in the house, but you should always keep practicality in mind when designing and remodeling.

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