

## DESIGN &amp; DECORATING

# It Seemed Like A Cool Idea

Design pros smack their foreheads as they recall the most foolish design trends of the last 10 years

By RACHEL WOLFE

**L**AST MONTH designer Jonathan Adler christened white bouclé the season's "It" fabric. In an Instagram video launching the New York flagship store of his eponymous home-furnishing brand, he commanded, "You must get everything in white bouclé." The playful authoritarianism worked: His bouclé Beaumont Lounge Chairs are wait-listed. Seemingly in step with his dictate, furniture retailers CB2, West Elm and Wayfair are also hawking seating clad in the pallid, loopy wool. And, at the most recent iteration of the Paris design fair Maison & Objet, countless vendors showed pieces thus upholstered. But the bouclé boom befuddles New York designer Kati Curtis. As she observed, the napped fabric stains and traps crumbs: "If you touch it, it gets dirty."

Design history is littered with wildly popular, then regrettable, interior trends: the squeaky blowup furniture of the early aughts, fueled by Disney star Hilary Duff's inflatable neon chairs; the fuzzy flocked wallpaper of the 1970s that left areas around light switches irreversibly soiled; the vertiginous swoosh of water beds.

Here, designers weigh in on the least-livable design choices of the past 10 years, from the impossible-to-clean to the just plain uncomfortable.

## OPEN KITCHEN SHELVEING

Unless you like your gazpacho with a hint of dust, or perhaps a dead fly or two with your morning cereal, you'll need to wash dishes left on trendy unprotected shelves before every meal. Editing your possessions, too, becomes a part-time job. "In order for the kitchen to remain looking clean and organized, all the dish ware, glassware and serving items have to be coordinated and curated," said Boston designer Erin Gates. No mugs from your alma mater.

**Instead** Use open shelving as an accent instead of main storage, perhaps to straddle a corner between sets of upper cabinets. If you want that light and airy feeling, Ms. Gates recommends facing top cabinets with metal wire grills that partially obscure a sadly eclectic cookware collection. Mirrored-glass door fronts will also create an illusion of openness without exposing your styling shortcomings.

## VESSEL SINKS

These first appeared in upscale homes as a contemporary take on the way ye olde wash basins perched charmingly atop dedicated washstands, but they quickly veered into tacky territory. The oversize bowls showed up in every would-be-posh restaurant bathroom, and trickled into tract developer homes. Richmond, Va., designer Sara Hillery pointed out that mounting the sinks requires an un-

comfortably low counter height: "We don't like to bend over if we don't have to." And it's hard to vanquish the toothpaste and soap scum that accumulates in the crevice where basin meets countertop.

**Instead** Ms. Hillery recommends classic pedestal sinks, or a hammered metal sink that is under-mounted, with no dirt-catching lip.

## DINING BENCHES

A side effect of America's susceptibility to farmhouse-chic décor, the idea of replacing chairs with a bench has its pros. Miami designer Kobi Karp noted the benches' "ability to disappear underneath dining tables." But anyone who's tried to look appealingly alert on a bar stool knows that a backless perch makes slouching inevitable. Adding to the monk-like dearth of comfort: Rusticated benches frequently lack cushions. They are famously heavy and hard to move, and determining the optimal distance between table and bench leaves guests at the mercy of table-mates. And heaven help any middle-seat person hoping to leave the table gracefully.

**Instead** Rely on the humble dining chair. "They might not seem all that innovative or en vogue...but dining chairs actually offer endless possibilities," said Mr. Karp.

## UNLACQUERED BRASS

Left unpolished, brass will develop a pleasant patina. But as the deterioration develops over time, your fixtures can soon look like a greasy mess—which design brands deviously spin as "living metal." Said Parisian design dealer Guillaume Excoffier, "Yes, brass has a warm color, goes with anything and gives your home an air of 1970s glam, but no one told you that you actually can't touch brass because any finger print will look like a butter stain." Plus, patina tends to erupt haphazardly and



**PRETTY IMPRACTICAL** From top: Wide-open shelves in the Sydney kitchen of Suzannah Williams; an unsunk sink in the Mexico City home of designer Rodman Primack.

unequally on various pieces, resulting in a room that's "a hodgepodge of patination," said Los Angeles designer Madeline Stuart.

**Instead** Ms. Stuart recommends polished or satin nickel. Unlike brass, nickel develops a far more reliable patina over time "and never looks tired or out of date," she said.

## SHEEPSKIN RUGS AND TROWS

As featured in magazines and Instagram posts of celebrity homes, sheepskin rugs and throws look pristine yet seductively soft. In real life, they're more than likely hiding errant Lego and a strand of linguine from last month. The material's 2-inch long fibers have a tendency to "felt" together over time, creating a permanent matted mess that resembles a feral dog's coat. "Life is too busy for that—I'm sorry," said Ms. Hillery, who was tempted to use a sheepskin rug in her own child's nursery before realizing that a nursery is the last place you



should put anything you can never get entirely clean.

**Instead** If you love the warmth and earthiness that animal pelts bring, consider a more practical cowhide. "Cleaning a cow is so much easier" than cleaning a sheep, noted Ms. Hillery. A little soap and water can freshen up a hair-on hide.

