

New Technology adding Dimension to Interior Design

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With interior furnishings getting both increasingly sophisticated, and at the same time responsive to the needs of the consumers, we have come to see in the last couple years a plethora of products and innovations that have made life easier for both designers and users alike.

From an applications and functional standpoint, technology has enabled a generation of aesthetically pleasing and easily maintained materials to invade the commercial and residential markets.

The lowly plastic laminate now boasts a range of finishes that include to name a few, matte, metallic, high gloss, and embossed options. A new light refractive texture minimizes finger marks to make maintenance a cinch, and at the same time subtly highlights the surface for interest. Custom color edgings and through-color surfacing materials that can be cut, carved, or routed

offer exciting opportunities for their use.

Some high-relief wall coverings are now manufactured to enable the designer the freedom of specifying paint finish on the material, thereby allowing the wall and ceiling colors to come as close as possible to the client's chosen scheme. These wall coverings and sculptured carpeting point to the increasing popularity of "high touch" (i.e. high texture) products in interior furnishings. The application of computer technology in carpet design and production for restaurants, hotels, and offices adds another dimension to the term "custom coloring", and has opened up endless possibilities for the design professional in recent years.

The wide variety of new materials and finishes available have accentuated the polarization of two approaches to design. For the "minimalist" who carefully edits all contents of a space to its essence, these products have caused an infusion of rich textures to the interior environment to achieve an increased complexity and sophistication that is previously unattainable. The sensuous interplay of lustrous silks, sleek lacquer, and nubby wools against the textured wall and floor coverings will spark interest in any monochromatic scheme.

At the other end of the spectrum is the Ralph Lauren/Mario Buatta look. The interior comes to life through a profusion of decorative prints, be it pattern on pattern or chintz on chintz. Whether the look be traditional or eclectic, the space relies on the

successful blending of a melange of visual elements to create the desired mood. Architectural detailing such as paneling, chair rails, crown moldings, coffered, or pressed tin ceilings are often added to give definition and character to the space. Fiberglass arabesques and rosettes also help reproduce the period look by modern means.

Manufacturers for both the commercial and residential sectors have gone to great lengths to make color selection simple and painless. Alliances have sprung up between plastic laminate, flooring, textile, paint and wall covering industries to research and produce color coordinated lines. However such convenience can become a double-edged sword. While it allows anyone to put together a foolproof color scheme quickly, it may also be too much of a good thing and unless used judiciously, may lead to interiors that sink into a sea of monotony.

To spice up a bland over-coordinated interior, one can have the option of adding something that has a unique "personality" which reflects one's taste. It can be a custom rug, an accent piece in an unusual finish, or a well displayed collection of decorative accessories. Sometimes it is possible to put together a "montage" of a homogenous collection of furniture and accessories with items from another decorative style or period to spark a new dynamic tension. In any case, the inclusion of a couple pieces of custom designed furnishings will lift the setting from

a mass produced "me too" image to reflect an interior that is created exclusively for the occupant.

An often overlooked approach is to draw on the architecture of the building to create a link between the exterior and interior of the structure. The architectural motif and building materials can be incorporated to become part of the interior details. The selected elements can be replicated on items like millwork, furniture, or rugs as an interesting means to reinforce the design theme.

Never before have designers had so many resources at their disposal, challenging them to exercise their imagination to make their clients' visions a reality. When one is willing to go beyond what is given by the marketplace, and work with a professional designer to explore avenues that expand the vernacular of design through creative application of its technologies, the resulting product will be more than a predictable arrangement of furnishings in a predictable setting.

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