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# RACHEL CANNON

## DESIGNING FOR INTROVERTS

| BY NATALIE KING

Interiors by Rachel Cannon. Photos by Jessie Preza

Interior designer, Rachel Cannon, is making the case for a quiet room, and doing it with style. Her interiors are saturated in gorgeous color, with interesting art, meaningful accessories and designated spaces for people to have a quiet area to call their own. As much of new construction is centered on open floor plans, Rachel is focusing on introverts and the need for some people to have a space to unwind and recharge.

**W**e talked about designing for introverts, about investing in quality and the effect of living in a space that is truly inspiring.

### **WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO CREATE A HOME THAT IS BOTH AESTHETICALLY PLEASING AND WELL-FUNCTIONING?**

My ideal client has always been professionals with demanding schedules (a lot like me) and adding the element of introversion into that profile has truly expanded the way I think about the influence of our environment on our ability to work and live at our highest level. As an introvert myself, I can attest to the fact that by and large, our culture promotes extroverted tendencies - from the classroom (participation points), to the work environment (clusters of desks), to the home (completely open floor plans). Introverts are told to “speak up” and “put yourself out there” and at home, families are expected to congregate in the huge shared area that is the living room, foyer, dining room, and kitchen - but this isn't how many of us achieve deep focus to be our most creative or healthiest. I truly believe that the next big trend in interior design will be creating spaces that honor and nurture the dynamics between people, whether it's co-workers, students, or families. I believe every home should have a Quiet Room, where people like me can retreat to process our day, recharge our internal batteries,

and recover from the toll of functioning in a world that's designed for extroverts to succeed.

### **WHAT AREAS OF THE HOME DO YOU FIND THAT CLIENT'S NEED THE MOST HELP WITH?**

A great design takes the entire home into consideration. Just like a car must be designed as a whole, your home must be designed as a whole to fully function in a way that creates ease and reliability. You wouldn't buy a car based on the front fender alone, and you can't really get everything you need if you're piece-mealing your home design together. So even when clients come to us for a kitchen remodel, we often address the problems in the whole home with our design, and then they have a road map to cleaning up the stressors it's causing. They may choose to phase the project out, but I feel it's my job to call attention to the ways the whole space must improve to make the investment of design really valuable.

### **DO YOU HAVE TIPS TO HELP CREATE A SPACE FOR FINANCIAL HEALTH IN THE HOME? FOR EXAMPLE, AN AREA WHERE YOU CAN CHECK IN AND ACCESS ACCOUNTS, PAY BILLS AND FEEL INSPIRED TO DO FUTURE PLANNING?**

Absolutely. As we forge this new path of the Quiet Room, I am leaning on my own needs as an introverted entrepreneur with a demanding schedule to guide how I can analyze homes to maximize what they provide for us. I see the Quiet Room as a place where, in addition to recharging our batteries, we can also work without interruptions or distractions to achieve deep focus - something financials definitely require to be maintained for optimum “health.”

### **WHAT IS THE EFFECT OF A SPACE THAT IS LACKLUSTER BUT FUNCTIONING OK VERSUS A SPACE THAT IS WELL EDITED AND INSPIRING?**

Just okay means there will always be an undercurrent of dissatisfaction, or a deep yearning for things to be better. It's a constant reminder of

what we'd like to accomplish, especially when we internalize those thoughts and tell ourselves things like “I can't afford to improve my space.” We create something called an Imposition Mentality - which is a state we create in which we are powerless to change our circumstances. The difference between that and living in a space that is well edited and inspiring is that the latter will empower you to be the hero in your own narrative. Thoughtful design really can be that powerful...especially when it's about more than just the cache of using a particular fabric or the provenance of an antique.

### **CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT A FAVORITE PROJECT SO FAR?**

My favorite so far is 100% my own kitchen. I knew when I bought my house that I would remodel it eventually. It wasn't the worst kitchen, but it was “okay” (and remember what that can do to our mental health!). Designing and remodeling the space was so incredibly rewarding - and although I didn't design the rest of the home at the same time, I began like many of my clients with Phase I (the kitchen). The difference between walking into my old, tiny, dark kitchen, and attempting to cook and be organized in that cramped space versus walking into an expanded space that is flooded with natural light and is set up to function for the way my brain works and what my muscle memory is...life changing. Life affirming! It feels like a breath of fresh air every time I walk in there. Opening the door at the end of the day, or getting my first cup of coffee are joyful experiences, now, as opposed to the mental anguish I'd feel before when I'd have to put blinders on just to get through mundane activities. Now, I look forward to the whole house bringing me that kind of restorative feeling - security, peace, rest. Our home environments should do that for us, no matter how big or small, and if yours isn't, the investment in working with a professional interior designer who is skilled at listening and evaluating your needs is worth every penny for the tranquility you'll experience in the aftermath.



