

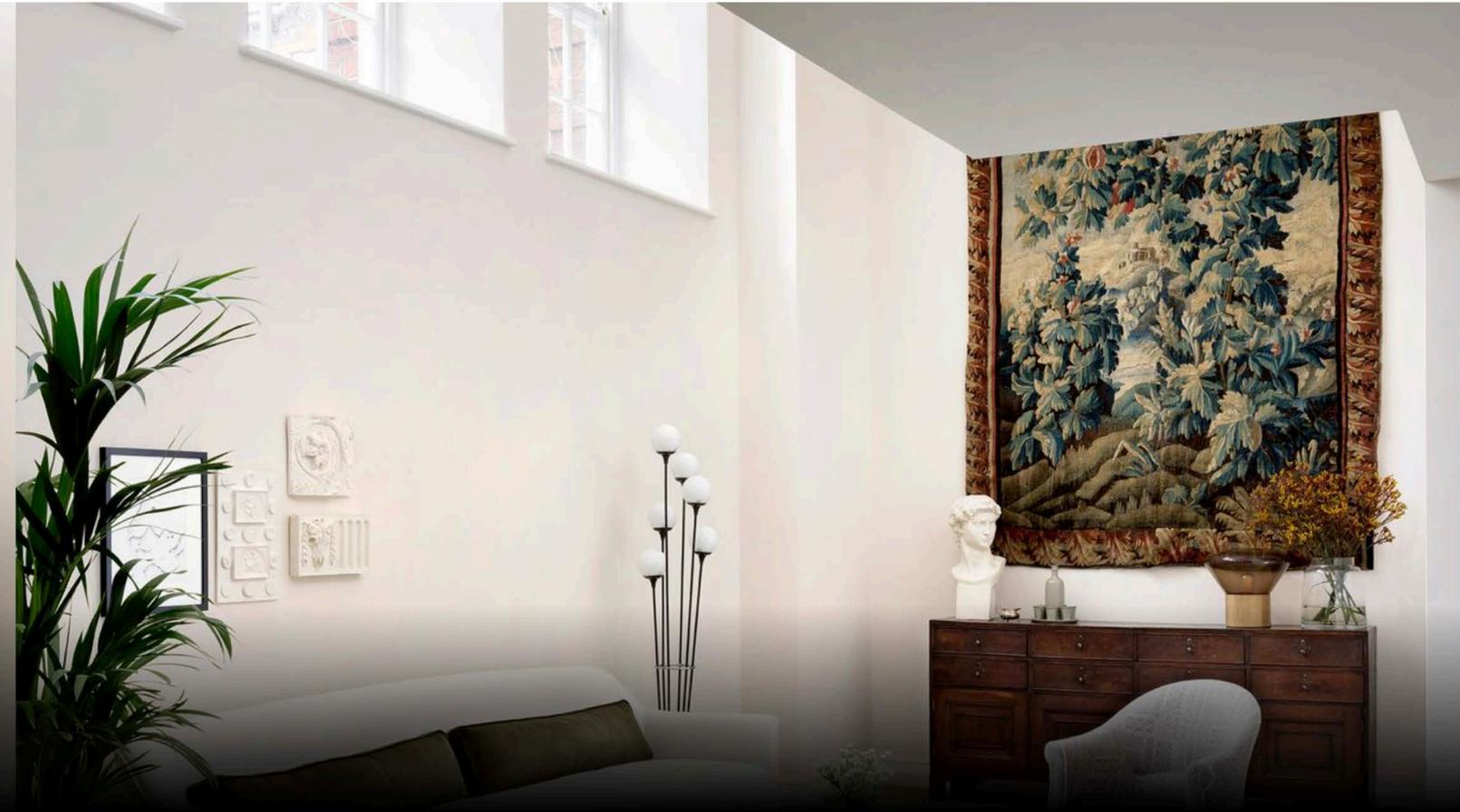
MANSION GLOBAL

DESIGNER'S CORNER

Embracing Heirlooms in a Modern Space

Layer antiques alongside contemporary pieces, boldly display a whole collection, or finish and reframe keepsakes for a contemporary refresh

BY [JENNIFER TZESES](#) | ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED ON MAY 12, 2021 | [MANSION GLOBAL](#)



An antique textile provides the focal point for a contemporary living room designed by Pandora Taylor.
SIMON BROWN



Whether it's your grandmother's collection of matryoshka dolls or a great aunt's Wedgwood, family heirlooms are treasured vessels that not only bring a storied past but carry a sentimentality that's irreplaceable.

