

Creating serenity, ambience, style & flair

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Serenity, ambience, style and flair are design elements that can not only make your home a utopian retreat from the world, but a place to celebrate your very take on life, your distinctive personality and worldview. How do you achieve these elusive qualities, and what do they mean for a room? When you walk in a room that's balanced and soothing, it exudes serenity. Add to that a distinctive atmosphere that imbues feeling and you've got ambience. When a room has style, it has

a beauty and grace. And with flair — you know it when you see it, a room with a genius or a natural gift.

We asked an antique dealer, owners of home furnishing boutiques, a manager of a kitchen and bathroom gallery, a supplier of marble and granite and a developer in the Triangle how they would achieve serenity, ambience, style and flair. Their answers are as distinctive as their personalities and their personal offerings. Larger than life Raleigh antique dealer George McNeill with a style he calls elegant leisure outfits a room with a different vision than say Mack and Pam Thorpe, owners of the Rusty Bucket in downtown Apex who are partial to down home country.

High-toned McNeill has a self-described “gilt complex” and scoops up antiques at New York’s Christy’s and at Palm Beach estate sales. The Thorpes took down Fuquay-Varina tobacco and hay barns and used the seasoned wood to fashion a charming country store, The Rusty Bucket, complete with beamed ceilings and brick walls and filled with rustic antiques and country Americana.



Wade Adler, manager-developer of 12 Oaks, the 680-acre golf-course subdivision in Holly Springs, emphasizes the nature of the development when he talks about serenity, ambience, style and flair.

Christine C. Tingen, builder sales manager of Ferguson Bath, Kitchen & Lighting Gallery in Raleigh, works with lighting and kitchen designers who search out the design styles of their clients before coming up with dream rooms.

Manager and craftsman Henrique Dias of Stone World Marble & Granite of Raleigh talks about the skill involved in crafting a countertop, fireplace or table from fine marble and granite his business imports from all over the world.

Chris Kirk, owner with his brother and mother of Kirk Imports of Raleigh, fills his 40,000 square foot showroom with furniture from buying trips to High Point, Los Angeles and outposts around the world. Along with buying living room, dining room, bedroom, including children's bedroom furniture in traditional, contemporary and transitional styles, Kirk scoops up unique finds from across the world in his work as a direct importer.



Kimberly A. Shore, who owns Sixpence Accents, an art and home furniture boutique located in a restored 1930s house on Chatham Street in downtown Apex, features traditional and contemporary hand-painted, rustic and shabby chic furniture, art glass, mirrors and other home accessories including a garden line. The business with eclectic offerings also has a variety of price-points. These professionals use their gifts and their inventories to create these four elusive design elements.

Serenity

To achieve it, you have to start in a room with good bones, says McNeill. Don't underestimate the value of millwork, details that not only increase the value of your home but set a tone of elegance. Paint the walls and McNeill's preferred Georgian paneling, picture frame or crown molding all in cream. But even so, the choice of the color doesn't matter as much as the balance of it in the room, says McNeill. A Lawson sofa, a simple-lined, low-back design, upholstered in cream velvet, spells serenity from its perch in front of the fireplace, flanked by two club chairs, also in cream velvet, McNeill says. Add two Louis XV chairs in cherrywood and upholstered in a cream velvet and cream silk cigar stripe. To the conversational nest in front of the fireplace, center a black-lacquered Zen coffee table, completing the unaffected calm.

"Art has to stabilize a room, give it depth and meaning," says McNeill, who envisions on the wall above the fireplace a landscape by James Daga Albinson, a realist from Sag Harbor. He recently brought the painting home to Raleigh from Christy's.

Adler of Holly Spring's 12 Oaks Community paves the way for tranquility with 20 miles of tree-scaped sidewalk along rolling hills lined in houses of southern classic styles: Colonial, Greek, Southern Antebellum Revival and Victorian, all with inviting front porches. It doesn't hurt that meandering through the neighborhood is a Jack Nicklaus golf course, named one of the top 10 new private courses in 2009 by Golf Digest.

Peace for the Thorpes who live in a restored farm house named Twin Gables, six miles outside of Apex, is found in simplicity. A clutter-free room whispers relaxation. Pam

sells antique trunks and chests that double as coffee tables and offers stackable boxes. All of these can be used to tuck away clutter.

