

The Home Designer

Dining Room S.O.S.

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Trust me, the world with all its likes and comments will still be there long after you've finished clearing the table.

I often ask, "How did we ever survive as a society without all this technology and distraction?" Just fine, thank you.

Here's my challenge: reconnect. Begin by creating a dining room that both soothes your senses and offers a sacred place to catch your breath. I like to say, "If

you build it, they will come." Whether casual or formal, make it your own. Dining is an art, not a race to finish before hurrying on to something else, so make it count.

If you're like most of my clients, the dining room has typically been annexed as the home office/recycling center/children's art supply repository. No. It's time to take it back. Think of this as a chance to feed your soul and provide your crew with lasting memories.

Historically, the dining room was always a bit more embellished and ornate than the rest of the home. This was where theatre met food – a place to impress your guests and display your finery. Today, it's all about gracious living. Time to pull out that set of dishes you've been waiting to use for only "special" occasions. What are you waiting for? Live a little. What could be more special than family dinner?

Here are a few of my favorite tips to get you started and on your way toward rediscovering the art of dining: Typically, soft lighting, comfortable seating, inspiring decor and a generous communal table are the order of the day. Regardless of your own style – classic or industrial, vintage or mod – when designing a dining room look for elements that are slightly more magical and theatrical. Remember, it's not a room you'll be spending all day in, so have some fun with it. Going a little over the top can yield great results.

Color, pattern, scale and drama are key elements to creating a successful dining room. This is the place for that statement chandelier, or those lengths of silk draperies. Exotic wallpaper, or a grand mirror can make your dining room an oasis. With minimal furnishings – table, chairs and a server – the opportunity for expressing your unique personality can be limited, so make every element interesting. Look for ways to add interest from ceiling to floors. Chunky crown moulding, a tinted ceiling color, wainscoting or an interesting pair of sconces are all ways you can add style even in a small space.

Consider a round table - more congenial for conversation with larger groups. I like tables with center, pedestal bases - keeps the area around the table clear for legs to stretch.

If you're limited on square footage, go for a banquette. Built into a cozy corner space, a banquette offers all the charm and intimacy of a chic urban bistro, and encourages community.

Break up that set – try mixing a pair of "host" chairs (typically armchairs in a grander scale), with side chairs of a different style. And, for interest, mix the upholstery or finish.

I love the look of a casual farm table flanked by painted French Louis chairs, or a set of Thonet bentwood chairs – two classic silhouettes that mix well in a variety of settings.

Install a dimmer – this is essential. Light control is mandatory in a dining room. No one wants to feel like they're eating in a hospital cafeteria, so harness the overhead light. For extra credit add a few votive candles – you can thank me later.

Rituals build closeness. What could be better than enjoying great food with the ones you love in a space made for building memories?