

Market Analysis **USA**

Easy Living

Rosamund Kavander



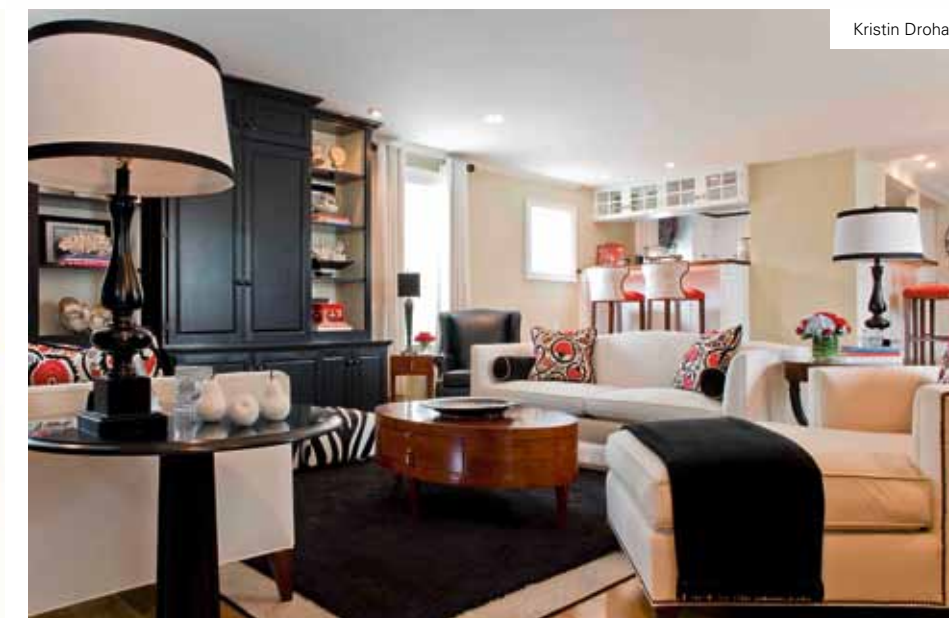
Ace NY



Kristin Drohan



Kristin Drohan



Kristin Drohan

The sheer size of the US market precludes easy definition; however **Mark Woodman** finds that whatever the region, the search for relaxed, personal and authentic style is a quest that crosses all demographics.

When confronted with seemingly endless possibilities, a continent that stretches thousands of miles between two oceans and a populace that consists of most members of the world, you'd think it virtually impossible to determine a national design identity for the USA.

And you'd be correct. However, a particular sense of style is flourishing. According to design professionals and retailers across America and into Canada, easy, personal, authentic style is influencing colours, design and lifestyle. This is the home as a safe haven and retreat from the realities of a difficult world.

There are myriad looks that refer to different parts of the continent. The bright pop and strong colours of southern Florida and the washed beach looks of the coastal regions are just two examples of regionalised looks. Add in the rustic cabin styles of the Northwest, slick urban lofts or arts and crafts bungalows and you quickly realise that there are as many looks as there are cultures thriving in North America.

In the end, though, it is all about ease. Comfort and friendliness is the goal and formality takes a back seat to casual living.

Whether traditional or contemporary, indoors or out, the key is easy, uncomplicated living. You can even find it in display materials, such as Simon Pearce's 'Easy Going' images and table settings at the New York Tabletop show.

It's an accomplishment considering the lack of holiday time available. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, most people in America only have two weeks of vacation. Yet the desire for a relaxed home is strong all year. "People are too focused on career," says Pedro Lima, a New York designer. "We seem more uptight than Europe so we want to have casual spaces at home," he adds.

Kristen Drohan, an interior and furniture designer in Atlanta, Georgia states, "So much of design here has to do with

mood. We don't have a quintessential style. We are far too unique to pigeonhole our design." Interiors have to represent the residents. As people become more overwhelmed by media, they want to rest in a space that speaks of their lives, travels and accepts who they are. Roz Kavander a colourist and designer in Toronto, Canada, echoes this; "Modern design is about curating a client's life. The home is about the stories of the owners."

