

# Life trends and Interior Design

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A few years ago when I was visiting a cousin of mine in Lahore, who had recently got married, I was shocked with the interior layout of the house. Now this is a typical example of an average person living in an average house of an average locality. But here, the furniture was too lavish and gaudy for the house. All Duco painted metallic silver and full of carved embellishments etc...it was simply out of place. Well you guessed it right, it was our traditional Dowry furniture that is normally stuffed into the house without realizing that it might not fit into the house. This cousin of mine had to fit in a the typical double bed with a gigantic headboard and footboard, two side tables and the matching dressing with a large stool in a small room hardly bigger than eight feet by ten. I had to run out to the verandah for a breath of fresh air, as it was rather stuffy in there. The room was drenched with stale air because of the heavy drapes. No surprise, there was also a typically large steel almirah for 'zewan, kapray etc.' and a trolley for TV in the same room.

The plight of the adjacent room was no different. It was literally stuffed with the most common furniture formula (cannot call it the most popular anymore) invented by the British designers a few decades ago, a "corner arrangement" a sofa set with matching coffee table set. The layout here was not a 'corner' but pretty jumbled up because of the undersize room and oversize size furniture. Again, the only place I was most comfortable was the verandah, open to the sky. I reluctantly told my cousin that I preferred to sleep on a "charpai" but a place that was uncluttered, and the air was clean.

My cousin asked me not to get tense and relax as he tried to explain to me that this was a typical situation and most probably hundreds of thousands of households, were at this moment, busy planning doing exactly the same for a wedding in the family. And this has been going on for decades, a standard practice. He asked me to take it easy.

The problem is simple, our folks today are not geared to think in terms of their physical environment and make wise decisions. Even the parents who are compelled to spend all the money are not capable of looking at furniture and interior design problems without the influence of blind traditions. It is quite mind-boggling that they knowingly and willingly make the wrong decisions.

This little story relates only to residential interior design decisions and shows how our traditional thinking can sometimes get in the way and clashes with our present day environment and comfort. Our thought process needs a re-assessment and detailed yet a pragmatic approach. But what I have narrated above is only a small aspect of our helplessness and inability to appreciate and utilize our built environment, especially our buildings and their interior spaces.

This episode took me back to good old days in the memory lane when life was much simpler and the curse of giving away such a dowry was neither a tradition nor a fashion. Back in the sixties and seventies one could relax in the ‘not so cluttered lounge’ donned with a couple of comfort chairs and our nostalgic radiogram against the wall, playing our favorite music. This era was followed by the “wall to wall” seventies and eighties, when carpet and curtain became the wall to wall craze. But what a riot of colors and shades and what a discord! People visiting Europe or colder countries saw the walls adorned with patterned wall papers but our walls lined with the same only became an embarrassment as the papers delaminated with the change of temperature and climate.

The nineties elbowed out the carpet days with the ceramic and porcelain tiles. Today even in the residential situation everyone is looking for a maintenance free surface. It can be called the porcelain age as far as interior finishes is concerned. Not only are the interior but also exterior surfaces being lined with hardwearing tiles with subtle colors and earthy tints and viola! You forget about the yearly paint job. The paint jobs in those times were quite a mess with the kalai or the ‘choona job’. Then came the distemper and the pastel plastic emulsions, but the matt enamel wall paint finishes ruled the nineties, which is easy to clean and maintain.

While on the subject of concepts and trends of design in the nineties, planning also saw a slight change on the residential scene. More and more people are seriously considering eliminating the formal drawing and dining rooms, which remain closed almost all the year round and it becomes an embarrassing situation when the peculiar smell of the closed rooms actually welcomes the guests, our worthy “Mehmaan”. This extra space is now considered as a bonus and a blessing for the kids and family. The author has already designed and completed two houses that do not have the formal dining and drawings, as shown in the snapshots.

The fate of commercial interior spaces is no different. Back in the sixties and seventies it was very exciting when Tariq Road was lined with new shops and shopping malls. But the development and application of modern design concepts and techniques in the nineties on Zamzama avenue, our latest high street, is nothing but a journey from old and mediocre to good DESIGN. Good design sells! And people are beginning to realize that good design simply guarantees boost in sales. It’s nothing but good presentation of the merchandise; creative lighting coupled with use of latest materials and attractive color schemes that pull the customer towards the shops. The author was perhaps lucky and the first one to introduce a Zamzama type shop on Tariq road recently. This jewellery shop called ‘Gehna’, as shown in the photograph is already opening eyes and the adjacent shops desire change.

Gone are the days when offices used to look like ‘begaar camps’ or the forced labor camps, (as shown in the photograph, before and after of an office space designed by the author many years ago) but modern techniques and standards of lighting and simplicity in design, with subtle and sometimes cheerful color schemes transform the work environment into a fun place to be. With centrally air-conditioned offices and backup energy supply you don’t feel like going home. The present office environment induces efficiency and higher returns. That is a guarantee modern design brings. Good interior design actually changes human behavior

and habits. You want to look smart in a smart interior. That's when you start wearing a necktie or start carrying a comb on your own accord. Good interior design actually changes our lifestyles and for our good. Invest in design.

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