

FOLIO PROSE

ROOMS TO REMEMBER THE CLASSIC INTERIORS OF SUZANNE TUCKER

Everything in design is relative – and related. That's why a designer's ability to manipulate scale and proportion is so critical to achieving beauty and comfort in a room, a house, a garden. Scale has to do with size, and proportion with balance. When I talk about scale, I'm referring to the way the dimensions of a particular component of the design – a piece of furniture, drapery, a work of art – compare to the dimensions of the overall room and to other individual design elements.

Unlike color or style, scale and proportion are not subject to individual tastes – there are correct and incorrect choices. I do believe that while it is possible to teach someone generally about scale and proportion, there are no definite rules that can address the many variables in any given project – experimentation and experience are the best resources and the eye must be developed. When the scale of the pieces in a room is just right, I can see it and feel it: the room sings, and it's blissful to be in it. When scale and proportion are off, the dissonance is perceptible to me, and often uncomfortable. Getting them right is a designer's greatest success. When they're spot on, the achieved harmony translates across every style and all tastes – casual of formal, modern or traditional, French, Italian, Japanese, English, you name it.

The proportions of a room also determine the appropriate scale for furnishings and how they are arranged throughout the space. If all the large pieces – say a piano, a sofa, a mantel, and a tall secretary – are on one side of the room, the room tilts. It feels off balance. The same is true for art, window coverings, and even such minutiae as where a light switch is in relation to the desk next to it, to the art over it, to the adjacent mirror and what it reflects. I can walk into a room and see what is off-kilter instantly. Often, simply swapping one object for another in creating a tablescape will fix the problem.





Also by Suzanne Tucker, *Interiors – The Romance of Design*, Oct. 22, 2013.

My formal education gave me a base for understanding proportion, and Michael Taylor, my former employer and mentor, showed me how to put that knowledge to work. He was a master at manipulating scale. He was also fearless about using large-scale pieces, like a vast bed, in small rooms, such as a tiny bedroom – not a designer's usual choice. He always knew as if by instinct when it would work, when it would create both instant drama and volume or a cozy cocoon-like space.

When working with exquisite pieces, it can be easy to forget that rooms are created to serve the needs of people rather than furniture. Sometimes a furniture layout looks brilliant on paper but doesn't translate into three dimensions. It's critical to determine whether people will move through the room naturally and gracefully, or if there are pockets of wasted space. Our evolutionary psychology has developed to deter us from entering spaces where we will feel confined. A back corner, even if filled with sumptuous chairs and sofas, will always remain empty at a gathering if guests have to maneuver around furniture to reach it.

Experience is the best remedy for addressing challenges having to do with scale and proportion. Whether the root problem is architectural or construction-related, in the layout of a room, or in a house's inherent nuances, it's always thrilling to discover the best resolution for a space and plan, function and furnishings, and of course, the client's needs.