



Custom white bronze metal screens separate this dining room, by Marc-Michaels Interior Design, from the rest of the house while maintaining the open floorplan. The foyer beyond features light stained wood paneling with grass cloth insets. The white bronze railing nicely accents the wood panels and the brushed silver chandelier in the dining room.



# 7 SECRETS OF MODEL-HOME DESIGN

EVER WONDER WHY MODEL HOMES LOOK SO ENTICING? IT'S AN ART AND A SCIENCE.

BY KAREN LEBLANC

**W**ith their show-stopping good looks, fine features and fashion-forward accessories, decorated model homes are the best places to see what's new in interior design — and to get an idea of how your own home could potentially look. TV shows, magazines and social media may fire up the design imagination, but nothing compares to experiencing the rooms we aspire to inhabit.

For the serious homebuyer and the design-savvy consumer, model-home tours show what's possible. And decorating a model home is both art and science.

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Each object, color, fabric, fixture and furniture piece is carefully curated and packaged to create a visual narrative that seems effortless, but is in fact calculated to seduce — and to sell.

Professional designers — model-home merchandisers — help merchandise the space from start to finish, picking color schemes, cabinets, countertops, furniture, accessories and art to pull the entire look together.

Many of these design pros have developed certain trade secrets — refined formulas for showplace décor, consumer-

tested and reflective of current tastes and trends.

We asked several leading local model-home designers to share their techniques. The challenge, they say, lies in achieving a balance between what's currently in style and what will tastefully stand the test of time.

One of the biggest decorating faux pas is trying to be too trendy. "Trends fade, and if you try to keep up with them, you'll never be happy with your home," says Kay Green, owner of Kay Green Design.



A custom built-in, painted ocean blue, highlights this family room by Marc-Michaels Interior Design. Glass cabinets in front of the windows allow the owner to showcase some collectables while not obstructing the natural light. The wood-planked ceiling and textured wood panels behind the TV add warmth.

There are ways to introduce the latest colors, patterns and styles into an overall design with more staying power.

“This is usually accomplished through ancillary items, such as tables, pillows and draperies, while the main furniture is left with a more classic look,” adds Stephanie Henley, principal, Beasley & Henley Interior Design.

Model-home interiors also are appealing because everything is in its proper place — neat and in sync with the room. The first rule in emulating model-home style is to declutter.

“You can’t make something look fresh and new when you still have all the old knickknacks and clutter floating around,” says Henley. “Don’t spend a dime on your interiors until you clear it out, and then wait awhile, and clear it again. Now you’re ready to design.”

Once you’ve pared down your personal belongings, let the decorating begin. Here are the seven secrets for model home style:

## 1 Discover and Develop Your Sense of Style

TV shows, shelter magazines and social media tools such as Pinterest and HOUZZ are good starting points to collect photos, and discover and develop your own sense of style.

“In order to claim a style as your own, it’s all about the personalization of the space,” says Marc Thee, co-owner and design prin-

cipal of Marc-Michaels Interior Design. “Personal items you find on your life journey will ultimately make your space your style.”

Adds Christy Scanlon, designer and co-owner of Masterpiece Design Group, “If you find something you love, make it your own — add your own spin, take it up a notch or combine several ideas.”

As your preferred style and color scheme begin to manifest themselves, envision how it will all come together.

“Don’t buy anything until you decide on everything,” advises Henley. “One of the biggest mistakes homeowners make with décor is purchasing furniture and accessories without having an overall vision.”

Friends love to give advice, adds Green, “but when decorating your home, it’s important that you follow your style. Taking in too much advice from others will just cause confusion and frustration.”

## 2 Create Scale and Balance

Don’t underestimate the importance of scale — the size and shape of your décor elements. The scale of furniture, artwork, lighting and accessories is the secret sauce of interior design that creates a cohesive look.

“Think about things like chair-back heights and depths of seating on a sofa,” says Thee. “Make sure seating isn’t placed

PHOTO BY ED BUTERA OF IBI DESIGNS

This guest room, by Beasley & Henley Interior Design, features clean, light bedding that gives the space an open look. Dark wood tones provide needed contrast.





**This great room cocktail table is merchandised by Marc-Michaels Interior Design with a mix of accessories such as books and a floral arrangement along with crystal, brass and bronze pieces. This is a simple yet elegant way to display some of the owner's prized possessions and collections.**

too far apart. There's nothing worse than feeling like you're far away from someone you're having a conversation with."

The scale of your accessories creates balance and visually works to tie the room's elements together.

"Make sure the scale of your area rug is large enough for the front legs of every piece of furniture to be on it," adds Henley. "This helps all the items in the room feel connected."

The size of artwork can either complement or overpower the décor, so pay attention to placement and scale.