And it's true to the period. "You're looking for that utility," she says. "One hundred and fifty years ago our forefathers had to be judicious about using their resources. They had to be utility minded."

Timeless treasures like the American country sofas and wing back chairs from Johnston Benchworks transport ones mood to a port of calm. The family company in North Wilkesboro maintains the Appalachian tradition of making its furniture by hand.

Round it out with rockers by Troutman Chair, another old-time North Carolina furniture maker that features joint construction, and add a few rustic antiques the Thorpes scour up on buying trips in Ohio and Pennsylvania and you've got laid-back down home ease.

You do want to have personal touches, says Pam, who suggests a handmade quilt to cozy up a sitting area and for charm. The shop features the works of local artisans including quilters, jewelry makers, needle-crafters, potters and even makers of homemade jellies and sauces.

Ambience

"The senses are a pathway to ambience," says Shore of Sixpence Accents. And lighting is a vehicle. Shore recommends choosing from her wide variety of lamps and Virginia candles with wood wicks, soy candles and even the wax frame of a candle with a LED-insert. "The wood wicks make a crackling sound so it sounds like a fire is burning, she says. "The LED-insert candle is battery-powered and can be set with a timer. They glow just like a candle. You can smell the vanilla when they are on."

Pam also rides the waves of the senses to ambience or spirit, especially through sight and smell. Cylinder lamps with punched tin shades cast shadows in pattern on walls, nightlights dipped in silicon resemble flickering flames, lights in tin holders featuring trays filled with scented wax release spicy aroma as their bulbs get hot.

"It's so nice to walk in the house and you're greeted with this warm, cozy smell," she says.

In the wintertime, Pam bakes cookies and brews cider on the Elmira Stoveworks Appliances, 1850 reproductions the store sells that were made in Ontario, Canada. The air is laden with spice and butter and stops customers in their tracks whom Pam restores with free goodies. Through layers of lighting, Ferguson's Tingen brings ambience to Triangle kitchens with a bold illumination. Lights are placed under cabinets, added as drop-down pendants above islands, located in recessed spaces overhead and over work spaces and prep areas. Craftsman Dias says he created an ambience of elegance by installing creamy white carrarea Italian marble in a foyer. It makes an immediate statement and sets up an expectation for quality.

"It's almost like creating a themed room," says Kirk of an ambience made palpable from scenic effects. He chooses from Kirk Imports' inventory the Old World British Colonial appointments, Moroccan styles or Key West-inspired furnishings to create the sensory feel of the room.

“It’s a very different ambience like walking into a completely different place, a suggestion of travel, says Kirk. “A lot of people do these sorts of rooms when they have traveled some place and have been to other countries and want to emulate it in their house.”

Style

“Style is not fashion,” says McNeill, who follows antiques like a commodities trader, but banks on beauty’s timelessness and shows off the period pieces he acquires in his Atlantic Avenue shop. “It’s God-given, either you have it or you don’t.”

“Antiques give a room an unmistakable sense of style,” McNeill says. Add a 19th century Chinese lamp or the red-lacquered, Chinese-designed clock he found in Honfleur, France, a French side table or a gilt stool and you’ve got an indelible fingerprint. Dias added his signature to a house in Avon, Connecticut by installing a black and white marble fireplace. The beveled edge of finely-wrought marble distinguished his work, says Dias, a skill he learned during training in Brazil. In the Triangle, he works with designers to create stylish kitchens and bathrooms outfitted in countertops he fabricates from one of 120 colors of granite and 12 colors of marble Stone World Marble & Granite carries. The Rusty Bucket creaks with style, from the timbre of vintage planks underfoot to the 1930s pickup truck Mack restored and often parks on Salem Street, the historic district’s main drag.

The place is so distinctive that New Hill actor and executive producer John Demers scouted it out as the location for his family-friendly television series he named after the shop, The Rusty Bucket Kids, located in the fictional town of Peak City. The name is a take-off on Apex’s town motto, “the peak of good living”. Sixpence Accents also features style arbiters.

From the colorful, contemporary stretched-canvas giclees to the realism of the originals and water color animal and floral landscape prints by Susan Crouch of Statesville, the 20 artists of Sixpence Accents offer their own individual takes on reality that can be used to transform a room, says Shore.

[Read more](#) about creating Ambience, Style, and Flair in your home.

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