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Going commercial at home

Designers blurring the lines when it comes to fixtures, floorings, furniture and more

By Dennis Hockman, Chesapeake Home

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Borrowing commercial innovations and materials for use in homes and vice versa is becoming de rigueur in interior design. Think restaurant-grade stainless-steel appliances in an otherwise traditional country kitchen or the hospital maternity rooms that try to simulate cozy home interiors.

Internationally known interior designer Clodagh, a leader in mixing things up, visited Baltimore in October for NeoCon East, a design conference that has evolved over the years as the place to be for anyone interested in new technologies and advancements in the commercial interiors industry.

Most of these innovations eventually trickle down to the residential space, and the NeoCon (National Exposition of Contract Furnishings) show is a great venue for discovering what's new.

Known for blurring the lines, Clodagh's work includes home design, product designs for furniture, lighting and textiles, and commercial and hospitality design projects such as Miraval Resort & Spa outside Tucson, Ariz., Nemaocolin Woodlands Spa near Pittsburgh and the W Hotel & Residences in Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

Born in Ireland, Clodagh left school at 17, dropped her last name and set up her own fashion design company. Before long, she moved to Spain, where her design evolved from clothing to architecture and interior spaces. A self-proclaimed nomad, Clodagh has traveled to more than 90 countries.

Last year, she celebrated her 25th anniversary of design in New York, and today from the offices of her studio in Manhattan's Noho neighborhood, she remains true to her core principles on inspirational and life-enhancing design.

Clodagh delivered the keynote address at NeoCon, drawing on her experience to show how the distinction between commercial and residential design is becoming less clear.

She says there are five design strategies that historically have been more widespread in commercial spaces but now are common in the home: communal spaces; big gestures; connective spaces; context; and what she calls "life-enhancing minimalism."

Communal spaces

The earliest houses compelled families to sleep, eat and seek shelter from the elements all in one room. Later, multiroom residences emphasized privacy over togetherness. Today, the pendulum is swinging back, and residential design is looking to hotels, restaurants, offices and schools where spaces are specifically geared toward community.

This trend balances private rooms with larger, open living areas where family and friends can be together.

Restaurants with kitchens open to the dining area so guests can see the culinary masters at work preceded the open family-room kitchens with commercial-grade appliances, where hosts can cook and entertain.

Big gestures

Interior designers often take advantage of large commercial spaces to make big, high-impact design gestures, like glass-enclosed stairs that rise through a swimming pool or hundreds of brass LED pendants suspended from the ceiling of an upscale lounge. At home, these tactics are either unrealistic or can quickly go over the top unless the design is approached with prudence.

Clodagh suggests deciding on the type of gesture you want to make — bling, glam, Zen — and then go big with one dominant element that defines the tone you want to set.

Something like a large piece of art that fills an entire wall or a high-glintz mirror-finish chandelier that brings a punch of glam in an otherwise understated bathroom often can make enough of a statement to shoulder the decorative load and stand alone. One big statement will have more impact than lots of little ones.

Context

"You should know you are in Arizona when you are in Arizona," says Clodagh. Luxury hotels all over the world understand that when people travel, they want the built environment to be an extension of the natural and cultural world around them.

At home, Clodagh recommends looking at how rooms are supposed to function and then creating a decorative scheme that reinforces the appropriate mood.

"Calm where calm should be, fun where fun should be, peace where peace should be, joy where joy should be," she says. In other words, context.

Connective spaces

If you've ever considered how luxury hotels or casinos are designed, you may have noted that one space flows seamlessly into the next. In reality, distinct spaces don't merge; rather, a careful interior design scheme encourages the perception of what Clodagh refers to as "connective spaces."

To create spaces that connect, everything must be considered. As examples, Clodagh suggests that such organic and inorganic elements as ceilings, nature and light can be used to create connection. "There is a missed opportunity in ceilings," she says. Also, "Bring the indoors out and outdoors in — nature makes people feel good, and the sound of water is universally liked." Finally, "Light is a way finder. It is influence."

Life-enhancing minimalism

For many, design is about creating the wow factor—the big gesture. "I love wow," says Clodagh, "but sometimes you need get away from wow and go 'ahh.' Design is a balance of 'wows' and 'ahhs.'"

Hotels often provide a moment of silence people cannot get at home. To create that sense of calm in the decor, Clodagh suggests "paring away the details to find the simple, beautiful and comfortable."

"Life-enhancing minimalism," she calls it, an approach that isn't about being stark, but rather encourages a luxury that comes from "living with everything you need, but nothing more than you need." Anything in excess is just clutter.

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Clodagh's design tips

- Accents should be supportive elements not chattering at you.
- Never put a desk in the bedroom. You should never go to sleep thinking about unpaid bills.
- Furniture should be supportive, comfortable, easy to live with and sturdy. But we don't need a lot of detail for it to be beautiful. Silence is beauty.
- Technology: If you can buy it, it's out of date. Hide technology — it is constantly changing, so when it is on view, it is dated.
- The last thing you see when you go to sleep and the first thing you see when you wake up should be something beautiful.

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Some products I discovered at NeoCon that can easily make the jump from a commercial space to your home.

Tile Crossville's Empire Porcelain Stone tile echoes the grandeur of 19th-century France with the look and feel of natural marble and now boasts 20 percent recycled content and an updated color palette. The tile's rock-hard durability resists staining and scratching and will remain virtually maintenance-free on floors, countertops and walls.

Lighting Hubbardton Forge's new Aperture sconces convey artistry and tradition with a subtly contemporary flair. Known for timeless design, eco-friendly manufacturing and products built to last, Hubbardton is one of the oldest and largest commercial forges in the United States — its lighting and accessories are equally at home in upscale spas, hotels, office buildings, restaurants and homes.

Flooring The new Travertine Collection from Amtico International is a manufactured resilient floor with the timeless look of natural stone. Eco-friendliness is an added benefit of this faux travertine that doesn't have the porous instability of the real thing.

Furniture Commercial furniture manufacturer KI, in partnership with eCoupled technology, has a breakthrough wireless electrical charging device. If you love your smart phone and laptop but hate all the cords and wires, the eCoupled technology might be for you. Marketed for use in restaurants, hotels and the like, the technology is compatible with KI desks. Installed beneath the desktop, an eCoupled unit will wirelessly charge the batteries in just about any portable device.

— *Dennis Hockman*

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