

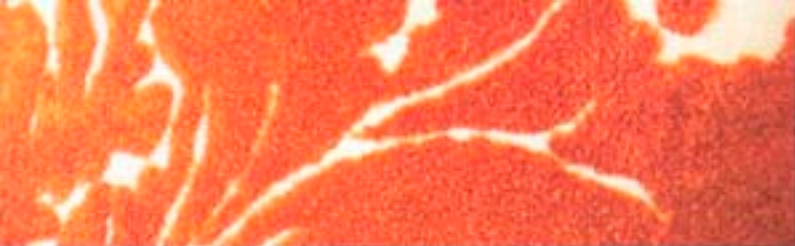
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at home with

Charleston's

Top Tastemakers



Meet four of the city's arbiters of style and taste, step into their personal abodes, and get their advice on gracious living

Charleston's reputation for graciousness and beauty can't be taken for granted. Her ambient stylishness doesn't just come with the territory, oozing from the architecture and leaching into the water. Rather, it is hard-earned and carefully crafted—and always has been. Fortunately, those carrying the city's good-taste torch today are legion—artists and architects, designers and decorators, event planners and festival throwers, among others.

They work diligently creating beauty, whether through inspiring interiors or unforgettable parties or flashy, fun personal accessories. And at the end of the day, these tastemakers go home, just like the rest of us. They toss their keys on the counter, kick off their Manolos, and settle into their personal comfort zones, infused with their signature styles. Here's how four of Charleston's leading trendsetters swank it up at home.

Amelia Handegan

Sumptuous Elegance

Elena Arcangeli



Kamille Corry



Mario Robinson



Well-honed Hues: A wide center hallway (top right) awash in luminous "pumpkin orange-gold" sets a vibrant lone. "I like pretty rooms that feel good," says Handegan, "with maybe a little drama, but not a lot."

"I wanted to be a painter," confesses Charleston's premier interior designer, who also studied art history in college without knowing where it would lead. In fact, Amelia Handegan is a fine artist, only her typical canvas has four walls and furniture. To the astute eye, a Handegan-designed room is as recognizable as a Matisse or a Renoir. With rich, hushed tones amped up with texture, Handegan creates sumptuous spaces that simmer with elegance. Neither too hot nor too cold, too loud nor too muted, she gets it just right, bringing out subtleties in fabric, color, and furnishings.

So it's no surprise that her home of 14 years is a study in refinement. "I find that less is more," says the 30-year design veteran. "I used to change things in my house more," she says, "but now I just want to simplify—only keep the things I really like.

I am still adding art. I think I will always collect some form of art, but I'm really trying to edit now."

What she has is a mix of Southern and European antiques, Asian accents, and Jamaican pieces. "I like the look of West Indies furniture. It fits this house well," she notes. The soft-spoken artist gravitates toward paintings of people: "I like faces," she says, and expressive subjects populate her walls, along with Oriental panels and still lifes. She commissioned Gothic-tinged portraits from photographs of her own great grandparents, who now watch over the sunny kitchen. Buddha statues scattered throughout the house reinforce the pared-down aesthetic. "They remind me to try and remain conscious of life and to stay centered," she adds.

Simplicity is one of Handegan's recurring themes. She fell for her early 19th-century

Spotlight on Art

"As a child, my Saturday morning art teacher was probably my biggest influence," says Handegan. "Look, don't you see the purple in the tree bark?" she'd ask, teaching me to see beyond the obvious." The would-be painter still believes that art is the one "must-have" in a stellar room. Amelia's art-lover tips:

- ❁ **Declutter:** "I'm trying to simplify everything else so my art stands out more."
- ❁ **Use your heart:** Choose art because you love it, not because it goes well in a certain spot. "It will find its place."
- ❁ **Go for texture:** Textiles, tapestries, and other unusual materials make interesting art pieces, like the leather from an old screen framed and hung over her den doorway.
- ❁ **Mix it up:** Blend in decorative, rustic, and functional pieces, such as mirrors and "things that aren't too serious."

