

MANSION GLOBAL

DESIGNER'S CORNER

Southern Comfort: Designing With Unbuttoned Elegance

It's an aesthetic that combines raw materials, family heirlooms and layers of patterns—with a “wink and a smile”

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Designed by Lance Thomas, this living room exudes a Southern sensibility.

JEN BURNER

Maybe it's the hospitality or the historical elements—homes with Southern charm just have a warmth that makes their style unique.

“Southern charm is an unbuttoned elegance,” says designer Lance Thomas of Thomas Guy Interiors in Lake Charles, Louisiana. “It embraces the humble, raw materials of the region and realizes them as timeless spaces with a story to tell. It feels collected, curated and classic. And just like people from the South [of the U.S.], a Southern charm-style home should always come with a wink and a smile in the design,” he said.

Here, advice from the pros on how to infuse that down home charm into your home.

Create a Warm Welcome

“Southern charm is a sense of style that instantly makes a guest feel warm, welcomed and a friend of the family. This feeling is invoked by incorporating family heirlooms and antiques, complimenting the friendly hospitality of the host or hostess, of course.

“When selecting furniture and upholstery, look for classic lines and traditional finishes. Antique dealers are the best place to find pieces that will lend your rooms that sense of the past that we southerners love.

“There aren’t hard and fast rules to a Southern color palette. Most have lots of color and lean toward a more muddied or historic color palette, such as the Williamsburg paint collection for Benjamin Moore.

“When selecting fabric for window treatments and upholstery, layer a mix of large-scale florals with mini prints. We gravitate toward textiles with floral vines and lighten the mood with an airy mini toss pillow paired with a wool plaid. Needlepoint pillows are an easy way to give a nod to the past.

“When designing a Southern porch space, I prefer to add charm through plants and natural elements. A porch swing is the ultimate in charm. If you have a covered porch then a blue ceiling is also a must.”



Designer Eric Ross believes adding old-world details like this Apple Blossom pillow by Michaelian Home makes all the difference. *Michaelian Home*

Color Your World

“A Southern-style home should have color. A soft, pale palette that meanders through the entire spectrum of color. Floral pinks, green, blues and yellows are reflective of the natural landscape and culture of the South.

“Fabric and prints are my favorite part of Southern design. Unassuming textiles like linen and cotton come to life with old soul patterns like plaids, toiles, seersucker and florals. Mix them, and layer them; the more the merrier. Vary the scale of each to help blend the pattern story.

“Heirlooms and hand-me-downs are essential to Southern design. These are the pieces that have a story to tell. The dents, dings and scratches are appreciated and valued. They maintain a sense of humility and imperfection that contrasts beautifully with a pristine tailored sofa for example.

“Furniture should come from natural materials like oak, walnut and pine with a proud attention to craftsmanship—artisanal without being overworked. The overall style is simultaneously relaxed and put together, poised but not perfect.

“An outdoor space is equally as important as the interior. The pride a Southerner has for their formal garden is unmatched and makes for enviable spaces. You simply can't do a Southern front porch without a rocking chair and a table large enough to fit a large plate of pimento cheese sandwiches and a pitcher of tea.”

— **Lance Thomas of Thomas Guy Interiors in Lake Charles, Louisiana**

Look to Tradition

“Fragrance, light and color are the first things that strike you and help to define Southern charm. Homes tend to be very open with the light streaming through. Color takes its cue from nature, particularly flowers, and is reflected in paint, such as peach, salmon, pale pink, light rose and light blue, and in floral fabrics done in chintz and fretwork and wallcoverings.

“Look to Queen Anne-style, Georgian and early American furnishings with an appreciation for solid wood, particularly in dining rooms. Colonial style, Queen Anne walnut tables, cabinets of mahogany and wood-paneled walls are frequent details.

“We have worked on homes throughout the south from Savannah estates to the home of former President Jimmy Carter and First Lady Rosalynn Carter in Plains, Georgia, and what they all share is a colorful palette that makes even very formal interiors feel more casual and lived in.

“Outdoor spaces are livable year-round. I paint most ceilings inside a soft aqua blue, called Carleton Blue from our collection with Fine Paints of Europe. Wicker furniture is also commonly used.”



A dining room designed By Carleton Varney features quintessentially Southern floral wallpaper and traditional furnishings.
Dorothy Draper & Company, Inc.

— **Carleton Varney, president of Dorothy Draper & Co. in New York**

Mix Old and New

“Consider mixing vintage pieces with new furniture to create a feel that’s authentic and gathered over time. Classic lines that are plush and inviting perfectly juxtapose a family heirloom. Don’t be afraid to mix and match or repurpose a favorite heirloom for a modern look.

“I love using neutral colors for larger pieces and mix in pops of color and pattern. For example, every Southern home typically has large spans of warm wood floors, neutral walls and a pop of sky-blue painted ceilings on the front porch to welcome you in. Bright pops of green, in addition to potted plants, ferns and flowers can be lovingly dotted throughout.

“Incorporate clean lines and areas of visual rest alongside bold or historic patterns. And mix in some modern elements to help balance it out. For example, you could use an antique wallcovering alongside clean, modern frames with oversized neutral mats and smaller-scale prints to offset patterns.

“When it comes to using family heirlooms, think outside of the box. Consider how a piece can be repurposed for modern day living. For example, a beautiful decanter can become a vase, while an old dry bar can become an entry table. Chairs can be reupholstered in a bold pop or pattern to create a modern twist.

“A true Southern porch should be both comfy and inviting and wouldn’t be complete without a rocking chair or porch swing. Consider adding a vintage quilt for chilly nights, accent pillows for pops of color and a small side table for drinks and potted plants.”

— **Lisa Haude, president and principal of PDG Studios, based in Houston**