



THE DESIGNER WITHIN

McClain

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THE DESIGNER WITHIN

A PROFESSIONAL GUIDE TO A WELL-STYLED HOME

John McClain



# CONTENTS

<b>9</b>	Foreword, by Loren Ruch
<b>10</b>	Introduction
<b>14</b>	The Design Process
<b>19</b>	Listen to Your Heart
<b>53</b>	Holy Chic
<b>87</b>	The Bold & the Beautiful
<b>131</b>	Neutral Territory
<b>165</b>	Partial to the Past
<b>197</b>	The Hollywood Effect
<b>222</b>	Epilogue
<b>223</b>	Acknowledgments

# THE DESIGN PROCESS

Design projects demand detailed processes that lead to success. Here are the basic steps I follow to start and complete every project.

## STEP 1: DEFINE YOUR NEEDS AND DESIRES

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When deciding to begin any design plan—for myself or for a client—I always start with what is really desired and needed. I ask my clients to dive deep explore what truly matters to them in design. Let’s start with color: what colors make you happy, relaxed, excited, or even hungry? Aesthetic: what vibe would you like to evoke in your home? Is it vibrant glam? Modern with clean lines? Or maybe it’s a light, all-neutral, transitional space to relax in after a long day. Travel: what past vacation destination or even hotel stay really stands out in your mind and why? No matter the design goal, you will only achieve it if you allow yourself to *feel* the design and recognize what you want it to accomplish. Identify the ultimate goal you are trying to achieve. Is function paramount in your ideal space? Or do you focus on the colors, textures, and materials in your dream room? Maybe it’s both (hint: it should be both). Are you envisioning a kitchen that will hold all of your favorite cooking supplies while still being design forward? Just know, you can have it all, at least during this first design planning session.

Write down all of the things you’re picturing. I like to use bullet points to separate my thoughts. Use descriptive words or specific examples of what you are envisioning as your ideal space. Your words do not need to be organized in any particular way. This is your brainstorming session, and there are zero judgments on your clerical skills.

## STEP 2: FIND YOUR INSPIRATION

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Now that you have your list of wants and needs, it’s time to start organizing them. I am mindful that most projects have strict budgets, but for this first critical exercise, let’s pretend money is no object. Build on the foundation of Step 1 by finding precise examples of your dream kitchen, bedroom, bath, or any other room. Start by tearing inspirational images from magazine pages or by starting a Pinterest or Houzz board and digitally saving your finds there. However, don’t limit yourself to images of entire rooms or homes. If it’s just one sofa (and by the way, it is a sofa not a couch), or a lamp, or even something as simple as a doorknob, save it! These will become the foundation of your design plan. Once you have found what inspires you, organize those images by room or space. This will help to further develop each part of your new home or room. As you are saving these images, ask yourself, “Why do I like this?” Then make a note of what you like on the actual page or in the notes section of the online platform you are using. You will soon start to see a pattern developing for your selections.

## STEP 3: CREATE YOUR PROJECT DIRECTION BOARD

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You’ve taken the first step and gathered inspirational images that grab your attention, so let’s create what I call a “project direction board.” This step is simply the assemblage of your finds in Step 2. Rather than showing the exact items you’ll use, the project direction board will act as a mood board, capturing how the project should feel. Compile the research that you have collected thus far into one or two presentations per space. Don’t worry about how you assemble these together; we just want to be able to review the images as a grouping: pinned physically to a foam core board or “pinned” electronically together in a software program to get a true feel for each room’s design direction.



## THE BOLD & THE BEAUTIFUL

To be bold means different things to different people. Some might consider a colorful area rug as venturing outside of their comfort zone, while another is adventurous enough to try out a new tile design for their bathroom. To me, bold means taking calculated risks in anticipation that the reward will far surpass any angst I felt on the path to get there.

I have always considered myself a risk taker. What's the worst that could happen? I have to repaint a wall or replace a window treatment? I admit, it's a bit easier for me to say these things considering that it's my career to study and hone my design craft to the point that all design decisions aren't as risky as they might seem to you. Despite this, I invite you to also make some bold moves in your own home. Not sure where to start? Well, this chapter is the perfect muse for your bold endeavor.

This chapter showcases some of my boldest designs. This doesn't mean being bold solely with color choices, so keep your eyes open for bold patterns, materials, lighting, artwork, and furniture (and yes, admittedly some bold color too). I like to make one bold move in my life each day, and this practice has sharpened my boldness to where it's no longer such a scary task for me to think along audacious lines. If you're timid, start small: change your shower curtain, paint an accent wall (yes, I'm a designer that still stands behind a well-planned accent wall), or buy some funky-patterned toss pillows. Soon, you will sharpen your own boldness skills and be ready to tackle large-scale bold projects.



