

**The L.A.-based Brown Design Group** creates a warm, polished look in this living room with a mix of neutral colors and bold accents.



MATT WIER





THINKSTOCK

# Transitional TASTE

Old and new come together in a style that bridges classic, traditional, midcentury and modern

**“A** huge compliment to a transitional design scheme would be if someone walks in and can’t nail it down to a style — but they love the way it feels.”

These words from Ryan Brown, founder of Los Angeles-based Brown Design Group, sum up a look that has exploded on the scene.

Brown describes the style this way: a mix of contemporary and traditional that is warm yet polished, speaking directly to the more informal way we live now and the open layouts that go with it.

A transitional look pulls time-tested elements from eras and genres, blending and overlapping two or more distinct styles until there is no longer a clear distinction between them, creating a new style of its own. Toss classic décor and an emerging trend or two in a KitchenAid mixer for interior design and out comes this irresistible hybrid.

Chances are, transitional is the style you admire most on Pinterest and HGTV and in magazines — if only you could put your finger on how it’s done. This style needn’t be elusive. Take a light-handed approach that’s as eclectic or as traditional as your personal taste dictates.

## SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

“Transitional design is the magical space that allows homeowners to

expand their traditional tastes with new trends,” says Nikki Klugh, CEO of the Nikki Klugh Design Group in Chula Vista, Calif. “The combinations are endless. You can mix a bit of industrial, Zen, French country or modern and still have a home that looks comfortable and cozy without feeling too trendy.”

A classic base keeps it timeless while unexpected accents follow your whims and life’s shifting seasons. “It can evolve as kids get older, new pieces or mementos are acquired or new colors inspire you,” Brown says. “The simple act of changing things around will keep it current.”

He says his clients appreciate the flexibility to use an antique with patina in the same space as contemporary furniture and a piece of modern art: “The wonderful juxtaposition of old and new creates an adaptable living space where they can relax and unwind.”

Michael Violante and Paul Rochford, founders of Violante & Rochford Interiors in Santa Fe, find the style appeals to fashionable personalities who are comfortable walking the line between two styles. They believe this blended style will stand the test of time precisely because it embraces change.

## KEEP WHAT STILL WORKS

Even die-hard traditionalists are coming around to the transitional way of thinking. Renovations are the time to »



tear down walls to open your floor plan and create a more modern, communal flow to your living spaces. In this vein, functionality and comfort are emphasized, never compromised, to meet a specific aesthetic.

Less predictable than other styles, transitional décor lets you update fixtures ranging from lighting to faucets and hardware, balancing sleek new choices against a classic, neutral background.

If you tend to lean more toward the traditional style, but want to give your home a more contemporary feel, focus on integrating updated classics such as the modern wingback chair, says Meredith Mahoney, founder and design director of online furniture brand Birch Lane. Reupholster that floral ottoman in a woven, beige fabric, then anchor the living area with a neutral rug.

"For the bigger anchor pieces, select something classic. Simpler shapes are always best," Violante says. "Then layer colorful accessories, art and pillows, which can introduce formality or whimsy depending on the mood."

### SEEK BALANCE AND HARMONY

Before the transitional fun can begin, Mahoney suggests, create a "less is more" environment: "Eliminate excess clutter (decorative books, garden stools, side tables, etc.) so you can highlight minimal artwork and accents, creating an open and refreshing space."

The biggest challenge tends to be juxtaposing two styles so they work together and provide a place for the eye to



Designers at Violante & Rochford Interiors in Santa Fe combined traditional elements with colorful, contemporary pieces to give this dining room a richly layered look that's also warm and inviting.

rest. Too much of any one style means you haven't mixed it up enough, Violante says. "Too much matching goes against the soul of this style."

If it's tough to know where to start, select some inspirational images to lead you. Brown encourages vintage shopping, where you can pick up storied pieces that add warmth if you don't have family heirlooms. He loves placing a Danish modern side table next to an old antique leather club chair for a dash of surprise.

“The simple act of changing things around will keep (the transitional look) current.”

RYAN BROWN,  
founder, Brown Design Group

"We love both modern and classic pieces," Rochford says. "Just choose something you love and you will be happy to have it for a long time." ●

### COLORS

A tailored mix of neutrals, or pops of color against a neutral background

### MATERIALS

Natural materials including stone, marble and wood; medium-tone leather; grasscloth wallpaper; geometric tiles; metal finishes

### FURNITURE STYLE

An eclectic mix of modern and classic in similar shapes; less is more

### FABRICS

Beautiful, rich and touchable; tufted upholstery; linen and velvet

### MOOD

Inviting and approachable; elegant yet cozy