But when your collectibles hail from a bygone era and your home's style is anything but, displaying them in a way that makes sense can be a challenge. To merge old and new so the look is inspired rather than haphazard, follow these tips from the design pros.

Create Repetition

“Combining old with new or personal with artisanal helps you achieve a more layered feel without losing authenticity. I am a firm believer that when a piece has value to you it mixes effortlessly with the rest of your furniture and decor. It's much more meaningful to live in a space that allows your own personality, interests and heritage to come through.

“Heirlooms easily brighten a space and help to differentiate it from other contemporary rooms. I have an antique hanging cage with mosquito netting for storing cheese that has been in my family for decades. It's the simplest piece but to me it's very beautiful. I also just recently set up a collection of Lenox porcelain vases of various shapes and sizes, and while they aren't extremely valuable on their own, when presented together they look like a million-dollar collection.



Built-in shelving provides the perfect home for a collection of curio.

Matthew Williams

— **Benoist F. Drut, owner of Maison Gerard Gallery in New York**

Scatter Your Displays

“Each heirloom tells a story and when you have them proudly displayed in your home, you can share your history with your guests and reflect on your past on a daily basis. If you have an old-world heirloom that might not ‘fit’ with your contemporary décor, mixing it in on a bookshelf alongside other more contemporary accessories is a good way to have them play against each other. Gorgeous old-world frames look beautiful next to modern shapes, books [and] plants.

“Displaying collectibles on a coffee table or in a custom built-in are other ways to incorporate antiques. However, if you have a silver or china set, it could be interesting to make a gallery wall with the china by having the plates on display in your kitchen. If you have an heirloom piece of art, use modern frames; that will freshen up the piece and give it a more modern feel.

The best way to unite the items is to create a layered, modern mix of old and new throughout your home. You can do this without it looking too cluttered. Also, painting or restaining an heirloom, such as a dresser or table, can make the room feel more cohesive. If you have mostly whites and light woods in your home, consider restaining dark pieces a lighter finish.”



Robin Strickler kept a china collection in full view by displaying it on a shelving unit in the kitchen.

Ryan Garvin

— **Robin Strickler** founder and principal of **Design Works**, an interior design firm based in **Irvine, California**

Unify the Look

“Unify the space by accessorizing. If you have a mixture of antique and contemporary seating, use the same cushions on all, or place contemporary lamps on top of antique furniture. A cohesive room has layers to it so nothing in particular stands out, it all sings together.

“Find a balance; a room with all contemporary furniture and just one antique piece might strike you as a bit out of place and vice versa. Alternatively, if one half was antique and the other contemporary it would divide the room. When using antiques, it is best to dot them around the room to avoid feeling contrived or creating discord in the space.

“If you are worried about your antiques looking out of place, try balancing textures and materials. For example, if you have an 18th-century walnut commode, try using other walnut accents throughout the room to tie it in.”

— Pandora Taylor, London-based interior designer

Repurposing Pieces

“Repurposing an antique or an heirloom is a great way to bring both function and visual interest to a space. For instance, turn an antique or vintage cabinet into a bar to lend a chic feel to an older piece. You can transform a family piece into something that feels updated and fresh.

“If you’ve collected items from various periods and styles, create a cohesive look by blending the wood tones and finishes throughout the room. Take care not to add too many heirloom pieces into one room; it can begin to feel stuffy and dated if the pieces aren’t mixed in well.”



Statement artwork makes a space designed by Dana Wolter filled with antiques feel more current. *Graham Yelton*

— Dana Wolter of Dana Wolter Interiors in Birmingham, Alabama