

HOW TO CREATE A WARM INTERIOR SCHEME

It can be a challenge to make the interiors of new homes feel warm and characterful in the absence of original period details — our simple design tips will ensure your new home or extension feels anything but cold and clinical

MAIN IMAGE: LBMVARCHITECTS (LBMVARCHITECTS.COM); OPPOSITE: SIMON MAXWELL

Your home, be it a contemporary masterpiece or of a more classic design, should feel like a retreat, somewhere to recharge at the end of the day or congregate with loved ones.

There is a misnomer that sleek, clutter-free, minimalist interiors can't feel warm and welcoming. Likewise, fans of period homes will argue that even traditional-style new builds can never have the character of authentically old buildings.

While it is true that it tends to be more of a challenge to create warm and cosy spaces in new homes and extensions, all it really takes is forward-planning, and a few tried-and-tested tricks of the trade. Here we share our top design tips for creating characterful new interiors in your project.

BUILD IN CHARACTER

The 'bones' of a building provide just as much in the way of character and warmth as final finishes such as paint and fabrics.

Of course what this means is that warm interiors are something you need to think about at the initial design stages, not just as an afterthought — simply painting a room a warm colour will not be as effective as planning in character from the off. There are a few ways to inject warmth during the planning stage:

Room shape: Avoid box-shaped rooms. Alcoves, chimney breasts, deep bay windows and partial room divides all add interest and dimension — so important for character.

Ceiling heights: Sloping, vaulted or dual-level ceilings offer so much more in the way of character and interest of form than a uniform ceiling.

Floor levels: A split-level layout is the ideal way

to introduce interest into a home — even a single room, such as a kitchen diner, can benefit.

Expose the structure: Keeping the inside of a house unwrapped, so to speak, is a sure-fire way to add character. Leaving certain structural elements exposed, such as timber beams, ceiling joists, or perhaps even electrical conduits in more industrial-style interiors, means plain walls or ceilings are broken up, avoiding a look that is too clinical.

BE COLOUR CLEVER

The colours in a room will dramatically change its feel — but colour on the walls is not the only way to achieve this. While paint is undoubtedly one of the simplest and most economical ways of injecting a feeling of warmth to a room, there are lots of other elements within a space that can be used to provide cosy-feeling colours.

Flooring is a good example — warm, creamy tones of natural stone, earthy quarry tiles and rich-toned woods will instantly warm up a space, where as harsher pure white and glossy black tiles tend to look colder.

Colour is also a useful way to break up large, vacuous spaces (which should be avoided at all costs if you want your interiors to feel welcoming) — create cosy zones and corners using warm shades on certain walls.

INTRODUCE TEXTURES

The overall feeling in a room is hugely influenced by the textures within that space. This doesn't just translate into cushions and throws — the walls, ceilings, flooring and fixtures and fittings can all play their part. ▶

“Warmer colours visually advance”



JO HAMILTON, creative director at London-based Hamilton Interiors (johamilton.co.uk)

There are many ways to bring warmth to a scheme, but colour selection is the most obvious. Cooler colours such as blues, greens and violets are calming and serene, whilst warmer colours — reds, oranges and yellows — are vibrant, alive and fun. These warmer tones visually advance and make the space feel cosier, so are an excellent way to add that homely touch.

Use natural materials, such as warm-toned woods and metallics. Choose a range of fabrics and textures that work well together without being too matchy-matchy, and layer. An uncontrived mix of hand-woven linens, plush velvets and softly patterned prints in differing scales, adds a soft feel to your space.



Combine Materials and Textures

Rather than sticking to just one type of wall covering throughout a space, mix up the materials you use to add interest and a more intimate feel. Here, timber cladding sits alongside stone, plaster finishes and slate tiles, for a look that complements the mid-century modern-style furniture from Walter Knoll (walterknoll.de/en).



Although a painted finish is the most common choice for walls, you might instead consider timber cladding, a textured plaster, fabric wallpaper or a more unusual final finish such as orientated strand board. Take a look at combining different textures in a room too, such as a section of wool carpet set into a timber floor.

INSIST ON GOOD LIGHTING

Lighting is so often overlooked as a source of visual warmth despite the huge effect it can have on a space. People are realising that a single, central pendant will do nothing in the way of bringing a room to life, but it is surprising how often lighting opportunities are missed. A good lighting scheme can create a cosy glow in a subtle way.

The key to creating a warming lighting scheme is to layer up. This means combining ambient (or general) lighting such as that provided by recessed downlights or wall lights, with other sources, such as a selection of side lamps at various heights, hidden LEDs for a glow behind shelving or picture lights.

Set each 'layer' of light on a separate circuit so that you can pick and choose according to the mood required. Dimmers are also a must.

CREATE SOCIABLE SPACES

Homes which encourage the people in them to congregate and converse are much more welcoming than those with vast open planes of emptiness.

There is certainly a place for cosy corners meant for one, and wide open corridors free of obstructions, but they need to be interspersed with crowd-friendly areas in order for a house to feel inviting.

