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Home as sanctuary

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New York interior designer Robin Wilson, author of “Clean Design: Wellness for Your Lifestyle,” says open kitchens and great rooms promote people flow — sociability — and air flow at the same time.

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Embracing and heartfelt, genuine and environmentally minded, classic and contemporary — perhaps even an eclectic mix of the two — as long as it reflects a personal and meaningful take on the world.

That's where interior design is headed in 2016: toward homes that neutralize the complexity and stress of life by becoming retreats of greater authenticity and peacefulness rather than places full of generic and relatively meaningless stuff.

“In design, people are talking about well-being across the board, physical and emotional,” said New York interior designer Robin Wilson, founder and CEO of Robin Wilson Home and author of “Clean Design: Wellness for Your Lifestyle.” “It is not just about beautiful anymore.”

It's more about soul and meaning, said Charleston designer Beverly Bohan of Haute Design. She describes a home integrating the best of contemporary and classical pieces in a clean approach that creates an environment that's about you and what you stand for.

“It's no longer about buying to buy and just putting stuff out there,” Bohan said. “It's not disposable. It's more thoughtful ... genuine, personal. It's about how you live, your personality, your values, what represents you and your philosophy of life.”

“I think America is returning sentimental,” she said.

Among the home decor trends are the new chosen colors of the year: Rose Quartz and Serenity for Pantone, and Simply White for Benjamin Moore.

It is the first time that Pantone, the world-renowned color expert and provider of color matching systems which has been releasing a color of the year for the past 15 years, presents two colors.

Pantone's website says, “As consumers seek mindfulness and well-being as an antidote to modern day stresses, welcoming colors that psychologically fulfill our yearning for reassurance and security are becoming more prominent. Joined together, Rose Quartz and Serenity demonstrate an inherent balance between a warmer embracing rose tone and the

cooler tranquil blue, reflecting connection and wellness as well as a soothing sense of order and peace.”

According to Pantone, the combination of the two colors challenges traditional perception of color association, reflecting the current gender blur in fashion and other areas of design as well as “societal movements toward gender equality and fluidity, the consumer’s increased comfort with using color as a form of expression, a generation that has less concern about being typecast or judged and an open exchange of digital information that has opened our eyes to different approaches to color usage.”

Together with Rose Quartz and Serenity, a nod to millennials that the design community greeted unenthusiastically, white is trending back, with its seemingly million shades, says Wilson.

While years back deeply colored walls were in vogue, dictating the furnishings and art of an entire house, classic whites are trending back as well as light blue ceilings that bring calm to the supine.

“Whites are the hottest thing to do right now. It is classic,” Wilson said.

New York decorator Marsha Russell, who recently moved to Charleston, said new color ideas sprout every year purporting to capture what makes people feel good or horrible when walking into a room.

Overall, though, “I think people gravitate toward the colors that make them feel good. If it makes your socks go up and down, that’s great ... But neutral colors are always in vogue, no matter what people say.”

And, picking a white should keep you busy enough: The paint retailer Benjamin Moore alone offers more than 150 different shades of white. What’s more, between all the companies combined, shades of white and off-white number in the thousands, said Roy Cole, owner of Brewers Paint Center in downtown Charleston.

There also are about half a dozen whites approved by the Charleston Historic Foundation,

he said. Whites are enough to get anyone into an argument, and this year's Simply White "not even white," he said with a hint of bafflement.

In other house trends, designers at Southeastern Galleries are seeing home decor that look "cleaner and lighter weight," said Nathaniel King, assistant to the company's president.

That includes lots of metallic and texturing in what are called casegoods (hard surfaces such as woods and metals) and a scaled-down look in upholstery. "No skirts, cleaner lines. Clear in trim, but not edgy contemporary," King said. And everything lighter in color.

Russell, meanwhile, whose vision of design stems as much from the bones of a house as from the authentic aesthetic of the people who live there, said people are gravitating toward the handmade and handcrafted, and will be for some time to come, she predicts.

The impulse may come from a lost past — lost family heirlooms — or a lost simplicity of life driven perhaps by our increased mobility and the ubiquity of technology.

Whether it's a handwoven carpet, embroidered fabric, glassware or ceramics, made in the United States or in tribal Africa, "people want to see the hand in things," she said. "They want to see who did it.

"I think the need for connection to the past never goes away; it reminds us of people we have known, places lived or visited that we want to remember, or maybe exotic locations we would love to experience one day," Russell said.

"The Internet has brought an introduction to products from distant cultures, as well as introduced us to artisans working in small towns close by that we didn't know anything about ... I think these will be our new heirlooms."

In that same vein, she said, wallpapers and textiles are going to have a more painterly feel, with blurred lines and lots of texture, she said. "There is a move toward a softer focus, which goes hand in hand with the handcrafted feel."

Geometric patterns continue to be popular, Russell said. "They look great with all the soft,

painterly, watercolor-feel fabrics that look hand painted, and fresh. There are so many possibilities with fabrics now.”

The return to handcrafted and textured reflects what Bohan of Haute Design views as people’s desire to individualize their home with the family heirloom, or mom’s handmade quilt, or repurposing the fur coat that one no longer wears but gets draped on a bench as a nod to the past.

“It’s about people making something ‘theirs,’ ” said Bohan, who considers her design “transitional,” a term that captures the marriage of traditional and contemporary for a timeless, classical feel in which everything is specifically chosen.

“I love when I hear people say, this reflects who I am ... Authenticity and integrity are coming back. It’s about value,” she said.

Bohan said design also is leaning toward a less cluttered, leaner look.

“It’s a time of cleansing. People are living in a more purposeful way,” she said. “They are buying what they need, and they don’t buy it if they don’t love it. They care about comfort and that things represent them, how they live, how they dress, who they are.”

Perhaps it goes hand in hand, then, that design is trending toward choices that make home more salutary and eco-friendly, says Wilson, an expert on healthy homes.

People want beautiful, sustainable, affordable, and healthy: no sneezing or wheezing, no off-gassing, energy efficient and safe.

“Everyone talks about the global ecosystem; your home is your personal ecosystem,” said Wilson. “You need a place that is your sanctuary. You have to ask yourself what you can do to make your space safe in addition to beautiful.”

Going into 2016, among the hottest home design trends on Wilson’s list that contribute to the integrity of that ecosystem are:

Quartz stone countertops, praiseworthy for offering multiple options, lower maintenance, antibacterial properties and durability.

Entry foyer or mudroom benches where people can pause to leave their shoes and outerwear to prevent toxins from entering the home.

Under-mounted sinks, which keep things cleaner by not trapping bacteria in the lip of the sink.

Open kitchens and great rooms, which are more sociable, more energy-efficient, and offer greater flow of air.

Home offices, offering a dedicated space to separate work from leisure.

Pantries for the convenient and proper storage of bulk purchases.

Mechanical window shades, controlled by timer or even a smartphone, that move automatically to keep out the summer sun or to let in the winter sunshine; to protect furniture and artwork, and to enhance security.

Home remote controls that allow you to manage security, temperature, lights, window shades and other features from your smartphones, even while traveling.

Curbless showers and other intergenerational or aging-in-place features that allow for safe living even while aging.

These trends suggest a practicality in living and an emphasis on well-being in the home, a trend that Russell welcomes.

“People want a smart home, and wellness is certainly part of that,” she said.