"I'm a touch-and-feel person. I'm very hands-on. Design evolves, and if it doesn't have that flexibility, it looks like a showroom."



plantation house because of its classic lines and simple symmetry. "It looks like it could belong out in the country," she says. Twelve-foot ceilings, original wide-plank floors, and old cypress doors, recently stripped down to the natural grain, add to its warmth and charm. Handegan didn't create a master design plan for these rooms. "It's more an intuitive gathering and layering of things I

love," she says.

Unconventional color is perhaps Handegan's most prominent signature and is often her creative starting point. She doesn't mind breaking color rules, choosing surprising hues that don't necessarily match. "They say that when you've mastered the rules, then you can break them. That's when you know you've mastered your own style."





Pouring It On: A love of all things classical, gilded, and gorgeous is evident throughout Crosby's abode, where Boykin spaniel Lula (right) enjoys the good life.



Entertaining 101

"Being invited to a home for a meal is the greatest compliment," says Crosby, who believes entertaining should be a pleasure, not a chore, and need not require polished silver and pressed linens. Get comfortable with your personal style, he advises, and guests will be comfortable, too. Mitchell's tips on hosting:

✿ **Serve with flair:** "Currently, I dress up Champagne or Prosecco with a splash of blueberry juice and a frozen berry garnish. How can you turn it down?"

✿ **Drop-in ready:** Keep cocktail nibbles on hand. "Present them well, and your job is done." His faves: Spanish Marcona almonds in olive oil, sugared pecans, and benne wafers.

✿ **Be prepared:** Know what dish you will serve in and the utensil that will accompany.

✿ **Smile:** Have confidence and enjoy the success of entertaining graciously.

Pull behind Mitchell Crosby's car in his shaded driveway, and the first thing you notice is his license plate: "PARTYS" it announces. This is a man who knows how to have a good time. As event planner extraordinaire of JMC Charleston (the J stands for Jay), Crosby can wine and dine masses or turn a theme party into an unforgettable affair. And when at home, he's no less serious about the finer points of entertaining. In fact, for Crosby, "personal style" and "hospitality" are synonymous.

"Living well is the best revenge" would be an apt bumper sticker to complement his vanity plate. Crosby is refreshingly old-school; he sweats the small stuff (without breaking a sweat), indulges in etiquette, and doesn't skimp on life's little luxuries: hem-stitched linen napkins, air-dried sheets, candles and fresh flowers, and good wooden coat hangers—"the Joan Crawford of it all!"

The Old Windemere home that he and his partner, Randall Felkel, bought 14 years ago on an oak-lined drive is formal without being stuffy, with Italian marble in the front foyer; gilt wing chairs in the living room; and artful displays of favorite things, from a collection of black-and-white Wedgwood bisque to seashells and coral, à la Tony

Duquette. The living and dining rooms are thoughtfully appointed to accommodate a houseful for a grand Sunday brunch or a spur of the moment intimate dinner party.

Crosby, a native Charlestonian and one of eight children of the Crosby Seafood family, comes by his talents honestly. "My family has always had big celebrations. Everyone embraces great food and enjoys each other's company," he says. Master of the genteel touch, he's unabashed about upholding old Southern traditions, like using menu cards and fine china. The dining room corner cabinet is packed with tabletop silver, and a smart kitchen renovation created room for a small office area with shelving for copious cookbooks and china storage—for all six sets!

"I always enjoy seeing the beauty in how other people live," says Crosby, who has taken his hospitality cues from local role models, such as Mary Ramsey ("who enjoys every minute of someone else's hospitality, as well as offering it herself") and the late Witsell Neyle ("who lived life grandly and entertained royally in a tiny efficiency apartment"). In that spirit, Crosby's cozy home is party central, not because his space is grand, but because it is welcoming and his approach to life is one of invitation.

Mitchell Crosby Open-Door Luxe



Jill Hooper

"You should be known for one thing—your signature dish or drink, for example. I want to be known for putting fun people together, with the addition of great menus and libations."

