



Traditional, *yet* modern

DESIGNER SUZANNE TAIT LIVES IN CLASSIC, ELEGANT SIMPLICITY

By Deborah Birkett

INTERIOR DESIGNER SUZANNE TAIT was probably destined to buy her appealing bungalow in Kitchener's East Ward three years ago.

Coming upon the house just as the For Sale sign was being hammered into the ground, she fell in love with its lovely leaded glass windows. "That's what sold me," she says.

She later discovered her great-grandparents' family business, Tait Glass, had supplied the windows and her grandfather had actually installed them.

Inside, it was a design disaster: all peach with green trim and a black-and-purple bathroom. Tait took the opportunity to imprint her own style on the house by emphasizing its classic aspects and adding contemporary touches. The floors were stained dark, the woodwork painted white, and the doors black.

While her personal and professional styles overlap a lot, Tait says she works with colour all day so she enjoys the gallery feel of her home's current high-contrast decor of white walls and dark furniture and accents.

Tait developed her interest in design early on. In Grade 8, when her parents were renovating their home in Kitchener, she kept looking over the architect's shoulder, making suggestions. She completed a

three-year course at Humber College and began her career in design at 21, specializing in kitchen and bathroom renovations for clients in the Toronto area.

She also worked as a senior interior designer for Polygon Homes, B.C.'s largest home builder, for a few years before she was drawn back to her hometown, wanting to plant roots closer to family and friends.

Ninety-five per cent of her work now is residential. Her clients are not only local; she finds herself working frequently in the Toronto area. ▶



A peek in one of the bedrooms at Suzanne Tait's home reveals a neutral colour palette and streamlined furniture.

Photography • David Bebee



BLACK AND WHITE

Suzanne Tait says she fell in love with the leaded glass windows of her older home in downtown Kitchener. She is enjoying her high-contrast decor of white walls and dark furniture and accents. Even her pug, Ruby, matches the decor.

Photography • David Bebee

SUZANNE TAIT'S DESIGN DOS AND DON'TS

- Do devote a little money to testing paint colours. Tait recommends buying tester pots or ready-made 12" x 12" samples. There's no substitute for seeing the colours in your home, in real lighting conditions. Tait relies on Benjamin Moore Historical Colours for the green-based taupes that work so well with natural wood (especially dark floors). Trusted colours include Lenox Tan (HC-44), Shaker Beige (HC-45), Northampton Putty (HC-89) and Sag Harbour Gray (HC-95).
- Do invest in the classics. Spend your dollars on things like neutral sofas with classic lines. Tait prefers to use classic, natural materials wherever possible, particularly for big-ticket items like floors, cabinetry and countertops. It's hard to go wrong with durable, stain-resistant fibres or materials in a neutral colour.
- Do consider simple, natural window coverings. Textured linen and raw silk give a finishing touch without being too bold or overbearing.
- Do make your decor pop with pattern and colour. Introduce more visual interest through accent chairs, pillows, accessories, and art. Used effectively in small doses, you can follow trends inexpensively in this way.
- Don't get overwhelmed by what you see in design and decor magazines and TV shows. It's easy to feel pressured to keep up with it all, but Tait believes that loyalty to classic materials and traditional lines results in interiors that stand the test of time.

For more information: www.suzannetait.com



Suzanne Tait's white and stainless steel kitchen gets a little burst of colour from the window covering and pots of plants lined up along the sill. At right, the bathroom maintains traditional elements in its wall tiles, pedestal sinks and mosaic inset in the tile floor.

Photography • David Bebee

► Because of that, she relies on a lot of Toronto-area design sources: Sescolite and Union Light for lighting, Ginger's Bath for bathroom fixtures, Elte for just about anything. Locally, she often scores great finds at HomeSense, although she admits it's sometimes tough to locate pairs of things, or items that don't have a little ding somewhere.

Her clientele ranges from young professional families looking for expertise in developing a five- to 10-year decorating plan they can implement as budget allows, to older couples whose kids have flown the nest (likely taking some of the furniture with them) and who want fresh ideas for updating the house.

Interior design is a Tait family affair: she gets her passion for design from her mother, and has helped both her sister and her parents with their homes and vacation houses.

Her most challenging assignments — “apart from working with family,” she adds wryly — are typically big renovation projects where she acts as project manager.

“These can be very stressful sometimes, just co-ordinating. Trades are very busy and, as reliable as I feel my trades are, things always happen.”

Tait says you can never know for sure what you're going to find, and she recommends doubling the allotted time for a reno. She also ►



► encourages clients to go away if they can while the project is underway.

The project Tait's most excited about is a model suite she designed for the new Grand Lofts Condominium conversion project in Cambridge. The luxury lofts are being built in a 19th century stone-and-timber factory. Developer Amir Klein gave Tait free rein in the model suite (shown at right) so she's made it a perfect expression of her own style, which she describes as "traditional with a modern twist."


The model suite features a neutral palette of soft blues and creams, complemented by chrome pieces, unexpected furnishings and original art. Tait likes to combine traditional lines with modern materials, with a preference for natural fibres and finishes. As with all her work, she strives for casual, liveable elegance.

Tait is "big on custom furniture," and has all her sofas custom-made so she can achieve the perfect size and shape with the best fabric for the client's needs. Most clients have animals, children, or both, and they need something that will stand up to wear and tear.

Tait says she's considering starting a line of her own custom furniture based on designs she's been making, and hopes to make that available on her website soon.

Asked about her design influences, Tait cites Canadian design icons Brian Gluckstein and Sarah Richardson: "One thing I love about Sarah Richardson's show on HGTV is that she shows mishaps. She's not perfect; things happen on site and I love that she shows that, because that's what happens on a renovation site."

Tait's dream project is to design, build and decorate her own house on an acre of property.

Right now, though, she says, "I'm glad to be setting roots back here. It's a very exciting community now with everything that's going on. Living in downtown Kitchener, I'm hoping the downtown core picks up. I'm very interested in watching everything that's going on down there." 

CONTEMPORARY STYLE IN THE GRAND LOFTS



Photography • Tom Vogel

