GOOD HOUSEKEEPING

Designers Say This Is the Secret to a Perfect Dining Room Seating Arrangement

One designer explains that it "gives the dining room a sense of personality without chaos."

BY KELSEY MULVEY PUBLISHED: JAN 17, 2026



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If you're planning a dinner party, you'll want to read up on the **designer secret to the perfect dining room seating.** Surprisingly, it doesn't involve getting a set of **perfectly matched chairs**. In fact, it's the opposite! For a cozy and cohesive look, designers actually recommend **mismatched chairs** around the dining table.

It's easy for this look to feel disjointed, so designers offered tips for how to make it feel coordinated without being matchy-matchy. It's a great way to show off any antique chairs you love, but only have one or two of.

Keep reading to find out everything you need to know about the designer secret to the perfect dining room seating.



DESIGN: TRACY MORRIS; PHOTOGRAPHER: ANICE HOACHLANDER

"When everything matches, it can read as flat; however, when everything contrasts, it feels disjointed," says Miranda Cullen of **Inside Stories** in Littleton, Colorado. "The magic happens in that middle space, where the differences feel intentional and the overall composition still feels cohesive and calm."

Mismatched chairs can also give homeowners a one-of-a-kind edge. "It allows homeowners to show off their unique style and gives their space more character," explains Deborah Sauri, co-founder of **TriVistaUSA Design + Build** in Arlington, Virginia. "We love it when our clients are open to being creative and playful, but being careful to not overdo it."

That said, there's a fine line between mismatched dining room chairs that are considerate—and a setup that's completely chaotic. To bridge the gap, designers say two is the magic number. Cullen likes to juxtapose two different chair styles. "I usually anchor the table with a pair of slightly more substantial chairs at the ends to ground the setup, then mix side chairs that complement rather than compete," she says.



DESIGN: INSIDE STORIES; PHOTOGRAPHER: ERIC LUCERO

Tracy Morris agrees and says sticking with two types of looks keeps the dining room "intentional and curated rather than mismatched." "It gives the dining room a sense of personality without chaos," the McLean designer explains.

Want to create an eclectic look with even *more* varying styles? Sauri gives you her blessing, as long as you buy them in pairs. "Try to have at least two of the same style so it doesn't feel haphazard."

With so many chairs to peruse, finding the perfect combination can be easier said than done. For **Jess Cooney**, it's imperative to consider your space's needs. "Think about function first and form second," the Berkshires-based designer explains. "If you have kids and limited floor space, a bench is a great replacement for chairs."

You'll also want to consider how a room's finishes interact with everything else in the room. For Natasia Smith of **Re-Find** in Boulder, Colorado, those smaller details is what feels a space "feeling cohesive and layered, rather than 'yard sale.'"

From there, you'll want to look for pieces that have through-line. "The goal is for the chairs to feel collected rather than coordinated," Cullen explains. "The pieces don't have to match, but they do need to speak the same language."

Tone, texture, scale, or finish can connect to seemingly clashing chairs, but Morris encourage you to look for contrasting silhouettes. "If one chair is upholstered, I'll pair it with something sleeker for contrast," she says. "It's all about layering interest while maintaining a sense of unity that feels intentional and elevated."



COURTESY OF JESS COONEY

Another tip: Juxtapose different eras. In a recent project, Cooney's client wanted to restore their existing antique chairs. Problem was, there weren't enough for all their seating needs. The solution? "We opted for a fresh, contemporary pairing for the head chairs that pulled in her dark accents and eclectic mix of finishings throughout," Cooney says.

Of course, you can't forget the ergonomics. Comfort is a non-negotiable, so it's a good idea to do a sit test when possible. It's also crucial to keep the dimensions consistent. "Whether it's a mix of chairs and a bench or different chair styles, keeping everyone at a similar eye level makes conversation feel natural and comfortable," says Sandy Baisley, also of Re-Find.

It's that perfect mix of similar and different—style and structure—that will keep your next dinner extended long after dessert is served.