



# OPPOSITES ARE ATTRACTING

The new luxury has a sense of style and a sense of humour says **Lynne McArdle**



**T**oday it's all about the fusion of mixed materials when it comes to home design. Whether it's traditional with modern, rough with smooth, high with low, the artful juxtaposition of opposites brings a welcome element of surprise to even the most

functional of spaces. Contrast keeps things interesting and gives a room visual appeal - where individual elements stand out within a cohesive whole.

Legendary interior designer Billy Baldwin once said, "The first rule of decoration is that you can break almost all the other rules." When it comes to what goes with what, the rules have all been re-written - and are just waiting to be broken. There was a time, for instance, when it was taboo to mix warm-toned and cool-toned metals. For the last few seasons, mixed metals have dominated design trend reports, and they look as though they'll be around for the foreseeable future.

The same goes for other materials as well. Throw out labels and forget obvious match-ups in favour of a creative tension between odd-couple materials. Think of fine wood veneers paired with brass accents that have an almost industrial simplicity, or a plain glass top set on an ornately hand-carved base. When in doubt, remember the 80/20 rule: 80 percent of your interior can be cohesive in colour palette, texture, materials and style, but don't forget the all-important 20 percent of unexpected choices that will take your space from predictable to surprising and unique.

Keep in mind, however, that just like any good recipe, they work best when you use high quality ingredients. For a mix to succeed, each piece must have its own design integrity and its own solid construction. Set the mood with a few stand-out statement pieces that combine materials and finishes and let the rest of the room take its cues from them.

**Fine finishes:** The devil may be in the details but the fabulousness is in the finishes. Specialty painted finishes that mimic natural materials - whether it's a crushed eggshell finish or a faux malachite - are hot right now and they pair up especially beautifully with glass and brushed metals. In

addition to their intrinsic good looks, fine finishes multiply the options for mixing and matching, so look for finishes that will play well with others. Metallic leaf has made a big comeback in the last few years - gold and silver are perennial favourites, but platinum and a warmed-up alternative to traditional silver looks particularly fresh this year.

**Second skin:** Beautifully finished wood veneers will never go out of style, but designers have re-discovered another new-old material. Vellum, a leather treatment originally used in bookbinding, was much loved by Art Deco designers, who applied it to everything from coffee tables to cocktail cabinets. Tactile and sophisticated, vellum mixes well with hard-edged materials such as brass and glass and reflects the re-discovery of contemporary elegance.

**Art and industry:** The artistry involved in creating a hand-painted finish or an intricate carving takes centre stage when the design of a piece of furniture is simple and clean. Traditional looks fresh all over again when it is paired with contemporary design - sleek lines plus classic materials and please-touch textures add up to a sophistication that never gets old. Think of a match-up of luxury materials and industrial components: an étagère with hand-applied egglomise glass shelves set into a clean stainless steel frame, for instance, or a console made up of a highly detailed rococo carved base paired with a simple clear glass top.

**The new luxury:** The old luxury was a dinner party for eight in a formal dining room; the new luxury is a couple of friends sitting barefoot on a vintage Turkish silk rug around a glass-topped cocktail table while they drink champagne and eat sushi. Today's luxury means fine materials and beautiful finishes applied with livability and versatility in mind. The new luxury has a sense of style and a sense of humour, but most of all a sense of confidence.

Lynne McArdle

[www.aldenparkes.com](http://www.aldenparkes.com)

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H/W 200 N. Hamilton, Suite 110