

BRING OUT THE  
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Text by Laura Kaehler / Photography by Durston Saylor

## NEW

An evolving architectural trend marries traditional exteriors, with shingles and sloping roofs, to spacious, sharp-edged interiors that are contemporary to the hilt



ABOVE LEFT: This classic stone-and-clapboard home features archways, flared cedar rooflines, and multi-paned windows. ABOVE RIGHT: The kitchen, using a background of white recessed paneled and glass cabinet doors, is partnered with sleek black-granite counters and stainless-steel details for a fresh, clean look.

Recently, at the inaugural Gala Picnic at the Philip Johnson Glass House (see *The Modern Estate*, Spring 2007), I heard guests exclaiming about how wonderful it would be to live in a house like this one. Clearly, they were responding to the cascading sunlight, panoramic views, and sense of openness that are a legacy of Johnson's inspired design.

More and more of my clients are expressing interest in houses with contemporary interiors. It's an aesthetic infused with warmth, color, and whimsy: crisp, simple details, vast expanses of glass, soaring ceilings, and exotic metals and woods. Perhaps clients find this style alluring because it mirrors the vibrancy of their own lifestyle.

However, when it comes to the outside, many owners prefer to play it safe, opting for classical façades. It's a matter of "blending in": They see contemporary exteriors as too daring, or out of sync with the character of their neighborhoods, or as a bad bet for resale.

As a result, a trend is emerging for homes that strive to fuse traditional Shingle Style outsides with ultramodern interiors. Greg Knudsen, an interior designer at Timothy MacDonald Incorporated, in New York City, explains that many of his clients "want that quintessential country vernacular exterior but are pushing for interiors with more of an 'edge.'"

Since roominess and openness are hallmarks of contemporary design, it's important to start with an open plan that limits obstacles like standard doors, which tend to segment the house. Instead, archi-

itects can draw on a range of structural components—floors, windows and walls, ceilings, and lighting—to assure an easy flow of movement.

The floor is a key element in establishing a sense of wide-open space. Although the same materials found in conventional interiors—primarily wood and tile—are employed, the challenge is to create a sense of continuity throughout the home. This is best accomplished by using matching floor materials, patterns, and colors.

Windows also play a major role in shaping the look and feel of interiors. Large windows that run from floor to ceiling can have few muntins—the horizontal or vertical wood or metal divisions that separate a window's glass panes. Such tall windows help "dissolve" the borders between interior and exterior spaces.

On walls, to obtain a greater sense of space, moldings can be mini-



mized or eliminated completely. Yet doing so creates a dilemma: Because walls, floors, and ceilings are made from dissimilar materials, they naturally shrink or expand at different rates, often causing small gaps and fissures to appear where the materials intersect. Molding hides these gaps, but since we want to limit its use, we must try another approach.

One solution is to build small “reveals” where floors, ceilings, and windows

meet with walls. A reveal—a shadow line created between two surfaces—effectively conceals these gaps, but it is very hard to build. As custom builder Ron Metell, principal of R.C. Metell Construction in Stamford, Connecticut, explains, “Clean, crisp planes and walls without trim are difficult to execute well, since there is no way to hide any flaws. Each corner and intersection must be perfect.” Yet this technique is well worth the effort: Capacious, uncluttered walls tend to highlight a room’s artwork or furnishings.

In typically designed interiors, ceilings appear darker and lower, since they don’t get the same amount of light as adjoining walls and floors. To mitigate these effects, a designer might use “up-lighting,” a line of tiny lights that encircles the perimeter of the room. Embedded within the walls, these lights are invisible. When turned on, they have a striking impact: The lights illuminate the ceiling, giving it a “floating” appearance, which in turn seems to add height to the room.

The effectiveness of contemporary design is highly dependent upon lighting: It’s the glue that binds everything together. Gary Novasel, a lighting designer at Patdo Light Studio in Port Chester, New York, laments the fact that “Good lighting is one design component lacking in so many homes.”

The use of artificial lighting adds color to a room and can also mitigate undesirable effects. For example, if a room is painted gray, the wrong type or amount of light could cast a sickly green color over everything.

The lighting used in contemporary interiors differs significantly from traditional lights: In place of chandeliers and lamps, there are more built-ins. Since their voltage is lower, the bulbs and fixtures are smaller, making the lighting—whether recessed, track, cove, or decorative—more subtle and providing a purer, less cluttered look.

In sum, this evolving exterior/interior trend offers owners the best of both worlds. Colonial façades, featuring period details, tend to harmonize with the existing architecture of many neighborhoods in Fairfield County. In contrast, the interiors throw tradition pleasantly to the winds, offering spaciousness, brilliant daylight, stunning heights, and rich, alluring materials. ❖



OPPOSITE PAGE: A glimpse of the excitement beyond is seen while strolling this new glass walkway to the great-room addition beyond. High transom windows allow more light to reach the interior hallway, while crisp track lighting adjusts for the ever-changing art collection. The great room’s fireplace and the colorful, modern furniture are the focal points. INSET: The exterior follows the curved lines, columned porches, and period details of this Shingle Style home. THIS PAGE: Interest is provided in a new patterning of cottage-style windows. A “floating” maple and stainless steel stair, along with a ceiling that follows the slope of the gable roofline, draws your eyes upward.

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