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Past Perfect

Interior Designer Jennifer Dyer
Makes Vintage New Again

• Writing | Laurel May

A magazine article entitled, "Having it all in the Miami Heat," sent designer Jennifer Dyer packing her bags for the Miami Design District. Arriving there with little training and no professional contacts, she set her sights on a position with the well-known South Beach Design Group. And just how does a wannabe designer land a gig with an internationally known design firm? "... Basically, I drove the owner crazy until he offered to give me a position," she says. Crazy seems to be the right word, as Dyer



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offered to work for free for six months, on the condition that if she showed promise, she'd be hired. Six months later, she was offered the job.

The signature South Beach Design Group interiors featured a mix of vintage and modern furniture, and during her days in Miami, Dyer discovered not only a love of old furniture, but a knack for discovering diamonds in the rough. Culling the treasures hidden within the antique shops of South Beach, and renovating her finds by replacing hardware or upholstery, a Miami antiques dealer took notice of her keen eye. "I became very good friends with this guy who owns a store called Arts and Antiques in Miami. I would fix [pieces] up and he would say, 'This doesn't even look like the same piece. I can't believe you did this,'" Dyer says. "So he would call me, and say 'OK, I want you to tell me what you think I should do with all these pieces, because every time you tell me change the

hardware or change the paint, these things will sell.' So that's kind of how I got into it. I would find these things and fix them up and sell them or place them in design projects."

After four years in Miami, Dyer was ready to push her design work to the next level, moving to Los Angeles and opening her own design business, Jeneration. Now working out of three cities [Las Vegas, Scottsdale and Los Angeles], the designer shares her tips for adding a blast from the past to a modern abode.

944: What is it that specifically attracts you to vintage pieces?

JENNIFER DYER: To me, they have an aesthetic that you don't find in new furniture. There's incredible detail, and the hardware, the lines of the pieces. You just can't find that level of craftsmanship now — and if you do, it is unbelievably expensive. I think that vintage pieces

have a substance that you just don't find anymore.

If someone wants to add some vintage flair to their home, what should they look for to begin?

I would encourage people to look for pieces that they can actually use. Vintage lamps and lighting, 1920-1960s credenzas ... I will actually place [a credenza] in a living room and mount a plasma over [it]. The cabinets will usually have very unique shelving inside, so I will place DVDs, A/V equipment in there. You can use them in bedrooms also. Side chairs and occasional chairs are also a really good purchase. They're something easy, something small that you can buy to add some character without making a huge investment.

Are there any rules of thumb that people should keep in mind when mixing new and old together within one room?

I like to have pieces that are very juxtaposed

to each other. So, if you've got a very clean-lined dining table with very contemporary chairs, and you want to throw a vintage piece into that mix, instead of putting a mid-century piece with the modern dining table, I would use something really elaborate, very carved, almost French deco. When you're thinking about doing a space that is already very contemporary, then add something very traditional, and vice-versa. Mix a very curvy headboard with some very clean-lined side tables. It's really just mixing and matching, and the more you do it, the better you'll get at it. Lots of people also have the notion that vintage furniture is very expensive, and it can be, but you can get some really wonderful pieces for not a lot of money ... you never know what you're going to find.

Go treasure hunting at www.jenerationhome.com