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Starting with the entry, the GRADE design firm took a modern approach to an Upper East Side residence in New York City, including carefully cultivated accents and textured wallpaper.



# CiTY



## Chic

Clean, sleek and minimal — but so comfortable it still feels like home

BY LISA MARIE HART

**A**rt aficionados know it was Leonardo da Vinci who said, "Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication." And U2 fans often reference guitarist The Edge's philosophy: "I think of (musical) notes as being expensive. You don't just throw them around. ... I suppose I'm a minimalist instinctively."

Thankfully, one needn't be a legendary artist or a global rock star to appreciate the warm, inviting sophistication of city chic style, which encourages a shift back to the basics.

In its finest form, city chic opens the door to a placid escape from the chaos and trappings of urban life. Each room becomes a streamlined version of your desires and temptations pared down to what you can't live without.

Born in the most populated and design-conscious epicenters, the style offers an easy-to-live-in haven from a hectic lifestyle, appealing to those who are well-traveled, decisive and confident. City chic is a serious expression of self.

"Chic people want sleek solutions," says Edward Yedid, a partner in GRADE, an architecture and interior design firm in New York City. Fellow GRADE partner Thomas Hickey agrees. "Type A people strive for perfection. Excess is not in their personality. They manage what they do very well and want an environment that reflects that."

For GRADE, that environment is restrained, consistent and tailored to perfection. "Clarity for us is calming," Yedid says. "It feels good and makes us happy. Our clients feel the same way."

Rhonda Vandiver-White, principal designer and founder

of RSVP Design Services in suburban Dallas, explains it as "a more practical and functional way of living in a space that is less cluttered, yet not sterile. These clients want a roomy and relaxed home that is intentionally 'under-decorated.'"

Clients of Chicago's jamesthomas design firm who are attracted to this style seek a look that isn't trendy, but still feels new, fresh and timeless. "They want their home to be restful and peaceful," says principal owner James Dolenc. "This look lends itself to that."

Kristin Cadwallader, who blogs at bliss-at-home.com, envisions a traditional foundation with modern flair. "It's polished but exudes comfort," she says.

### TAKE A CUE FROM NATURE

Coast to coast, industry insiders agree on several main design components, beginning with a lack of clutter. Mother Nature herself presents beautifully simple landscapes. From a blue ocean to a snow-covered field, the serenity of a single color smooths our frazzled nerves and eases the mind.

Strip away the excess and build a cohesive, tailored look based on clean lines. City chic palettes tend to be monochromatic, accented by soft materials.

Design pros also agree on what city chic is not. It's not stark or industrial — all brick and steel. Think refined, not rugged; curated, not collected; never fussy, heavy, ornate or overstuffed. Most importantly, it's never cold. "Modern can be very comfortable, warm and textured," says Hickey.

City chic designers tend to buck trends that can make »





**“Repaint your kitchen** cabinets gray instead of white for a twist on the standard kitchen,” says Tom Riker of jamesthomas, designers of this residential custom kitchen in Chicago’s Trump Tower.

a space look dated. For a timeless look, use a light hand with geometric shapes and prints. “That’s why we call the powder room the jewel box of the home,” jamesthomas principal Tom Riker says. “It’s a fun place to be different and go bolder.”

Kelsey on the House host and licensed contractor Brian Kelsey (kelseyonthehouse.com) sees the increasingly popular home office as a focus of city chic style. He likes concrete or repurposed wood desktops, vintage lighting and old metal bar carts for storage. “As long as it doesn’t look like — well, an office!” he says.

### TRANQUIL, NOT BORING

Even though less is going on, city chic can be one of the toughest looks to achieve on your own. Dolenc says the challenge lies in uncovering a tranquil space without making it boring.

“Most people have the basic elements but have cluttered it up with so much stuff,” Hickey says.

“Get rid of unnecessary items, then rework in the things that have true meaning and value to you,” says Vandiver-White. Her firm offers a kit for

*Even though less is going on, city chic can be one of the toughest looks to achieve on your own.*

DIYers who want some expert direction.

“Even the circulation of your home has to be thought out and well-spaced so you’re feeling it as you walk through,” Yedid adds.

Tone down and harmonize your palette. Vandiver-White suggests a neutral base for walls, floors and ceilings.

And take note that gray is the “it” neutral in city chic right now. “Gray wood floors have a patina that feels a bit Old World,” Riker says.

Layer textures and neutrals, and choose texture over pattern. GRADE likes to layer lighter materials next to darker ones so they frame each other. Dolenc suggests limiting pops of color, patterns and irresistible trendy pieces to items you can change out seasonally: pillows, small accessories or fresh flowers.

“Mix antique brass pieces in with your silver for a great collected-over-time look,” Cadwallader suggests.

### OPT FOR QUALITY

One drawback can be the style’s steep price tag. Still, money spent on quality is money spent wisely. Grass cloth wallpaper and boldly veined marble are recent faves.

Splurge on ample, floor-to-ceiling silk curtain panels and “go full height” to add vertical oomph in small, metropolitan spaces, says Lynda Quintero-Davids, interior stylist and blogger at Focal Point Styling (nyc1q-focalpoint.blogspot.com).

Another trick? “Paint the baseboard and crown molding the same color as the wall to lengthen a short room,” she says.

Start your journey by browsing select pieces from Horchow, Arteriors, Plantation, Ethan Allen, Room & Board, Ralph Lauren, Design Within Reach, Restoration Hardware and Z Gallerie.

Finally, opt for a gentler ambience with sconces, chandeliers, table and floor lamps, says Riker. ●

### COLORS

Monochromatic palette in a range of neutrals, especially gray and silver, soft pastel accents, deep moody blues.

### MATERIALS

Rich woods, antique brass and other metals, marble, glass, crystal; soft and textured wall coverings such as grass cloth, silk and suede.

### FURNITURE STYLE

Refined, tailored, clean lines; nailhead trim, small to medium scale.

### FABRICS

Silk, velvet, linen, leather, faux fur, subtle stripes.

### MOOD

Approachable, serene, elegant, warm, inviting, polished, sophisticated, provocative.