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Lost in TRANSLATION

Can the delightful décor of someone else's living room be successfully translated to your home? Probably not

Alarm: The charm of this room in a Memphis home is a combination of its décor and its lovely view over the city. One of those apartments, the furniture, including the Matthew Patrick Smyth-designed chair, created by interior designer Richard C. Long



Praying into a cocktail party, designers know what they're in for. Like decorators and investment bankers, they are usually harried, rebuffed by other partygoers to ask specific questions. "What would you do with this room? What color would you paint it?" someone will say. "What do you think of...?" Finally, the questions all come down to, "Something's off here, and I don't know why."

I try to be diplomatic in my answers. I have been to many houses where décor has all the elements that should make it successful, but somehow it just doesn't. I'm not the sort of decorator who goes into someone's home and mentally picks it apart. If I'm not asked about the décor, I can turn off my analytical mind and simply enjoy the conversation of my hosts and their guests. (Believe it or not, it's some of my business how they live, and with what. I'm a "psychology" decorator. I am never here to concern the world to my point of view.)

But when I take on a project, I usually will discern that successful décor is inevitably linked to comfort and usability. We need to feel comfortable with what we live with. If our surroundings don't make sense to us, how can we



Below, top: The master bedroom's four posts, made in India, come with a canopy that simply drapes over it, and the lighting is now the kind of the springing English cloth at the foot of the bed, in the top of the most shiny table from India and in the legs of the chairs. The very 20th-century decorative quilt, antique Dutch brass oval headboard, and a towel have a cup atop the canopy, and to not go together and not only. The subtle color scheme (fresh flowers) for the room would translate easily to someone else's, modern-but still defined would be the focus of natural light that bring out in beauty. **Below, bottom:** In a bedroom setting area of the living room is an antique sofa (made in a European style), antique table, and antique lamp. The thing about it. These elements could work in someone else's home (after a detailed search to find similar antique

pieces) and family and guests to find them pleasing.

My favorite rooms have a special combination of colors. They are warm, beautiful, open-space, comfortable, and friendly. The good news is that homeowners and decorators can achieve this ideal if, as they make their choices, they keep it in focus.

I have a client in Wisconsin who has a charming home that everyone likes to come to. Many of her guests don't spend too long on what she has done. In fact, after my client had her last child, a friend of hers came to visit bearing a baby gift, a camera—and her partner's! She had come to see the baby and, it turned out, to photograph the baby's room. We had just decorated, but someone was there to get the exact measurements of the no-drapes, warm-cream, vibrant drapes, etc.

This was certainly flattering, but can the client's nursery be translated to her family's home? Probably not, because her friend could not match the elements that made it so special. What are it off from the decade she thought her home had improved as a child, the antique illustrations of children that she had carefully collected and framed, the old (1970) painted-pipe chair's table she'd found in an antique shop.

The other rooms in the house also reflect my client's interests. There are places to read, watch TV, work on a piano, work on the computer. The accessories in clients' homes are chosen for their color and tactile quality. Every item was selected because it inspired or moved my client, not just to fill a space. Instead, she can gladly tell her guests where, how, and when she found a particular item, why she was attracted to it, and even, perhaps, how she carried it home. She had fun with the decorating process, but she also is relaxed her own personality. The colors she loves are best and come in that Anglo-Irish backdrop and a lovely color—not as a theme, but as a springboard for the selection of more the colors.

Because she enjoys her home, her guests pick up on her enthusiasm and feel comfortable being there. This is an attitude that cannot be copied from a photograph or simply measured and installed. What the friend who came to photograph the nursery may not realize is that the room evolved into what it is today. You copy the architecture and track down the exact fabric, and then use it, but the personal touch is what separates this decoration from the standard fare.

When I work on a project with new clients, I ask about their interests. What do they like to do with their time at home? What makes them feel good? What activities are their children involved with? It's all right to take ideas from friends, show houses, and magazines, as long as it's your own the process, not to define the final product. My client's popular baby's room design may have started with a photograph of an interesting, well-styled room, but if we come across the photo books, we might not even recognize it as the baby's room of the room my client brought into being by carefully combining her personal taste. **TIME**



Matthew Patrick Smyth is a freelance designer based in New York City. A sampling of his work can be seen on his website: 212.333.3213 matthew@msph.com