Some of this ease comes from the clearing of clutter. "The economy, combined with the environmental movement, has diminished our need for non-essentials. We are cleaning out our closets and cleansing our design palettes," explains designer



Kristen Drohan



Above, left and below: Pedro Lima Design



Tara Seawright



Above and below: Tara Seawright

Rosamund Kavander



and colourist Denise Turner of Alta Loma, California. Despite difficult times, "We are still looking for comfort," believes Drohan. Her new furniture line is high quality but accessible and simple. "The pieces are designed for life. In tough times, it is better to have one really good piece than a collection of low quality items. It is about choices that make sense in one's life."

Within that realm are well-considered collections. Whether family heirlooms or items casually gathered during holidays, they express the American consumer's past and passions. The US gathers its multiculturalism best at home. According to Turner, American style is as eclectic as its people. "We're embracing indigenous, hand crafted designs. But these aren't our grandmothers' craft sale items. We're borrowing elements from other cultures and blending them into our own." There is no specific tradition, "We have personality and confidence, It's about the American Dream," says Tara Seawright, a New York interior designer.

Colour plays a key in this and a particular, recognised trend is colour tinged with time. Fabrics and furnishings have a greyed,

dusted patina that is quiet and casual. Even in the luxury category it's not about flashy glam. Much like the food industry, interior design has entered a period of slow luxury with thoughtfully designed spaces filled with carefully constructed items. When it comes to individuality, we cannot be in a hurry to showcase our lives' loves.

To counter that there are glimpses of brighter, more upbeat hues. According to Turner, "We are gravitating to optimistic, feel-good colours...that lift our spirits. The colours, however, have to be nurturing and evoke a sense of authenticity." Like a fleeting holiday, there are quick jolts of colour that punctuate spaces as accessories, accent walls and single furnishing pieces.

The economy's touch, evident in colour choices, is of course having an effect on design services, but more so on private home spaces. Seawright maintains that clients may cut back on some elements in their bedrooms, for instance, but still create a special public dining space. "Design services become a menu from which clients choose."

The pervasive sense of ease lives within technology, as well. However, it's not the

be all and end all that you might expect. As Drohan explains, "My designs and communications are done digitally, I'm not old school." However, there is a bit of irony as she explains, "My products are old school but my methods for designing and attaining them are not. I can make more people aware of the quality through digital media." Kavander personally uses tech but finds that clients are fatigued by all of the instant, low quality information available. Agreeing with Drohan, she finds that "Design is an art and clients want authenticity, something meaningful and a real life experience."

Turner agrees that technology is there to support her business needs. She has blogs and emails but also says design is an art and the passion required doesn't translate via text the way it does in person. As she puts it, "I need to hear a human voice every once in a while."

There is the undeniable influence of technology, however, as Seawright has discovered through discussions of her designs on other people's blogs, which in turn brings clients to her doorstep. "Blogs are important and their power is

real. Like patients do with their doctors, clients can now do their own 'design diagnostics,' contacting you after they have a groundwork of ideas," she says. With all of the information, though, it's too much for clients to sift through so they are still coming to designers to ensure their spaces feel authentic, familiar and comfortable. Whether contemporary or classic, it has to be 'real.'

Consider the movement of reclaimed, re-imagined and repurposed; it is a worldwide trend that has taken firm root in retailers such as Restoration Hardware and West Elm. According to Gary Friedman, chairman of Restoration Hardware on his website, 'In the spirit of 'just being me,' we will continue to push boundaries, be authentic to our own unique point of view, never tire and refuse to act our age.' And if you need a respite from daily stress, West Elm crosses cultures and style boundaries with its take on fresh white washed looks and the culinary appeal of tapas. All of which tie in, once again, to this idea of simple, casual living.

No matter where you find yourself in North America, personal style takes the forefront and easy living appears to be the key. ■



Contacts

- www.colorturners.com
- www.kristindrohaninteriordesign.com
- roz@roomworks.ca
- pedro@pedrolimadsign.com
- www.restorationhardware.com
- www.simonpearce.com
- www.taraseawright.com
- www.westelm.com