Good examples include seating arranged in such a way that people come together — with sofas and chairs facing one another, around a central coffee table. Kitchen islands with seating are another good example. ➤

“Don't ‘over light’ your home”



JIM LAWRENCE, Jim Lawrence Lighting
(jim-lawrence.co.uk)

The key is to find a healthy balance. You don't want to 'over light' an area and make it feel artificial. Where it might be difficult to install overhead lighting, wall lights are a foolproof go-to. Otherwise, a mixture of table and floor lamps with dimmers are ideal for altering the atmosphere according to the setting, for example in a living or dining room. We suggest pendants in these spaces too, to bring another layer of light when necessary, and for adding a main point of interest to your home décor.

In bedrooms, to retain the warm atmosphere, use low level outlets such as picture lights, reading lamps or wall sconces for a softer look.



Homes with Heart

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Combine wall colours with a nod to the natural world, such as Farrow & Ball's SS17 Trend Colour, Studio Green, with modern finishes like polished concrete floor; Deep, bold hues can bring timber panelling to life, particularly when combined with a cosy velvet chair such as the Matador armchair from Terence Conran (contentbyterenceconran.com); Varying ceiling heights can add interest and drama – as demonstrated in this extension; Shuttered concrete panels on the ceiling and walls have been softened with more rustic timber and stone panelling for a look that is both contemporary and warm; Painted wood panelling (finished in Farrow & Ball paint) is ideal for breaking up expanses of wall.



IMAGES: SIMON MAXWELL (MAIN TOP RIGHT); SAM BROWN AND ANDY HASLAM/CO SNOOK ARCHITECTS (BOTTOM RIGHT)

MIX AND MATCH STYLES

There is no reason why a modern house has to be furnished with only modern fittings and fixtures – there is still a place for a little bit of history. A well-sourced find from a reclamation yard or an antique fitting passed down through the generations will slot beautifully into an otherwise contemporary, minimalist scheme, adding a more individual, less formulaic touch.

It is personal touches that give a home personality and remove the risk of things feeling too sterile.

CREATE A FOCAL POINT

Without a point of focus, a room can feel lacking in character. A focal point creates a natural gathering point, drawing people in and therefore making for a space that feels sociable and inviting. In period properties the fireplace tends to be the most obvious focal point to highlight – a feature that warms physically, as well as visually.

In the absence of a fireplace, a large picture window framing a show-stopping vista makes for a ►

“One of the key considerations in warm interiors is the use of natural materials”



LUIGI MONTEFUSCO, Director of LBMVarchitects (lbmvarchitects.com)

One of the key considerations when creating a warm interior scheme is the use of natural materials. Using wood flooring in an organic finish such as natural oak is a great way to add a sense of warmth to the scheme, especially when paired with neutral off-white paintwork that accentuates the natural light entering the room. Avoid ice white and blue colour palettes, instead opt for soft neutrals and hues with undertones of red. Fabrics and furniture also play a big role in bringing a scheme together, with cosy rugs and tactile velvets establishing a strong sense of comfort often associated with warmth, and antique furniture pieces introducing a lived-in quality and unique sense of personality that transforms the space.



stunning focal point. Large pieces of artwork, huge mirrors, even banks of built-in shelving covering an entire wall, set off by a bright-coloured wall behind, can make perfect focal points.

USE NATURAL MATERIALS

There is something inherently warm and comforting about natural materials as opposed to synthetic ones — they have a tactile quality with a reassuring, timeless appeal.

Consider natural timber for flooring, work surfaces, interior cladding on walls and even ceilings. Stone is another material that lends warmth, from creamy limestones to tumbled travertine.

Finally, don't overlook natural soft furnishings such as linen, wool and leather. **H**

MERRY ALBRIGHT, Border Oak (borderoak.com)



When designing a home I tend to incorporate both 'actual' warmth and 'perceived' warmth. Actual warmth can come from a specific source such as a woodburner, open fire or range, all of which can be used as design focal points in a room, but also provide an exceptional ambience which is hard to describe. People typically, but unconsciously, congregate around a roaring fire or range cooker, gravitating to the warmth whilst enjoying the social, homely ambience they can create.

Perceived warmth tends to come from materials, textures, craftsmanship, lighting and colours — we like to layer these factors up in Border Oak homes, so that you create a multi-dimensional feeling of atmosphere. An oak frame will provide the perfect backdrop for those looking to create a sense of warmth.

Combine subtle textures such as wooden wall panelling and natural flooring, as well as other tactile experiences — handmade door latches, window seats, bespoke staircases all add to the feeling of comfort, quality and sensory reassurance. Clever use of colour and lighting (both natural and artificial) also play a part in creating a warm atmosphere in a new home and help showcase the various layers of the structure, texture and experience within your home.

“Light influences mood”



CELERIE KEMBLE, Interior Designer, partnership with Arteriors (arteriorshome.com)

My best advice would be to introduce the right amount of lighting. It's important to understand that it is one of the strongest influencers of mood in a room. Choose your lighting so that it can come from many sources and heights, which softens shadows and allows your lighting to remain variable for different occasions.

A room should be like a stage where you can use lighting to highlight or downplay certain areas at certain times. There is no need to match all your lights, such as all-brass or all-nickel — find lighting that helps break that monotony.

“People unconsciously congregate around a focal point such as a roaring fire or range”

