

OLD TRICKS, NEW STYLE

New Orleans-based interior designer Hattie Sparks Collins talks to Leah about our generation's love for traditional style.

Photography by Andrew Gianmarco. Styling by Jana Lufkin.

What's old will always feel new again, and trends routinely cycle back around (in fashion, the accepted dictum is that it takes 20 years for something to fall in, out, and back in style). Our generation has experienced first-home purchases and settling periods dovetailing with the great staying-in of a pandemic: We'd likely always have started caring more about couches and lighting fixtures at this point in our lives, but we *really* started caring when our homes became our offices, and we hunkered in and settled down. A social scroll these days would leave you sure that any well-appointed house is pulling more from the past than it might have in the not-so-distant past, and it's hard to think that's just a coincidence.

"The past few years have been pretty tumultuous. There's so much that's been going on, particularly with Covid. People really withdrew and took comfort in their

homes, and our business just completely skyrocketed," explained Hattie Sparks Collins, the owner, creative and decorator behind Hattie Sparks, when I asked why every stylish person seems drawn to antique-adjacent spaces and rooms more classic than modern. Austerity and angularity seems out of favor, replaced by things the zeitgeist is intent on labeling grandmillennial. "I think people wanted to return to those traditional themes and classic aesthetics because it was comforting to them. It was things they grew up with in their grandparents' home or parents' home. It's soothing to come into your house and see these familiar shapes and colors and patterns. On a very philosophical level it makes sense to me that people want a more traditional look."

Spending more time at home has officially become the norm, and, of course, the content we digest has morphed alongside









us. Six or eight years ago we might not have known what an influencer's home looked like (or cared), but social media positively teems with visibility. We're seeing more people's spaces—and more work from people like Hattie.

"People are realizing the value of home and have put a premium on it. And as they began spending more time at home they wanted to reinvest in pieces and design that would stand the test of time—and they could enjoy being around all day, every day," she shared. "Home was no longer just a stop-in after work for eating and sleeping; it's become everything for a lot of people."

The thing that drew me to Hattie, beyond her beautiful work, like the Vashon Island, Washington home seen in these pages, was that she and many of her clients are in a similar life stage to myself and many of the women in our community. Mid-to-late 30s, with children who are still young but beyond the baby-proofing stage, we're in the homes that could very well be our forever spots, and we've spent enough years in them to have settled in but not so long that we're devoid of any past-life relics (like hand-me-down couches or tables that moved from apartment to apartment). There's the awareness that good things last, and it's better, when possible, to invest in something you'll have and love for decades. "When you spend the money on really quality pieces, there's sticker-shock, but then you'll love it for 15 years. It's going to stand up to the wear and tear of daily life,"

she advised, touching on a theme that's true of any investment item (like beautifully made shoes or bags). And while designers will always love aesthetics, they don't ignore function for form.

"What's important to me is making sure that spaces are super functional for families, that nothing is too untouchable or too precious; that if they want to shift things around it won't upend the entire design," she explained. "I want people to feel like they can live in their houses versus being very careful because the drapes match the pillow match the headboard and the bed skirt, and if anything gets stained or ripped we can't get the fabric again...I admire that level of design so much and think it's beautiful, but I find my clients come to me for more of a livable approach. We want them to feel like they can actually live in their space and relax, like it's welcoming and warm and has been there forever when they come home."

The dream, no? As is the idea of a child-friendly space that's also adult-eye approved and, ideally, smartly thought-through and strategized so everything isn't out the door when your toddler decides they're over dinosaurs or unicorns. "A child's room should be able to grow with them," Hattie said when I asked her to pull back the curtain on what designers really do when it comes to creating spaces for little ones. "We do a lot of pieces in kids' rooms that can stay with them throughout their lives." One of her go-tos is putting a vintage, mid-century-modern dresser in a nursery. "I tell parents,





'Use this as your changing table; keep their clothes in it. It's a nice enough piece that you're going to grow up with it. Tell them it's theirs: This belongs to you, and it's something you're going to want to keep throughout your life.'" She's not talking about making it through the sticker-and-crayon years, either. "It can go through high school, college, their first house. I like to choose a couple pieces that can grow with them or the parents can put into storage and keep for them until they're a little older."

Hattie, a mother of twin girls just shy of turning five when we talked, is also serious about telling your child that a piece is theirs—and letting them know that that kind of responsibility comes with some

ground rules. "I sat them down around their birthday last year and said, "These toys belong to you. They're your responsibility. If you lose it or break it, then it's gone, so we need to be careful with our things and take care of them. Put them back in their homes," she explained to me, the direct charge feeling mind-blowing in its simplicity. "Here's the home for your books, here's the home for your Tonies. We talk to them about responsibility for their belongs: 'If it breaks, we'll try to fix it, but you need to treat your things with care.'"

Chic and smart like all great design. I came to our phone call eager for design advice and left with a new attitude toward parenting.

