



creating sanctuary

Transform your home into a space of well-being.

BY JULIE SINCLAIR • PHOTOGRAPHS BY DANIEL AUBREY

Beauty, it is said, is in the eye of the beholder. And to internationally renowned designer Clodagh, when it comes to creating a home, beauty is also in the “I” of the beholder in that she shapes environments to reflect the owners’ personalities. A prominent designer of spas (she was bestowed the International Spa Association’s 2007 Visionary Award), Clodagh notes that the same characteristics that make a spa peaceful and inspirational can and should be used in the home.

“It’s about designing the irritations out of life and ensuring that everywhere you look you see something beautiful,” she says — ideas that are reflected in her own inspiring home in New York City, shown on these pages.

Clodagh believes that a space cannot be truly beautiful unless it functions in harmony with and evokes pleasure for those who inhabit it — concepts she suspects evolved from her youth: “In Ireland as a child, I grew up in the depths of the country and was fascinated by light, fragrance, and shadow.” Today, this translates into a design scheme that employs open spaces; clean, contemporary lines; and touches of the natural world throughout. And her design approach continues to transform. “I recently attended a conference on biophilia and learned about the effects that animals, flowers, and trees have on people,” she says. “The



ABOVE: Clodagh in her design studio.
RIGHT: The natural tones, varied textures, abundant sunlight, and open space in Clodagh’s Manhattan living room present an inviting gathering place.





BELOW: Once a large closet, this second bathroom stays uncluttered with "tall storage" behind the glass mirror. RIGHT: Two figurines hung on the wall provide good feng shui in this couple's zone.

DELIGHTFUL DETAILS

Creating a spa feeling and wellness practice at home is key to Clodagh's design philosophy, and "it doesn't necessarily take a lot of money," she says. "Pay attention to your everyday routine, employing even small changes to make it easier and more relaxing."

Focus on the bathroom: Install his-and-hers medicine cabinets, or if there's not enough space to do that, divide the existing one so that each person has his or her own section. Ensure that there are plenty of hooks so towels have a place, and invest in a beautiful, comfortable, soft robe and two sets of towels for each person.

Create a relaxation area: Establish at least one special area dedicated to an activity central to your life (such as reading, painting, or meditating).







Soothing colors, a soaking tub big enough for two, and details that lend comfort and ease make Clodagh's master bedroom a haven for couple-friendly relaxation.

interconnectedness we as humans have with nature is huge. Think about how smelling a flower gives you a moment of pleasure.”

The stimulation of the senses is one reason walking into a well-designed spa evokes an immediate feel-good reaction: The moment you step through the door a part of you relaxes a bit. Clodagh translates this into the homes she works on. “Design is silent; it takes over like a nanny,” she says, noting that it’s important, therefore, to ensure that your surroundings support your happiness. “It’s only by first discovering what pleases you and then creating an environment that celebrates those qualities that you’re sustained.” In her book *Total Design*, Clodagh describes the process as involving the health of the environment, senses, intellect, instinct, and spirit. Her design philosophy assumes that every aspect of a space — from the positioning of walls and the quality of light to the items in the closet — affects the experience of it.

To guide clients through an interior makeover, Clodagh developed a process she refers to as the Four Cs: contemplate, cleanse, clarify, and create. The system, which is also outlined in her book (containing a detailed workbook for those who want to try it on their own), begins with contemplation: identifying your needs and desires that oftentimes get lost in the rush of day-to-day living. During this stage, you evaluate how the space makes you feel and how you function in it, determining areas that bring pleasure and those that irritate. Like a psychotherapist for the home, Clodagh helps clients delve into their inner core while evaluating the contents and decor of their living spaces, ultimately helping clients to better know themselves, recognize their attachments to certain possessions, and envision elements that will promote joy in their lives.

Next comes the cleansing and clarifying steps: clearing the space of unwanted and unused items and pinpointing the things that will really enhance life. “There’s an Irish saying that suggests minimizing your possessions so you have room for luck,” she says, noting also that if you’re worrying about your stuff, then your stuff is managing you.

