

Decor Score: Attitude, not altitude, needed for canopy bed

by Rose Bennett Gilbert

Q: All my life I have wanted a tester bed. Now we've bought a house with low ceilings - just eight feet - in the bedrooms, too low for a four-poster, but I'm determined! Is there a way to achieve the look of a four-poster that doesn't look tacky?

A: And how! Forget "tacky" and focus on the elegant bedroom we show here, where the "four-poster" is a clever illusion conjured by New York designer Charles Pavarini III for the ne plus ultra Kips Bay showhouse, one of the oldest and definitely most exclusive designer showhouses in the country.

THINKING BIG - This 'four-poster' bed is a clever illusion by New York designer Charles Pavarini III. He has mounted moldings on the ceiling to support curtains of lush fabrics that cascade onto the floor. CNS Photo courtesy of Charles Pavarini III and Design Associates Inc. Granted, the ceilings are higher than yours. But even though there was plenty of altitude for a real four-poster, Pavarini chose to interpret the concept instead. He mounted decorative moldings on the ceiling to support curtains of lush, metallic fabrics that cascade into "puddles" on the floor at each corner of the platform bed.

He called the room a "Renaissance Bedchamber," but Pavarini gave a vigorous nod to the 21st century, too. He installed computer-controlled LED ambient lighting around the ceiling and set it to transition through an ever-changing cycle of subtle colors. (See more of Pavarini's award-winning ideas at www.pavarinidesign.com.)

Q: We are retiring to the Sun Belt (Arizona) as soon as our house is finished. Meanwhile, I'm working with an interior decorator long distance, trying to choose surface things like colors and tiles. Having lived all our lives in the Northeast, we're frankly a little shocked by the palette and tile designs she's been e-mailing. They are so bright! Too busy, my husband says about the tile patterns. Are we just being too uptight and conservative?

A: I'd say "yes," but it's not your fault because you look at the design world through Northeastern eyes. Read: traditional and understated.

Blame the quality of the natural light in your latitude. It's thinner, lots less sunny and tends to foster conservatism in dress, decorating and definitely in choosing colors.

Need proof? Take a quick trip where the sun shines hot and brightly, and watch how the color decibels rise in sync with the temperatures. I did just that last month - my first dip into the culture, climate and cuisine of Puebla, an underexplored region of Mexico - and fell totally for the exuberant colors that virtually vibrated everywhere I looked.

Imagine the deep periwinkle-painted Mesones Sacristia hotel with its window and door trims in shocking pink. Step inside to an open patio dining room aglow in outrageous orange outlined in purple. Be intrigued by the metallic multi-colored embroidery on the traditional Poblana women's "China" dress, distinctive enough to merit its own stature on the city's outskirts.

Most of all, flip out over the handpainted Talavera china and tiles that have been handmade in Puebla since the Spanish first discovered the right kind of clay there - and only there - in the late 16th century. We're talking brilliant colors in turbulent designs, and they're used everywhere without inhibitions: up the front of entire buildings, including churches; set into outdoor walls and indoor kitchens.

One major studio, Uriarte Talavera (www.uriartetalavera.com.mx), will ship its glorious tiles and pots almost anywhere. But this is fine art, remember, and doesn't come cheaply. Plane tickets are another story: AeroMexico has just launched new, budget-soothing flights from a number of major U.S. airports directly to Puebla.

Go. Soak up some of the warmest colors under the sun. And once your Northeastern eyes are adjusted to hot hues and unbridled patterns, you should feel much more at home with your new Sun Belt palette.

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