"A key mistake people often make is they buy artwork that's too small for the wall and then place it too high," says Henley.

### 3 Curate and Cluster

Strategically clustering your personal belongings can turn clutter into intriguing visual displays.

"Keep things edited and group like-items closely together," says Thee. "Get rid of things that aren't useful."

Curate and edit items on the coffee or cocktail table. Thee says that every cocktail table should contain four essential items:

- Something green or something alive.
- Books that say something about you.
- Candles, one scented and several that aren't scented.
- A personal memento.

Avoid over accessorizing. It undermines the clean, pared-down aesthetic so appealing in model-home interiors.

"In our model homes, we're using less small-scale accessories and showing more monumental items that create a statement," says Scanlon. "Kitchen cabinets are becoming more of a focal feature in the home, making accessories on top of cabinetry less necessary — especially if your design is contemporary."

### 4 Create Design Moments

Look for opportunities to create "wow" moments — focal points that punctuate a room.

"Children's spaces and outdoor living areas are perfect opportunities to create that 'wow' design," says Scanlon. "For example, take your children's hobbies to the next level with their bedroom theme. This can also be translated into a loft or spare bedroom, where the kids rule the room."

Make a statement with furniture to liven up a living space. "Try an accent chair with a different pattern, bright color or different fabric," says Green. "You still want the piece to be functional, but to also leave a lasting impression."

In the living room, Thee suggests creating a "snapshot wall"

PHOTO BY GIOVANNI PHOTOGRAPHY



In this bathroom, by Masterpiece Design Group, frameless glass, sleek tile designs, white towels and a free-standing soaking tub help to achieve a serene, spa-like ambiance.

to command attention in a room.

“This could be the sofa wall or the TV wall,” he says. “You can have a wall with a group of images in frames, then in another room, a wall that has a large watercolor. In a different room, you can use interesting old photos.”

## 5 Finishing Touches

Finishes add visual interest with texture, dimension, reflectivity and color — and help enhance the perceived value of a home.

“Great finishes for me are the most important and show-stopping design features,” says Green. “I suggest starting in the bathroom and kitchen. Update the kitchen backsplash and cabinet hardware. Create a natural stone shower to incorporate spa elements into the home.”

Using metallic and reflective materials will add sophistication to a room, adds Thee, who says that “metallics are a trend with staying power.” Lacquer accessories, crystal candleholders and mother-of-pearl objects provide perfect surfaces for light to dance and disperse, he notes.

“Add exterior finish elements that are unexpected in an interior setting, such as stacked stone, brick pavers and tongue-and-groove siding,” suggests Scanlon.

## 6 Pick Inviting Colors

Color is the No. 1 design tool to refresh a space or reflect a trend. From painted stripes to neutral, timeless hues, experts say pick a color scheme that makes the space inviting and memorable.

“Think about what you’ll be using the space for,” says Green. “If you’re updating your bedroom, you might want to think about softer, more relaxing colors. Once you choose a color, you can build around that and find bedding, pillows, and art to match your color scheme and really pull the room together.”

Play it safe with a neutral color palette or go for drama with an edgier, high-contrast color scheme — but either way, be decisive. “Don’t live in between,” says Thee. “Pick one and stick to it.”

He suggests mixing neutrals in a low-contrast color palette with grayed lavender or seaglass blues. Or do the exact opposite, mixing high-contrast colors such as ink blues, gunmetal gray or dark charcoal with a light cream/winter white or light neutral colors.

For timeless color palettes that never go out of style, Henley suggests whites, creams, grays, tans and blues.

Adds Scanlon: “I always recommend starting with a neutral



In this Mattamy Homes model, Beasley & Henley Interior Design created a timeless kitchen that captures the latest looks with uncluttered countertops, fresh colors and light backgrounds with a few darker contrasts. Large art pieces are hung at the right height, and plants add a splash of green.

base, whether beige or the new “greige,” and then layer color on top using pillows, paint, vases and other elements that can be easily changed to suit the color of the year.”

## 7 Maximize Your Living Space

Furniture layout, window treatment placement and lighting can work together to maximize every inch of your living space.

Green suggests hanging window treatments as close to the ceiling as possible to give the space the illusion of being larger. Also, plan furniture placement carefully to avoid wasting space.

“Try different layouts for your furniture,” says Green. “You want the furniture layout to enhance the space and also allow for easy traffic flow.”

Also, take advantage of outdoor living space to increase your functional square footage.

“Outdoor living spaces are extremely popular right now,” says Scanlon. “By adding a trellis, an outdoor fire pit, brick pizza oven or some nice outdoor furniture, you can turn your space into an oasis that resembles a model home.”

Whatever your sense of style, experts say to keep it consistent throughout the home.

Using these seven secrets as your guide, model-home style can be simple to achieve rather than some unobtainable ideal. ■



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