

Home & Garden

Bringing it home: Find inspiration in public spaces' decor



This 2019 photo shows the inside of andSons Chocolatiers in Beverly Hills, Calif., which was designed by Lauren Buxbaum Gordon and Nate Berkus. Homeowners who want to take decorating inspiration from their favorite public places should consider what specific elements they like best, such as appealing lighting. Inside andSons, ample natural light is paired with soft pendant lighting to create a light-filled, inviting space. (Christopher Dibble/Lauren Buxbaum Gordon via AP) (Associated Press)

By **Melissa Rayworth | AP**

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Sometimes, sitting in a public place like a hotel lobby, you notice a mix of colors you'd never considered using in your own home — and you realize you absolutely love it.

Or you see furniture that's much more modern than you thought you liked, but it's just what your living room needs.

Interior designers say clients often tell them about public places with style they want at home. This can function as a useful shorthand, says Lauren Buxbaum Gordon, design director and partner at Nate Berkus Associates, who designs commercial and residential spaces.

"If somebody tells us they love the Park Hyatt in New York versus the Greenwich Hotel," Gordon says, "we know we've got a good place to start with them."

It's not about trying to duplicate that space's style. It's more about specific elements — the flow of the space, or the lighting, or "the coziness factor" — that you'd like to emulate.

If a client loves a certain resort in Mexico, Gordon says, that style is “probably not going to translate to Chicago, exactly. But we try to tap into some of the details: If they’re responding to wicker woven chairs, we can certainly incorporate details like that.”

Northern Virginia-based interior designer Tracy Morris agrees: If you fall in love with the design of a sleek, modern dance club in Miami, that’s worth noting. And though bringing that entire style home to a traditional Georgian house might not work, Morris says, you can bring in “cleaner-lined pieces of furniture” to get a bit of that style.

We’ve asked Gordon, Morris, and Los Angeles-based designer Betsy Burnham for advice on the best ways to make this happen.

LIGHTING YOU LOVE

“There are so many different layers of lighting in restaurants,” Morris says. “In a house, most people only have two: the overhead lights, and then maybe a lamp or two.”

So, notice which restaurants have lighting that pleases you, and see how they do it: Does the space have “cove lighting,” meaning things like strip lighting tucked out of view underneath cabinets or other indirect light?

Take photos of light fixtures that appeal to you, and considering adding types of lighting you don’t have.

NOTICE CHAIRS AND TABLES

Is there a restaurant where you’d be happy to sit for hours and talk with friends? That’s the way you want your dining room to feel, says Burnham, and often it comes down to choosing the right chairs — in terms of style and comfort.

So, take note the next time you’re enjoying a restaurant: Are the chairs fully upholstered, or made of wood or metal, or a mix of these? Do they have arms, and is that important for your comfort?

Also, consider table shapes: Many of Burnham’s clients love the long, narrow communal dining tables that have become popular in restaurants — something they might not have thought of otherwise for their home.

If you discover chairs or a table you’d love to own, take a photo. “We use Google image search all the time,” Burnham says, when a client has a photo of a chair they like. If you can’t find that exact chair for sale, you might find something very similar.

Burnham and Gordon both suggest Pinterest for this purpose: “If you have a particular restaurant in New York that you like, search for it on Pinterest,” Gordon says. “It’ll also pull up 1,000 other images that look similar.”

CONSIDER YOUR SHEETS

Hotel visits are a great way to test out design ideas for bedrooms, from furniture arrangements to color palettes to bedding. If you discover sheets you love at a hotel, ask the staff for the brand name and type of fabric.

“Everybody talks thread count,” Morris says, but find out whether the hotel sheets that impress you are percale or bamboo or jersey or something else. “Bamboo sheets are really silky and soft,” she says, “compared to the really crisp nature of percale.”

Another bonus when staying in a beautiful hotel room: Take a good look at the tiles in the bathroom. Hotel bathrooms “tend to be a little over-designed,” Burnham says. But you may notice a nice tile arrangement. “Or you could love the use of a small-scale tile on the floor versus a large-scale stone on the wall.”

If you take photos “and you really think about it while you’re experiencing it,” she says, “you can bring a lot of that home with you.”

Want one more finishing touch? High-end hotels and restaurants are often subtly scented with a signature fragrance, Morris says. If you find out that one delights you, ask the staff if they can find out what it is. If they tell you the space is flavored with vanilla, Morris says, you go to a home retailer “and you buy yourself a vanilla candle. You do not need tons of money to make this happen.”

And if you love a particular public space, don’t hesitate to ask the staff who designed it. You can get the designer’s name, follow them on Instagram and perhaps even direct message them a question.

“I have people reaching out to me all the time on Instagram asking me questions,” Gordon says.

EDITOR’S NOTE — Melissa Rayworth writes the Ask a Designer column monthly for The Associated Press. Follow her on Twitter at @mrayworth.

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