Tara Guérard
Something Old, Something New

Jill Hooper



"My goal is to keep things simple and steady at home, because my work life is so completely crazy."



Fresh Vibe In outfitting her 1740s home, Guérard isn't wed to tradition, opting for a mod kitchen (bottom left), dressy color, and, of course, impeccable—and fun—details.

T radd Street is sedate on a sunny Monday morning, its old-world appeal underscored by cheery window boxes, quiet courtyards, and dignified homes. But when the doorbell rings at the Guérard residence, South of Broad refinement turns into momentary mayhem. Georgia, the family's spirited Springer spaniel, goes ballistic, the baby starts crying, and Guérard opens the door with a big, apologetic smile. "Come on in," she says. "Welcome to my crazy life!"

Nothing riles Tara Guérard. The high-octane owner of *Soirée*, author of *Southern Weddings*, and mother of eight-month-old Aiken is known for her attention to detail and pulling off big-budget weddings and events without a hitch. Named one of *Modern Bride* magazine's Top 25 Trendsetters in 2005 (along with Wolfgang Puck and Vera Wang), Guérard creates drama through masterfully coordinated, subtly honed touches, not by getting all dramatic. Her home, a 1740s Charleston single (sans piazza), reflects this. Here, the old-fashioned and the innovative—something old, something new—come together in an ideal marriage.

"My goal is to keep things simple and steady at home, because my work life is so completely crazy. When I come home I try to mellow it out a bit," says Guérard. Three years ago she and her husband, Russell, bought the house from his mother, who lived here for 20 years, and set about adding their own touches, including a contemporary kitchen in the hyphen connecting the original house and the old kitchen house.

"I love old stuff and old houses," says Guérard, "but my tastes are pretty modern. Since this area wasn't part of the historic structure, we felt free to go for it." A marble and frosted glass island is lit from below, an idea borrowed from a hip New York bar. An antiqued mirrored wall behind open cabinets lends an air of spaciousness to the compact kitchen.

The home's stately mouldings and high ceilings accentuate Guérard's fresh palette. Regal gold matches the "dressy, sexy" satin and purple velvet-lined curtains that set a formal tone in the living room, where she pairs a boldly upholstered French settee with a \$60 coffee table. In the dining room, geometric curtains, a mod chandelier, and contemporary lamps on an heirloom side-

board satisfy her appetite for mixing it up. The "I do" guru took a tip from her wedding-planning expertise in painting her dressing room: "Pale pink makes skin the prettiest," confirms Guérard, who opted for "Melted Ice Cream" ("I buy paint based on the name!"). She purchased the contrasting black chandelier to use as event lighting, not realizing it was hand-blown glass.

At the top of a split staircase, Guérard's tiny bathroom is her crown jewel, like the top tier of a wedding cake. Pizzazzy black-and-white paisley wallpaper spotted in *Domino* magazine plays off a dazzling Thai mirror, while a claw-foot tub provides calm juxtaposition—the perfect balance of action and anchor, which is exactly the role Guérard plays for her lucky brides.

"When I design an event, I get to tear it down in five hours; designing for my house is harder," she says. "I have to live with it." Fortunately, with Guérard's savvy panache, that shouldn't be difficult. ●

Perfect Marriage

Making an old house fit a modern young family is a bit like taking an age-old traditional celebration (like a Southern wedding) and giving it a fresh, creative makeover. Tara's tips for updating an 18th-century abode:

✿ **Honor the old:** "We hung portraits of Russell's ancestors in the stairwell," a playful alternative to the typical over-the-mantel mandate.

✿ **Adjust:** "Climbing three flights to the baby's room for diaper changes got old fast, so we put a changing station on the first floor."

✿ **Get funky with small spaces:** "The tiny half-bath under the stairs is the perfect place for the mod 'People in Leaves' wallpaper."

✿ **Play up the strong points:** The Guérards may not have a yard for a swing set, but they love their low-maintenance courtyard, where they entertain and relax.