

Decor Score: Eclecticism can be applied successfully

by Rose Bennett Gilbert

Q: We have moved into a city loft apartment that is basically contemporary - high ceilings, cement floors (painted), and industrial-size windows. Our furniture is pretty traditional - mostly heirlooms from my husband's family, who were collectors. We're having trouble visualizing the integration. Can you make any suggestions?

A: Think eclectic, that wonderful concept that lets you have your contemporary and your traditional, too, coexisting peacefully in the same space. The word eclectic actually translates into something like "the best of many different things." Which, be assured, is not the same as "hodgepodge." However you choose to mix things up, the same rules of good taste apply as, say, when you dress yourself. Colors should blend. Patterns should be compatible. Proper proportions should be observed.

ECLECTIC SUCCESS - Just the right touches of today's chic, subtle silvery white-on-white wallcoverings dress the walls in a traditional sitting room. CNS Photo. Observe those parameters, and you can feel free to exercise poetic license. Because tall walls are so dominant, put them to work as background for the kind of mood you want to conjure. The simply elegant room we show here might be inspirational for your contemporary loft space.

Here, instead of the stark "industrial white" walls too often assigned to all contemporary spaces, the sitting area has been softened with wallcoverings that have decidedly traditional stripes and damasks. But not your ordinary stripes and damasks: these (by Sanitas for Blue Mountain Wallcoverings) are chic silvery white-on-white, which let them bridge the style difference between the hip modern space and the traditional antique furnishings.

Q: We purchased a Tiffany-style lamp for our bedroom. When it arrived, it was even more beautiful than we expected, so we decided instead to put it in our living room. However, we already have a Tiffany-style lamp in one corner of the living room. We put our new one in the opposite corner. My husband said they do not have to be matching lamps. What is your opinion? They are both gorgeous, but they don't match.

A: The more interesting to look at, I'd say. The days of matchy-matchy decorating are far behind us. That

goes for colors, as well as patterns and styles, and carefully symmetrical arrangements.

Chances are you grew up in the era of what could be called "Noah's Ark decorating," back when everything came in twos. Two matching tables with two matching lamps at either end of the sofa - two matching nightstands with ditto lamps on each side of the bed - you know how it went.

Today, we're all about asymmetry, instead. You still need two lamps, of course, but let them be different enough to be interesting. Think of your Tiffany-style lamps as the works of art they are. No way would you want all your other artworks to be the same, would you?

Speaking of Tiffany artworks, you might be interested in the current exhibition at The New York Historical Society in Manhattan, which gives much credit for "his" lamps to a woman artist, one Clara Driscoll (1861-1944), who headed Tiffany Studios' Women's Glass Cutting Department for many years. Recent scholarship reveals that she was the creative talent behind such iconic lampshades as the Wisteria, Dragonfly and Poppy. Have a closer look at "A New Light On Tiffany" (www.nyhistory.org).

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