

MANSION GLOBAL

DESIGNER'S CORNER

How to Display Your Antiques in a Way That Feels Modern

You don't want to feel like you're living in an auction house after all

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A gallery wall decorated with antique mirrors and designed by Benoist F. Drut for Maison Gerard in New York is paired with modern cloud-like light fixtures and an abstract cowhide-print...

JAMES HARRIS

Each week Mansion Global tackles a topic with an elite group of designers from around the world who work on luxury properties. This week we look at how to showcase your antiques in the least stuffy way possible .

While antiques undoubtedly pay homage to the past, displaying them in a more modern way can breathe new life into your home.

"The personal touch of adding antiques to a modern space will allow them to stand out much more than what was shown in a showroom, breaking the monotony of an all-one look or period room," said Benoist F. Drut, owner of Maison Gerard gallery in New York City.

"Curating antiques within an interior gives the space a narrative," said Georgina Wood, design director of London-based Taylor Howes. "There is something around the poetry they add when juxtaposed against a modern canvas; you often find that when removed from a traditional surrounding, the character of a piece stands out more and has more impact."

To give old-world objects a new point of view, follow these tips from the design pros.

Have Design Intent

"Showing all the pieces in the same room is dated. If it is a set of seating or a suite of furniture comprised of a dining table, dining chairs, sideboard, and a console, for example, I would display them separately—show the console in the living room and introduce contemporary art to lighten it up. The most important thing to remember is that there are no rules when it comes to mixing periods, styles, colors, and materials.

"I like to place variations within groupings and tweak a vignette to create a skyscraper landscape. If you have a collection of vases and they are all the same height, I suggest displaying some on small wooden cubes, varying the heights to make it more dramatic. You can even try using a small gift box, as long as it's sturdy, to change the heights of some of the items you want to display. You do not want to have anything in your home that looks like a store display.

"With color, there is something to be said about consistency in groupings. However, you also want it to be interesting and engaging. You can keep pieces together by family but introduce surprises.

"When creating an environment, I often think about what I refer to as the dialogues of objects—displaying two very different yet related items.

"Recently I created a space that included a pair of 20th century armchairs upholstered in faux snakeskin and placed a snakeskin screen behind, an antique zebra rug on the floor and a textured fabric sofa with a colorful ceramic base in between. The vignette was amazing; it was demanding but it worked."

—**Benoist F. Drut, owner of Maison Gerard gallery in New York City**

Get Creative

"It is often quite nice to combine styles of furniture and objects. We are currently designing a very modern study in the South of France with a pair of 1930s armchairs paired with a modern sculptural desk. A previous client collected porcelain, which was mounted in clear acrylic boxes and positioned on the wall up the staircase.

"We are enjoying maximalism at the moment, and the layering of artisans, finishes and materials within a space. Interpreted in the right way, you can bring to life the traditional methods and apply them in a modern setting."



This room designed by Taylor Howes showcases a chinoiserie wall mural and ceramics on the window ledge, which add old-world character to a modern home.

Taylor Howes

— **Georgina Wood, design director, London-based Taylor Howes design**

Juxtapose With Purpose

"In the past, I have paired a vintage secretary with a sleek modern chair because the juxtaposition is aesthetically pleasing. But on the other hand, it can also be nice to group vintage pieces together—perhaps a few objects lined up on a dresser or a vignette on a library shelf.

"I especially like to experiment with color when modernizing a space or one piece in particular. Sometimes reupholstering an antique can give it a new life. In one of the living rooms I recently designed, I used hot pink horsehair to reinvigorate an English bergere.

"The juxtaposition of materials and surface finishes are often great determiners, as is the way shapes play off of one another. For example, displaying a collection of antique desk accessories, antique leather-bound books or a vintage clock on a modern desk looks wonderful. Antique and vintage textiles, from throws to decorative pillows, are great accents on late 20th-century sofas and club chairs.

"I tend to use contemporary furniture and lighting elements to give a space a more modern feel. These pieces take on an artistic quality and have energy against traditional backdrops. Another way to modernize an interior is to incorporate a bold paint color or even use graffiti on the walls."



Graffiti-covered walls create a whimsical backdrop for antique curio and art in this room designed by Phillip Thomas.

Antoine Bootz

— **Phillip Thomas, founder and principal of Phillip Thomas Inc ., a design firm in New York**

Tell a Story

"In our studio, we have used modern surfaces such as metal coatings, resins and embroidered finishes, all of which can create a unique stage for an antique. Lighting is also a vital element to experiment with—light, temperature and position will influence the mood and can further highlight the quality or specific detail of a piece.

"The important aspect is balance—balance of materials and the quality of finish. Antiques and artifacts can sit comfortably in the grandest of classical interiors, as majestically as they would in a contemporary minimal interior. To emphasize a piece, create a level of tonal contrast between the object's finish and of the interior. This can be very minor in contrast or as stark as a silhouette, the effect is entirely personal."

— **Singapore-based Scott McNeely, design director HBA Residential**