The process of design, especially in the holistic way that you work, is so interesting. How do you begin each project?

I believe in letting the client communicate their needs and desires fully - and often, they don't have the words to do so. We create private Pinterest boards that we share with them and for the first two weeks of our process, we let them pin their favorites without adding to the ideas. I'm looking for common threads in what they choose, and since they're typically having to go through their own boards to select their top pins, they're editing themselves in the process, rather than me doing that for them. Once I start to see the hidden things they're liking (usually without them even noticing), we begin to pull ideas and design elements that align with that vision. Most of them are amazed at how accurately we can pinpoint their likes and dislikes. From there, we want to dig deep and analyze the way the space needs to support their lifestyle, which I think is equally as important as the aesthetics, if not more.

Can you talk a bit about color and the effect that it has on mood? What are your favorite color combinations to work with?

I am obsessed with color, and the more unusual of a combination the client is willing to take on, the better! I think the trick to making color work is by avoiding the trends altogether. Select colors YOU love, and disregard what you're being fed on social media. If you make the conscious choice to step off of the trend bandwagon, and fully embrace your own preferences, your rooms have a much better chance at standing the test of time, than if you simply mimic the latest fad on Instagram. Our homes are our most valuable investments, and we need to treat them as such - so forego the disposable design mentality and start living with what you love. It will absolutely change your life.

Describe the key elements of an interior that is fulfilling?

I think the most personally fulfilling rooms begin by being authentic. I know that's a buzzword that's lost a little of its meaning, but what I mean is letting your own unique quirks and interests take





center stage. Ignoring bad advice that tells you that one way is “the right way” to design. There used to be an adage that “every room needs a touch of black” but I’ve never liked that kind of thinking. My dad hates black, so he would fixate on the one black thing in a room and it would really get under his skin. Next, I think we need to eschew any notion that we all need to have homes that look similar. Good taste prevails, always, but it comes in many forms. I can appreciate a Palm Springs mid-century modern just as much as I can swoon over a Georgian traditional in Charlotte. A fulfilling interior might combine the best of both worlds (for me, definitely). And finally, quality is worth waiting for. Fast design is just like fast food...it might serve an immediate purpose, but the long-term effects aren’t great. If you can’t afford to buy everything at one time, stick to your design plan and buy it one piece at a time. Haste makes waste, and it would be better to buy one top-quality item once, rather than buying 6 low-quality items that get destroyed and constantly need to be replaced.

I love a few points on your podcast Episode #15 A Case for the Quiet Room where you said, «We’ve eliminated walls and become a nation of noise making devices and we wonder why we’re all frazzled and fried all the time...» to describe the need for a quiet space to give ourselves the opportunity to truly recharge and enjoy our time at home. This makes so much sense. You then add, “You don’t have to let this room meet anyone else’s approval – but yours” which is a powerful concept in the visual age that we live in. For people that have been really tuned in to interiors through social media, it could be hard for them to take a step back and really consider their own taste and personal style. Are there tips that you use when trying to help a client find their personal style, and to see what they are truly drawn to?

Thank you for listening to the podcast! I would reiterate my comments above, about getting off the trend bandwagon. If we think about it, we are bombarded with images that entice us to buy, buy, buy. You can’t be on Instagram for more than 60 seconds without seeing several ads, many with links to buy right from the app. This is consumerism, not design, and we can make the decision not to be swayed by it. If we returned to old school values, which taught us to buy the best we could afford, buy very few things, and take care of them so we could live with them for a long period of time, we’d all be the better for it. Make a conscious choice to prioritize quality. If you don’t know what good quality is, ask someone to help you understand it. Stop watching home renovation shows with completely unrealistic budgets and timelines. Finding your own personal style takes some time, but it can be done (not by taking a quiz on a website that also wants to sell you more stuff you don’t need). Use the same method we use for clients with their Pinterest boards. Start to look for the links between everything you like. Maybe you always pin blue rooms, or maybe you pin rooms that feature banquettes in the breakfast room. You’ll start to see what you gravitate to, and if you pin it more than 3 or 4 times, there’s a good chance that it’s «your style.» Ultimately, you have to live in the home when it’s all said and done, so it needs to be decorated and designed to suit YOU, and nobody else. Not your mom, your neighbors, your best friend. The highest compliment would be for someone to walk into a client’s home and say, “OH my god, this is so YOU!”



