

Written by David M. Brown

Furniture works in unison with fashion. If you see it on the runways and magazines, you will see it in furniture.



Choosing an occasional chair is like choosing the perfect dress or suit, says Jeané Shurtliff, a design associate with La Maison Interiors, 15450 N. Scottsdale Road.

Occasional chairs range from those that are used for company — you pull the chairs toward the sofa ensemble for conversation or up to the dining room table for food — to everyday recliners to accent pieces which add color splash, stripes pizzazz or textural contrast.

“It doesn’t matter how beautiful it looks on the hanger; if it doesn’t fit correctly, you will never wear it — or sit in it,” says Jeané for La Maison, whose principals, Davinder Chawla and Alan K. Reinken, celebrate the first anniversary of their full-service design showroom this September.

Consider comfort, scale, function and style.

First, be comfortable: “If you are tall, find a chair with a higher back. High-back chairs will help to support your lower back and neck,” Jeané recommends. “If your legs are longer, find a chair with a deeper seat; deeper seats will help to support your knees and legs.”

And watch your scale: Don’t overweight your room. “Most people focus on individual furniture items, which is putting the cart before the horse,” she says. “Take notes on whether the room is square or rectangular. Measure the ceiling heights. This will narrow down the world in terms of what pieces to select when it comes to fit and function.”

Functionality: Arms? No arms? High back? Low back? Ask first: How is the room being used? “If you watch T.V., most likely you will want arms for lying down and stretching out after a long day. If you are going to entertain, this is when you can have a little more unexpected and artful pieces in the room.”

Chairs are used differently and placed differently. If you enjoy playing board games, a seating area with several chairs and a table should be incorporated, she says. If you enjoy watching movies, theater seating may be appropriate. If you and your spouse are snugglers, maybe a chair and a half is the right way to go.



You and your significant other may like different chairs, so find a chair that fits each one and, then blend both chairs with fabrics that complement your environment. “The key is to blend your two styles, so the room represents both of you,” she says.

Say the room has high ceilings: Explore higher-back pieces. “If you’re not comfortable in a higher back sofa/chair, then go with a lower back item and hang a larger wall décor piece above it. This will help to bridge the gap between the ceiling and the furniture,” she says.

A universal rule, Jeané explains: Don’t block pathways. Make sure there is room to move around in the room and leave a lot of space between the upholstery pieces and tables.

Transitional furniture — a wedding of traditional and contemporary with simple straight lines — is the trend and can be found in many heights and widths. The question to continually ask: How will the chair fill my space and complement my room?

Finally, these chairs should still feel very much at home: Make sure their fabrics and finishes best represent you and your color palette. Fabrics and finish change the style: Refinish a dark cherry or oak piece in brushed silver or low gloss black, and a traditional chair becomes transitional.

However, like a wardrobe, rooms can’t be changed for yearly trends. “So, covering a chair in a trendy fabric and adding the same fabric to a pillow and tossing it on the sofa is like adding different jewelry to a timeless black dress,” she says.

Whatever chairs you choose, remember to include everyone in the decision-making process to avoid disappointment. And, of course, having a floor plan done by a professional designer is the start to finding the perfect pieces and taking the guess work and stress out of the project.

“A designer can lead, guide, and direct you, to ensure a timeless style you will love and enjoy for many years,” Jeané says. “And, just like suits, chairs come in all shapes and sizes, and sometimes you need the help of an expert who will assist you in creating the room of your dreams.”

As always, when you think home, think La Maison.

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