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male pattern boldness

DC'S BRIGHTEST INTERIOR DESIGN AUTHORITIES TAKE THEIR CUES FROM AN UNLIKELY SOURCE—THE WORLD'S FASHION RUNWAYS. BY MERLISA LAWRENCE CORBETT



The "Banker's Lair," designed by Lori Graham



The many moods of Room & Board

Stripes in polyester, checks in cashmere, herringbone in tweed—the same fabrics flaunted up and down the runways of Milan can adorn your living room. Whether formal like a dinner jacket or relaxed like casual khakis, menswear-inspired upholstery suits any space.

Clean-lined, tailored, and trimmed, sofas and chairs feature certain design elements synonymous with a handsomely attired man. "Well-dressed men have one thing in common: They do the essentials right; they do not go overboard on trends or loud accessories," says Lori Graham, of Lori Graham Design (1604 17th St. NW, 202-745-0118; lorigrahamsdesign.com). "A key principle in menswear is to use classic, well-tailored base pieces and offset them with pops of color." The same, she says, is true of upholstery. An example: Take a gray-tuxedo-colored sofa and accent it with a silk damask throw pillow, "the pocket square of the upholstery world," says Graham. "A fabric with a subtle pinstripe, a faint tweed, or a tight herringbone can make a stunning large upholstered piece. Think of your large pieces as the pants and jacket of a great suit."

A designer who loves to incorporate masculine elements, Graham gleans inspiration from one of her favorite men's fashion designers: Oscar Udeshi of London. Deconstructing a Udeshi overcoat, Graham points to his choice of a classic herringbone fabric with fresh yet subtle stripping and black velvet flaps over the pockets. She describes this coat as strong, confident, always chic—traits that easily translate to furniture. "In conceptualizing his clientele, Udeshi has mastered an approach to haute

menswear that couldn't be more instructive as a roadmap for well-edited interior design. In each piece, as well as in the room as a whole, classic lines and familiar fabrics play the dominant role, while daring details, fresh interpretations, pops of vibrancy, and hints of whimsy provide the soul of the piece and the essence of the room."

If your personality is more business casual than three-piece executive, you can find upholstery pieces in denim, khaki, leather, corduroy, and suede. Whatever the style, if you can wear it, so can your sofa. Graham designed a media room for an investment banker who lives in Dupont Circle. She upholstered the walls about three-quarters of the way up, creating an exaggerated wainscot to help with the acoustics. She chose twin Century settees from her LG Place custom furniture line and upholstered them in Ralph Lauren's Heather Gray Banker stripe fabric; to approximate a dress shirt, crisp white pillows top the settees. A bold animal-print ottoman anchors the room like a fine pair of Ferragamo oxfords. Befitting her client's profession, Graham named the room the "Banker's Lair."

Because many textile companies manufacture fabric for apparel as well as interior designers, masculine upholstery design runs concurrent with men's fashion trends. In fact, this past June, British fabric maker Holland & Sherry (300 D St. SW, Ste. 322, 202-484-1256; hollandandsherry.com) hosted a trunk show at the Washington Design Center, a collection of showrooms for luxury home furniture and decorating goods. But instead of featuring typical luxurious upholstery fabrics, they sold ready-to-wear neckties and custom-made shirts.

What's hot now? "Stodgy is over, sexy is in," says Chad Alan of Chad Alan Designs (3473 14th St. NW, #4, 202-332-1652; chadalandesigns.com).

Think sleek and minimalist: A pinstriped Zinc chair from Room & Board evokes images of a silk suit from Canali's Milano Collection, with its fitted waists, narrow lapels, and slim jackets; the Boden chair, with its angled high back and dressed in a smoky-gray jacquard-poly blend, looks as haute as a GQ model in Hugo Boss.

As with fall suits, gray sets the tone for upholstery. "Deep gray is making a huge imprint on interior design," says Alan. "Masculine and sexy, gray is turning beige on its side and bringing a new depth to bleached-out and uninspired palettes." Avoid the blandness of beige by infusing texture, like a houndstooth design in camel-colored cashmere. Layer the look with a check throw similar in pattern to a Burberry scarf. And don't be afraid to mix the classic with a bit of whimsy. Traditional suit patterns such as pin-stripes, plaids, checks, and windowpane have been joined by paisleys, "which have evolved from men's ties into stunning fabrics ranging from re-embroidered silks to block-printed linens and suede," says Alan.

Not content to follow tradition? Turn to the underdog of fabrics for a trendy alternative. "I think we're used to seeing wool on accent pillows, but now we're seeing wool on entire sofas and chairs," says Angela Belt, visual associate for Room & Board (1840 14th St. NW, 202-729-8300; roomandboard.com). The store's wool Goetz sofa by Herman Miller in an ash gray displays the weight and warmth of a fine winter coat. Meanwhile, wool in herringbone patterns, like the one used for Michael Kors's double-breasted long-wool-blend peacoat, are being incorporated into wingback chairs.

Fine details like button tufts, nail heads, and box stitching give shape and even more texture to finalize the look. "My new favorite technique is pin-tucking," says Alan, who recently designed a massive pearlized gray



Lori Graham

Regarding masculine design, "stodgy is out, sexy is in."

—CHAD ALAN



Fit for a king: Graham's design for the banker's bedroom

leather sectional for former Washington Redskin Chris Samuels. Alan completed the piece with pin-tucks in cushions pulled down in half-inch dimples on each corner block. Now the showstopper in Samuels's lower-level family room, the sectional makes a bold statement for a brawny guy.

"People always say that you can tell a lot about a man by how he dresses," says Alan. "Well, the furniture in his home tells even more." **CF**



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