

The Detroit News

Section H

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# homestyle



## Making design accessible

**Decor guru Barry Dixon has easy tricks to beautify the home. 8H**

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Cover Story

# The master speaks

Barry Dixon will offer advice on design at show in Grosse Pointe Farms

As a child, Barry Dixon moved often with his parents, living in exotic locales such as India, Korea, South Africa and French Polynesia.

Today, as a renowned interior designer, many of the influences he absorbed as a global nomad are reflected in his work, which blends classical architecture and traditional inspirations with elements of modern design.

The result is a warm, elegant style that has been showcased in leading shelter magazines such as Metropolitan Home and House Beautiful, where he has been ranked among America's top designers

six times. He's also featured in the May-June issue of Veranda, on newsstands now.

Dixon once designed a suite for ABC news anchor Diane Sawyer in a Traditional Home magazine show house and has appeared several times on TV, including a week on "Good Morning America," decorating a living room.

On June 4, Dixon will be guest speaker at the 26th Christ Church Grosse Pointe Antiques Show in Grosse Pointe Farms, and will sign copies of his book, "Barry Dixon Interiors," by Brian D. Coleman (Gibbs Smith, \$40).

Dixon, 51, paused this week from his busy schedule — he recently designed a home in Beijing for a Russian billionaire — to talk to Homestyle about design.

**You're a master of mixing old and new in fresh combinations. What's the trick?**

Find something in common and use that as a link, something that connects the aesthetic dots. Maybe all these things you're collecting are carved wood with fluid organic forms, so you take carved Victorian pieces and mix them with clean modern elements. They'll work together because they have a relationship stylistically.

Or, you find something that plays



Photos by Gordon Beall / Barry Dixon Interiors

Inspired by the ocean outside this Florida dining room, designer Barry Dixon used a seaweed motif on teal draperies and walls, and a light fixture with a pearl-like globe.

against the style on purpose. If one thing is modern — simple, minimal, angular and blocky — then put something effusive, carved and curvilinear next to it. Such juxtaposition highlights diversity, sort of like masculine and feminine. In a strange

way, you're showing off every nuance of each piece — you see all of its qualities. At the same time, you create an interesting balance. It's almost like a good marriage — often people pick a mate who's everything they're not and together they're successful.



Dixon mixed Asian-influenced rosewood tables, lamps from Paris and a floral ottoman and sofa from his Tomlinson collection in this southern Virginia resort showhouse.

The thing you can't do is mindlessly throw things together and call it "eclectic." That's often a catchall phrase when things are paired without reason or purpose.

**Describe your color philosophy.**  
It's all about the psychology of a room — what you want that room to be. If it's a chill-out room, you want colors that are calming: pale greens, grays, quiet blues — serene tones that you see in a spa. If you need to be awakened, in a kitchen, maybe you need orange and yellow, or red and white checks.

**What inspires your palette?**  
I'm inspired by the colors of nature, and I love to bring the outside in — whatever I see through the window of a home. If I'm in the Caribbean, I'm seeing turquoise water and chartreuse banana leaves. In Manhattan, I'd use gray, black and silver in a penthouse, but I wouldn't use those colors in my Virginia farmhouse.

Just as eyes are a window to the soul, you have to look through the eyes of the house, the windows, to ... make it feel like it has an honest connection to the world. They'll unite interior space to exterior and almost make the inside bigger. It really does happen — any time you blur a boundary you open a space.

**Any tips to transition a home from winter to spring?**

I just do furniture arrangement — a little less fireplace-centric, and a little more view. Put the big sofa so that it looks out at the view, angle the chairs so they look out at the flowers.

Bring fresh flowers inside to remind us of the season — don't use spring daffodils and tulips in winter.

**What one change gives the most bang for the buck?**

Bring color to your life. Color changes everything. Change the color behind you on the wall, bring in some bright pillows. It's always the quickest fix and people can

do it themselves.

**What's a typical mistake and how can we avoid it?**  
People buy gigantic sets of things that all match; the entire room has such a specific look that it's boring. You wouldn't wear all denim. You've got to break it up and mix: mix the high and low, the old and new, the formal and informal and you've got something that feels modern. It's the mixing of things that makes it personal — that's how you put the "you" in your home.

Pick a chair from Pottery Barn and an antique console from the antiques show and mix them together. The expensive piece brings up the inexpensive piece, and the common piece makes the rarefied piece approachable. If everything in the living room is all treasured things, it feels stilted and on display, not relaxed. Mixing knocks it off the "don't touch me" pedestal and makes it hospitable and approachable.