## BLACK FLOORS

Yes, ebony boards contrast arrestingly with white walls and are a shortcut to urban sophistication, though it's questionable why you'd

want urbanity in a country house, where this trend also popped up. And, as Ms. Stuart pointed out, "If you've ever owned a black car, you know how quickly a dark surface can attract and magnify even a single speck of dust or dirt." Also, any chair pulled or pushed too aggressively can leave a scratch as glaring and regrettable as a permanent neck tattoo.

**Instead** A rich, deep stain on oak or walnut floors can add depth to a room and be much more forgiving of everyday detritus and your impulses to move furniture.



**BOUCLÉ UP** Beaumont Lounge Chair, \$1,950, preorder at [jonathanadler.com](http://jonathanadler.com)

## BACKSTORY

### Bosom Buddy

The sensuous inspiration behind a classic lamp

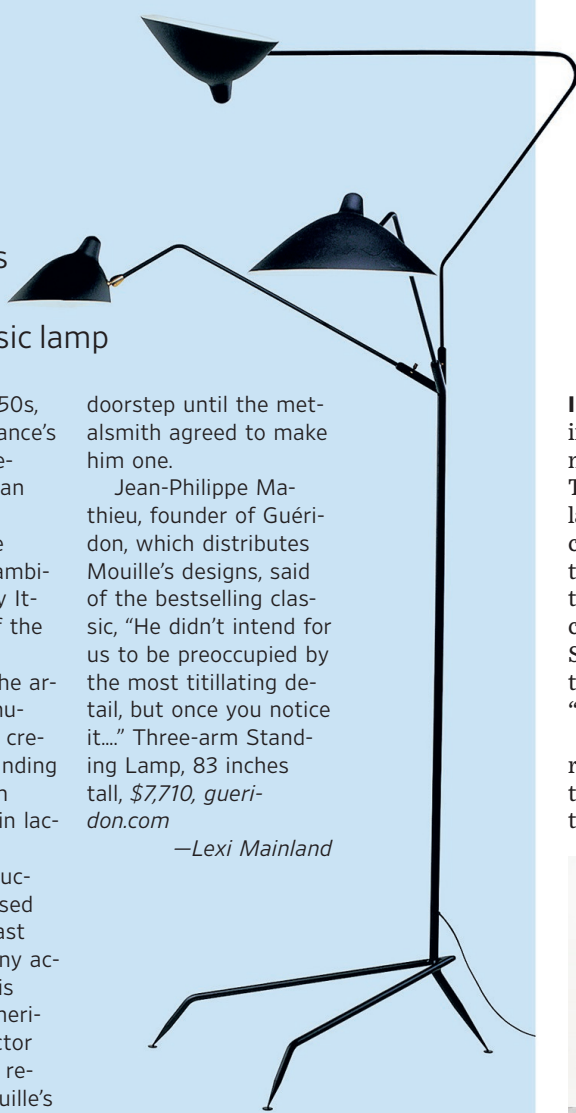
**IN THE EARLY** 1950s, Jacques Adnet, France's most influential designer, hired Parisian metalsmith Serge Mouille to produce lamps. The pair's ambition was stoked by Italy's dominance of the lighting market.

Fascinated by the architecture of the human body, Mouille created a skeletal standing lamp, its three thin arms culminating in lacquered aluminum shades whose seductive shape was based on a woman's breast and nipple (by many accounts, those of his wife). The first American sale was to actor Henry Fonda, who refused to leave Mouille's

doorstep until the metalsmith agreed to make him one.

Jean-Philippe Mathieu, founder of Guéridon, which distributes Mouille's designs, said of the bestselling classic, "He didn't intend for us to be preoccupied by the most titillating detail, but once you notice it..." Three-arm Standing Lamp, 83 inches tall, \$7,710, [gueridon.com](http://gueridon.com)

—Lexi Mainland



## FLOWER SCHOOL

### Spring Is On The Move

Floral designer Lindsey Taylor riffs on a dynamic sculpture

**I FIND ARLENE SHECHET'S** work inspiring given its sense of movement despite its heft and sheer size. The 69-year-old New Yorker creates large-scale sculptures that jumble clay, wood and metal into forms that seemingly defy their static nature. For April's floral impetus, I chose the aptly titled "Touching Summer" (2020), a piece from her temporarily closed solo show "Skirts" at Pace Gallery, NYC.

I clustered three geometric ceramic vessels into an uneasy group that mimicked the slightly awkward tension of the five-foot-tall work, and placed a floral frog atop the front vase to help shape an ikebana-style arrangement.

Late-spring garden flowers arrived via



**THE INSPIRATION**



**THE ARRANGEMENT**

Left: Arlene Shechet's sculpture, "Touching Summer" (2020). Above: Vases, from \$138, Pitcher, \$35, Brass Floral Frog \$38, [bloomist.com](http://bloomist.com)

Fed Ex: lilacs, pale yellow parrot tulips, fleshy sweet pea and just-blooming Spirea. From my garden, winter honeysuckle and a branch of Parrotia tree, its bronzy fall leaves still clinging to it, humbled the mix. A speckled yellow hellebore aped the mottling in Ms. Shechet's work.

I boosted the idea of movement by cutting the stems various lengths. A tulip in the foreground felt right despite the sculpture's absence of yellow there. But that's why we say "inspired by." Once I've honored the starting point, I yield to the needs of the arrangement.