

> style

by Stephanie Simons

"I love a room with soul, but it has to match your personality."

In postmodern suburbia, home design has reinvented itself. The stoic, standardized formulas of yesteryear have given way to more passionate and diverse displays, punctuated by personalized layers and details.

"Design has come full swing," says **Catherine Macfee**, president and principal designer of the Orinda-based firm Catherine Macfee and Associates Interior Design. "Just like the styles you see in fashion, anything goes. It's an art, not a science. There are no wrong answers."

Macfee, who studied at San Francisco's Fashion Institute of Design and Merchandising, has the heads-up on the latest trends and a knack for creating her own. She specializes in custom-designed furniture and interiors. Her fascination with whimsical shapes and colors is inspired by the unique charm of the West Coast, especially regions like Tahoe, Napa, Carmel, and the East Bay.

Compared with San Francisco, where homes are known for exquisite antiques and elegant architectural details, the East Bay is considerably more casual and relaxed. Sophisticated suburban neighborhoods allow homeowners to indulge their every whim.

"The East Bay is unique," Macfee says. "Hypothetically speaking, if you want to have a teal house, it can look great. Warmer weather dictates more color. But in San Francisco, it would be out of place."

As for interiors, Macfee says the most effective design is a process of persistent layering that allows a room to take on a life of its own. For novices, this slow manipulation of colors, textures, and ideas is the surest way to reach that genuine Aha! moment, the one that comes instinctively to professionals like Macfee. "Some beginners speed through this critical stage, some skip it altogether, while others yell Eureka! the moment they walk into a store, pick out their favorite pieces, and think, 'There's my room!'"

"I love a space that's created rather than purchased," says Macfee. "I love a room with soul, but it has to match your personality. That means having the patience to let a space develop into something unique and wonderful. That's the fun of it."



CATHERINE'S FIVE STYLE TIPS



1. Shop like a scavenger. Always be on the prowl for pieces you love, especially if you're traveling.

2. Don't stifle a playful lifestyle with stuffy pieces. If you've inherited furniture with dated prints but classic lines, transform it by covering it with bold new fabric.

3. Walls and floors in a room should be a common color and intensity. If you're

smitten with terra-cotta carpeting, try a similar shade on the walls.

4. Welcome the flavors of different cultures into your home. Variant influences can work together to create a larger scheme that's hip and harmonious.

5. For a quick, easy splash of the latest colors in your home, try out some new bathroom towels or sofa pillows.