**Page 86:** This open-plan dining room needed to grab your attention as soon as you walked into the front door, and I say mission accomplished! The design plan started with the unique blue, silver, and black flame-stitch-style striped wallcovering, and the rest is history. Remember what I said about a starting point for your design? Well, this was mine. The rug works because of the larger-scaled pattern, and the blue leather side chairs and velvet head chairs pull the wallpaper colors down to eye level. A custom brass and walnut dining table further plays off the linear lines throughout. The star attraction could very well be the starburst brass and glass light fixture.

**Above:** Looking back to the entry of this home, a linear glass and wood front door design opens into the hallway leading to the rest of the home. Look closely in the wainscoting and you'll see one of my favorite tricks: hidden closet storage behind wainscoting.

**Opposite:** Swivel chairs are a great way to create a seating area. Here, four chairs are upholstered in a soft and supple bouclé fabric. The coffee and side tables are in natural, organic shapes to pay homage to the mountains outside.

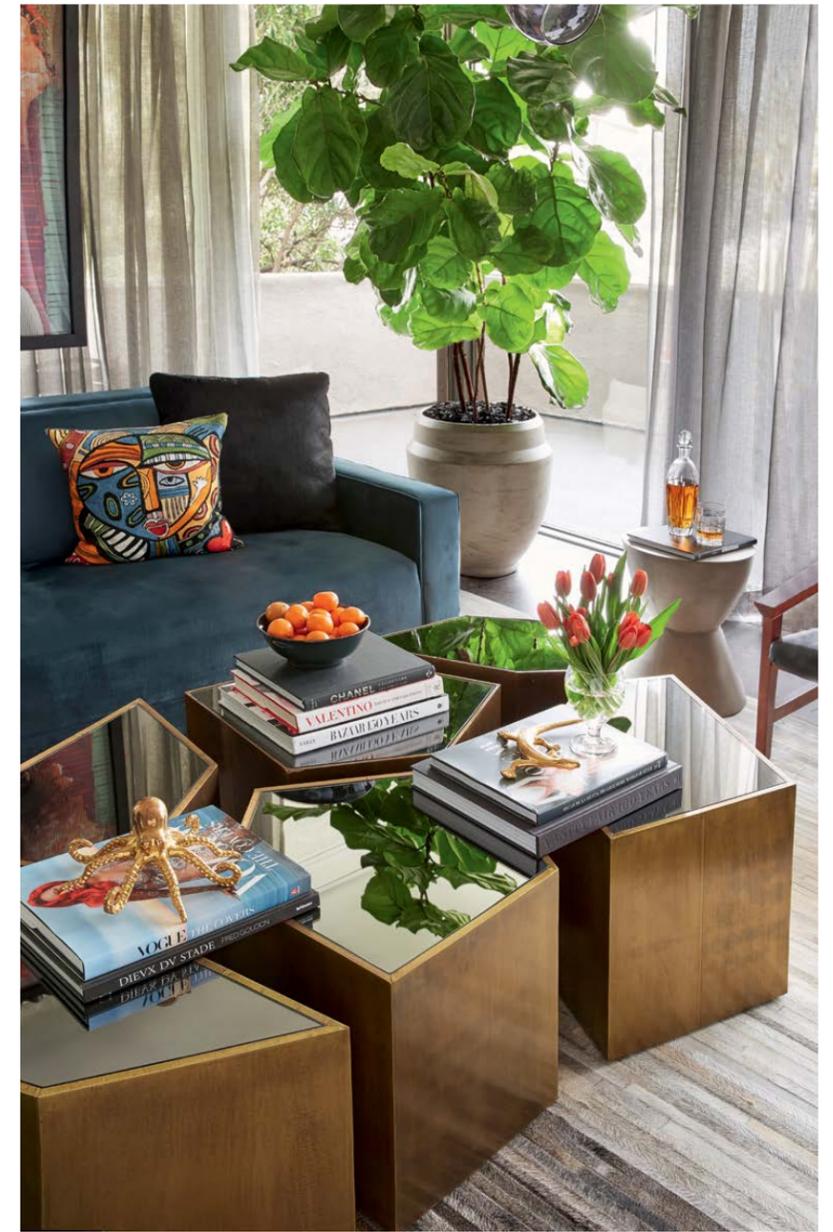








“If you don’t have a traditional coffee table, cluster several smaller tables together to create the effect of one larger center table.”



**Opposite:** The living room is a lesson in symmetry and shape. Two black ceruse-treated bookcases flank the prismatic walnut credenza. The brass on each piece ties them together.

**Above:** The toss pillows are fun and colorful—evocative of what could have been used in this home in the past.



**Above:** This bedroom faces a beautiful lake, and two midcentury-style chairs furnish a reading spot like no other.

**Opposite:** The main bedroom feels as if it was almost carved out to create this cozy and modern bed nook. Metallic cork wallcovering adds contemporary texture, while the wooden bed and nightstands bring in the nature that midcentury design embraces.