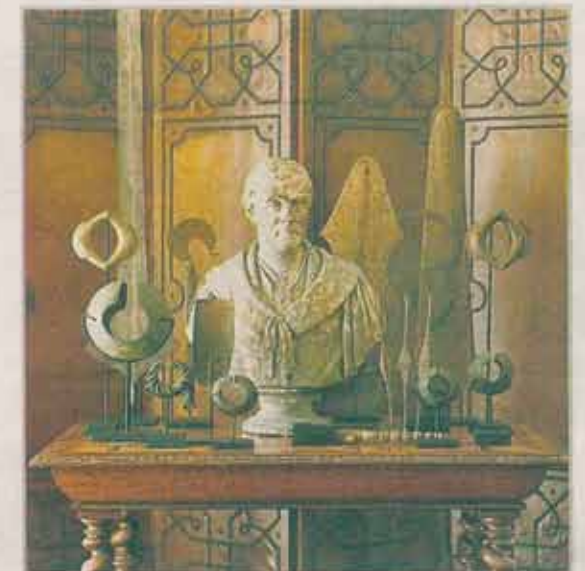
**Are some of us hopeless?**  
I don't think anyone is hopeless. You just need to look at everything with an open eye. Some people get too hung up on the way things have always been. Designers come in with a fresh eye — we're not married to the fact that the buffet has to go in the dining room because it came with the table 20 years ago. Move the buffet to the big foyer in your big new house. Change the fabric on the two arm chairs and move them to the living room fireplace. Find a beautiful pair of antique chairs and use those in the dining room instead.

You've not only broken up the set, you've united three separate rooms — there's a unifying aesthetic. People will think you got all new furniture and everything feels fresh.

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Dixon brings the outside in to the music room in his Virginia farmhouse with branches placed atop a restored antique piano. He bought the antique white chair in England.



Global influences in this Dixon mix include an English bust, African currency and a Chinese scribe's brush.

## 26th Christ Church Grosse Pointe Antiques Show

**Where:** 61 Grosse Pointe Boulevard, Grosse Pointe Farms.  
**When:** June 4-6 (preview party and silent auction, 7-10 p.m. June 3).

**Guest speaker:** Barry Dixon, interior designer, 10:30 a.m. June 4. (Visit [www.barrydixon.com](http://www.barrydixon.com))

**Tickets:** \$25 covers admission all three days

**Information:** [www.christchurchgp.org/antiques](http://www.christchurchgp.org/antiques)  
Etc.: Dixon's new fabric collection with Vervain is represented by Marie Howard Showroom, Michigan Design Center, Troy. Carlton James Galleries, Sterling Heights, represents his furniture line with Tomlinson/Erwin-Lambeth. His new rug collection with Megerian is at Woven Treasures in Birmingham and Jasmine Rugs & Furniture, Troy.



Artwork, rather than draperies, flanks the windows in this corner of a gentleman's study; a staircase leads to a wine cellar below.

## More expert tips from Barry Dixon

- Keep the sun shining year-round by using textiles inspired by light: tangerine, lemon, orange, red, gold.
- Don't be afraid to downplay a serious antique with an amusing accent to keep it from becoming too formal and unapproachable.
- A lowered ceiling instantly makes a dining room more intimate.
- Use warm, stimulating colors for conversation areas — fire-glow reds, ember oranges and golds.
- Travel mementos, especially hand-crafted and ethnic pieces, make striking accents and mix well with modern design.
- Extend draperies above a window to make the window seem taller.
- Antiques are environmentally conscious, green decorating — no new trees are cut down.
- Don't shortchange children — give them a beautiful room they can enjoy and they will grow up with an appreciation of good design.
- Hang a collection of framed art tightly together like a windowpane to give it more power and impact.
- Upholster the walls of a noisy room to absorb sound.
- Visually expand or camouflage the perimeter of a square room with a circular carpet.
- Use repetition of basic geometric shapes — circles, squares and diamonds — as a tool to link different elements in a room.
- Color shy? Introduce a bold color in areas not in daily use — a formal dining living room or guestroom.
- Hang a lamp over a desk to give more tabletop space and keep the surface uncluttered.
- If you live in the city bring urban materials back inside with glass, iron, stone and brick.
- Mirrored furniture disappears and appears to take up less space in tight quarters.
- Mix masculine and feminine elements in a master bedroom so both partners feel at home — for example, masculine, natural woods combine well with pretty French toiles.
- Let your imagination run wild in a small powder room and cover it from top to bottom with shells, fabric or an arresting mural.
- A small room with low ceilings seems larger when walls and ceiling are painted one enveloping color.
- Modern elements can be successfully incorporated in period interiors when linked by colors or patterns.



Barry Dixon