

welcome

Live As Well As You Look

THERE ISN'T ANYTHING controversial or profound about the idea that fashion and interior design are intermingled pursuits—and there hasn't been for centuries. The countess in her quarters at Versailles wore confections that complemented the colors of her china, or the paint on her walls, each inspiring the other to greater feats of froth. Furniture was shaped to suit the swell of a dress, and though the frock passed out of style, the chair endures. A cover of *House & Garden* from 1949, part of a series of issues that began the year before, tells readers to “Live As Well As You Look.” Ever since humankind acquired the leisure and money for domestic arts, those who care about style have pursued it with a passion that knows no bounds. The man who dresses well tends to live well; the woman who cares about the color of her settee tends to be the one who cares about the color of her boots and bag.

Style is a personal thing. Some people are born with the ability to express their style in everything they touch; they don't seem to struggle to articulate who they are. They're the ones who turn heads by doing something as simple as mismatching the patterns on their skirts and coats (or on their chairs and curtains)—and making an eccentric choice look charming and appealing. The rest of us have to work a little harder to figure out what our personal style is, and how to express it. And there's nothing wrong with that. We turn to the experts—those who live stylishly, whether they are professionals or not—because they can show the way.

Of course, there is no such thing as handing over the keys to your house to a decorator. Even those who are wealthy enough to do so inevitably resurrect a few telltale habits. I'll never forget visiting the beautifully decorated home of a man made newly very rich by some lucky investments. He was insecure about how to spend his money, so he did what many Americans have done in this century: he turned to a decorator. The decorator pulled together a gorgeous house, and shopped, on behalf of his client, for everything, down to the swanky tube of toothpaste and elegant bone bristle brush. When I returned for a photo shoot, everything seemed meticulously preserved. But there in the bathroom was a bright purple toothbrush and a mangled tube of Colgate. The client had drawn the line, feebly, perhaps, but there it was—a triumph of personal style. You have to begin somewhere.

The idea of personal style seems to fly in the face of trends, fashion dictates, and revivals—those tidal

waves of taste. Suddenly, everyone is talking about Art Deco, or French design of the '40s, or '50s modernism. A great wash of inventory appears on sales floors; prices of pieces that languished a mere five years earlier skyrocket. Within a few years everyone tires of it and something else looks fresh and exciting and inspiring. (The same thing happens in fashion, which moves more rapidly.) The important point, though, is that someone, somewhere, fell in love with the style of the '40s. It expressed something, in all its reserved elegance, that someone recognized as startling yet familiar: “That's it! That's how I want to live. That is my style.” So there it stopped, for that someone. The tide rushed out, but before it did it had forever changed the way someone expresses a personal style. That's why it is worth paying attention to every little buzz and tickle of the design world. You never know what will catch. People who love design often speak of being like sponges—soaking it all up. Of course, to be ready to do that over and over again, you have to wring yourself out from time to time.

At *House & Garden*, we talk about design for the well-lived life, and we believe that living well begins at home. Home is the place we feel safest, the place in which we can explore, experiment, and express the zaniest of our creative urges. When we are secure at home, we are on a firm footing in the outside world. Living well isn't just about what is on the walls, or in the closets. Living well has to do with where you go from home—whether it is into a community of mothers who are raising children, or to work for a good cause, or to a job that brings some benefit to others. In fact, I've noticed that it is often the case that the people with the fullest closets live the least well. They are hoarding their possessions, living against a day somewhere in the future when they will enjoy what they have. Use what you have! Wear through the armrests; chip the china; spill on the place mats; stain the sheets! Perhaps your closets contain the remnants of a discarded personal style: the bold black sheets, when all you want now are the palest, most soothing of hues; the whitest dishes, when all you want now is a vivid burst of sunshine for the table. Move on. And move out into a world that will teach you more about what matters than any magazine could—or should.




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