

style



Stirred, Not Shaken

Winnetka interior designer Cindy Bardes Galvin has spent decades formulating the perfect cocktail of pattern, pedigree and style. The result is nothing less than intoxicating. By Lisa Skolnik

Start with a drop of black. Then gold.

Stir in one interlocking pattern (a gorgeous textile or wall covering will do). Add an animal motif, preferably leopard — à la legendary 20th-century decorator Elsie de Wolfe. Keep stirring. Introduce a few treasures, pieces that have either

been in the family forever or “heirlooms” purchased at a European flea market. Then finish your creation with a glamorous garnish. (Something Fortuny, if budget permits.)

“It’s my magic formula,” confides Winnetka interior designer Cindy Bardes Galvin, sharing only

an “abridged” version of the style cocktail of color, pattern and texture she has spent the last three decades perfecting. “Would a famous chef really tell you what’s in his secret sauce?”

During the 30 years that she’s been doing residential and commercial interiors, Galvin points



out, “I’ve learned so much.” Her trials and errors have yielded this short list of the elements she believes a well-done room requires. “I try to use as many of them as possible,” she says.

In theory, some of these ingredients sound suspiciously audacious; in practice, they’re quite appropriate and highly appealing. Galvin’s own home, where this interview took place, is rife with stunning examples of the fully executed formula.

In the formal foyer, a neo-Classical confection so spacious it does double-duty as a second dining room for holiday overflow, she uses the hits of black and gold in the furniture, which are treasured family pieces, and anchors the room with pale blues and icy whites in a patterned Palladian-style rug of her own design. Strips of wallpaper applied to the manila walls in lieu of architectural moldings spread the Palladian pattern throughout the entire space.

And in the living room — where richer and earthier hues prevail, playing to the lushly landscaped grounds beyond the grand picture windows

Galvin takes particular pride and joy in her living room, which also sports a Mrs. MacDougall hand-lacquered Ming-style table and her hard-won antique collection of boxes and Chinese export porcelain.

— she pairs a miniature Georgian secretary her mother-in-law gave her as a housewarming gift 30 years ago with gilt-framed landscapes, handsome early-19th-century Italian provincial chairs uphol-

stered in a coral cut velvet covered with an interlocking pattern of dragonflies and a French provincial stool covered in a bold leopard print.

The motif plays out time and again in Galvin’s home, with hits of the gold, black, leopard skin and many different patterned textiles and singular antique pieces cropping up in just about every room. She takes particular pride and joy in her living room, which also sports a Mrs. MacDougall hand-lacquered Ming-style table and her hard-won antique collections of boxes and Chinese export porcelain.

It’s all part of a grand but subtle plot. In all of her jobs, she weaves these same elements — and repeating hits of color and pattern — throughout a house with seemingly staccato strokes. In fact, the hits are part of a delicate and definite game plan that yields a cohesive and intriguing whole. Yet “no one really figures it out because it’s





restrained and understated. It's meant to be subconscious," she points out.

Galvin herself often operates subliminally, working intuitively much of the time. For instance, the trompe l'oeil moldings in her foyer started out as regular wallpaper, albeit a quite sumptuous and pricey neo-Classical style she bought 30 years ago when she and her husband had just moved into their house. "I just knew it would look great" cut in strips and applied to the foyer walls," she says. But her wallpaper contractor said he wouldn't do it.

"I told him I will and I did," she recalls.

She has that same instinctive confidence about everything design-related, from clothing to furnishings, and likens dressing an interior to dressing yourself. "Houses are wardrobed in layers of color, texture and pattern," and pieces have "cuts," she explains. And in both arenas, "I buy what I like and then I make it work. If I have to play with it or move everything around to make it work, I do it," she says with candor.

And what she likes and buys always seems to be "exceptional," as evidenced by the feedback she gets from clients and friends. Whether it's couture clothing or home furnishings, "it always ends up being the one thing that everybody wants," she admits.

Yet the pieces she chooses are coveted for a reason; her keen instincts consistently lead her to what she calls "forever pieces." They will last a lifetime and beyond, and lend themselves to multiple purposes. Andirons from the Paris flea market are used as statuesque doorstops in her foyer; an antique 19th-century black lacquer and gilt papier-mâché tray was transformed into a seamless occasional table with a carved bamboo base; lamps that were once blue and white temple jars from China grace a client's living room as lamps; and the damaged panels of a Chinoiseire screen were used as a bank of closet doors to transform the space from a dowdy office into a glamorous dressing room.

Galvin chalks up her propensity to pick winners to her formal training in art history and de-



sign at Northwestern University, and the informal training she got from family friends Basil Brown and Bill Blount, two well-known Chicago designers who catered to the society crowd and were on staff at Marshall Field & Co. when she was just starting out as a young interior designer herself. "They were traditionalists and taught me that there are certain things that are correct and certain things that aren't," she explains.