To Clodagh, letting go of excess and those things that don’t bring joy is very much a part of being healthy. She notes that Americans spend \$23 billion a year on self-storage units. “I don’t recall the exact statistic, but there’s a very high percentage of people who never go back to get their items.” All this stuff, Clodagh believes, has an effect.

BEDROOM ALLURE

“The focus of the bedroom should be pleasure and indulgence,” says Clodagh. “If there’s room, a soaking tub in the master bedroom allows couples the opportunity to bathe and chat.” Other ideas:

Invest in a good mattress: People sharing a bed often have very different weights, and a well-designed mattress will prevent the entire surface from moving when one person turns over.

Take care of your eyes: If you read in bed, install good reading lights.

Enhance romance: Put a soft love light in the bedroom. “Most of us would prefer to be naked in flattering amber light rather than fluorescent,” she notes.

Invite sleep: The relaxing qualities of a few drops of jasmine on a tissue by the bed will invite slumber.

BELOW: A bronze Buddha that's been in the family for years "is the spirit of our house," Clodagh notes. RIGHT: In the hallway, art collected from all over the world "tells a story," she says.

FUNCTIONAL ART

"Everywhere you look there should be something beautiful," recommends Clodagh. And it doesn't have to be art for art's sake: even a bowl of fruit beautifully arranged can provide a colorful focal point. Passageways – transit areas that are not observed by the still eye – present an opportunity to bring in playful shapes, unusual materials, and intense colors.

Make a space for meditation: Clodagh recommends setting aside a place in your home to be still and get centered – even if it's just a corner of the couch that faces a peaceful environment.

Rotate artwork: "The Japanese have a tradition of changing their art seasonally," says Clodagh. "It refreshes the visual energy of a space." To make this easier, try leaning paintings against easels instead of mounting them on the walls.





A COMFORTABLE KITCHEN

Clodagh makes the analogy in her book that an attractive kitchen that's hard to work in is like a good-looking person with a bad personality. The first stop for many when arriving home, the kitchen needs to function efficiently while addressing everyone's needs.

Create individual zones: "People's various cooking styles often mean they get in each other's way," notes Clodagh. She recommends arranging the kitchen so that task areas are defined (such as putting the coffee pot and cups near each other).

Keep it simple: Stock the kitchen with affordable dishware of all one color.

Go for an open plan: Open up a wall with a counter or bar to allow the cook to communicate with those in the adjacent room.

onto," she says. "It often goes beyond the physical." As part of the clarification process, Clodagh suggests making three lists: the non-negotiable must-haves, the negotiables, and the things that would bring enormous joy — a wish list. The non-negotiables stay, obviously, and she recommends skipping next to the wish list and letting the negotiables sort themselves out along the way.

After clearing out what's no longer necessary and what doesn't bring joy, there's finally space to create: a clean slate upon which to bring in new elements and rework things — not only in the home but also in life. "Emptiness allows room for growth," she says. And space for comfort — something Clodagh feels is intensely important in the home. To bring in components of self-nurturing, some of her recommendations include outfitting the bedroom with cotton bedding that's cozy and cuddly; sleeping on a supportive mattress; and owning a luxurious, comfortable robe. One's personal health and that of the natural environment are also key; she uses all-natural, organic, and sustainable materials whenever possible and helps clients plan for a lifestyle of well-being. "I'm starting to put massage tables in clients' homes because I'm finding that more and more, they're wanting the convenience of getting weekly at-home treatments," she says. (And, in fact, Clodagh recently designed a professional massage table to address this growing trend.) Other recommendations: organized closets, plenty of hooks in the bathroom, and water filters. "Ideally, we'd all have our water go through a central filtration system when it comes into our homes," she says.

Ultimately, Clodagh's design philosophy centers around the idea of keeping people well. Notes Clodagh, "It's about creating a place where you can be peaceful and let your mind expand, about enhancing life and spirit." In other words, bringing "spa" into the home by designing into it beauty, serenity, and spirituality. □

There are often a lot of emotions (good and bad) caught up in material objects, and she recommends to clients that they let go of items with which they associate negative memories and sell or give the things away to others who might enjoy them — because clearing them out helps clear the mind. "I personally try to do an emotional audit four times a year to get rid of stuff I'm holding

Designed for socializing, the open kitchen is also packed with storage to keep surfaces clear for creation.





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