Yet the solid grounding in art history and tradition that she got in school and from her mentors is what has allowed her to evolve as some of her clients have migrated to more modern and contemporary choices. "Over the years I've learned to appreciate the beauty and potential in pieces of all eras, and mix newer things in to take the results to new places," she explains.

And invariably, whether the pieces she uses herself are antique, vintage or new, she finds "a client will ask me to get the same thing for them, which isn't easy if it's an antique," she admits. But she tries, noting, "If I see something fabulous,

In the family room, the walls are stippled for texture and the floors are inlaid with Tasmanian oak in a diamond pattern.

Galvin found a home for a treasured neo-Classical English butler's desk that belonged to her grandmother in her guest room.



I buy it because I know someday it's going to work somewhere."

This modus operandi is one of the reasons she recently opened Maze Home in downtown Winnetka. Over the years, she had amassed a large cache of those singular pieces and had them stashed away in her basement and a warehouse. Now the store serves as her atelier and design studio, and a retail outlet for those


In the guest room, flowering vines climb the walls on Farrow & Ball wallpaper, while cabbage roses bloom underfoot on an English needlepoint rug.





antique and one-off finds as well as furnishings and accessories for home and soul from handpicked and exclusive sources, such as D. Porthault, a world-renowned luxury linen line only previously sold in London, Paris, New York and Palm Beach.

If Galvin were born a half a century earlier, she would have surely been a grand dame of design in the vein of de Wolfe, who also championed the notion of doing an entire home in a fresh, personality-driven and cohesive manner and had a penchant for touches of gold and leopard-skin prints.

Instead, she can measure her success by the thousands of miles she's logging between her jobs in California, Colorado, New York and Chicago — which all require sourcing in Europe — and the success of her store, which has had brisk sales ever since opening its doors last January. 

■ *A mix of prints, including Galvin's favorite — namely leopard skin — give this serious miniature Georgian secretary a playful persona in the living room.*

(Your) Home For The Holidays

The holidays are right around the corner, and so are all the challenges of entertaining family and friends or hosting them overnight. Since it's the busiest time of the year, Galvin starts her preparations for the season in September to avoid the last-minute rush. If you have to play catch up, or are at a loss for what to do, here are her tips for giving your home a holiday update and bringing your guest quarters up to snuff.

- **Think globally:** You probably already own plenty of items you can repurpose or dress up to use in this effort. If you do decide to buy a few new things, “occasion-proof” your home by stocking up on supplies and accessories that can be used whenever you entertain. “Holiday decorating isn't just for Thanksgiving and Christmas, which is automatically where people's minds go. It's year-round, and you should think seasonally. You're really getting ready for winter, or summer when it's warm outside, and both seasons have a range of special occasions,” Galvin says.
- **Start a holiday stash:** “Keep seasonal accessories, decorative items and supplies on hand year-round,” counsels Galvin, who always has a healthy stash of seasonal decorative props in storage, such as dried berries, pomegranates, branches and grasses as well as vases, bowls, baskets, ribbons, candlestick holders, candelabrum, candles in varying sizes, shapes and colors and more. She stores substantial items, such as miniature Christmas trees she has made in the past and a cornucopia form she studded with dried apples and lacquered for posterity's sake last year, and buys fresh plant materials, ribbons and trimmings yearly at Platz Wholesale Florist in Morton Grove. She also saves natural items, such as pheasant feathers from hunts, pinecones, rocks and pretty chunks of wood she finds during the year hiking or shooting.
- **Have the right tools on hand:** All the decorative props won't do you any good if you don't have the right tools on hand to use them. “You should always have a well-stocked tool kit and the standards on hand,” maintains Galvin, who has comprehensive kits devoted to holiday decorating, lighting, picture hanging, general home maintenance and car care. For holiday prep, the tools to have on hand include scissors and hammers in several sizes; different types of tapes, wires, ribbons and strings; thumbtacks, nails and hanging hardware in a range of sizes; markers and spray paints in metallic hues; and a staple gun. The basic lighting supplies you may want to have on hand include: spotlight fixtures that can sit on the floor, string lights, different colored bulbs and extension cords.
- **Last minute quick hits:** If you've waited until the last minute to do anything decorative, focus on the hot spots that your guests really see and stick to bold strokes. Besides the Christmas needlepoint stockings, wreaths and holiday plants she brings out each Christmas, Galvin puts out big bowls filled with fresh unshelled nuts and big leather baskets with giant pinecones; covers her mantels with natural and gold-sprayed pine branches and her vintage papier-mâché angels; and decks anything she can with a host of Tyrolean bells she's been collecting for years.