

DESIGN & DECORATING

Kindred Snaps

Want to show off your family photos in a way that feels chic, not cringe? Here, five tips from the pros

By NINA MOLINA

IT'S A SCENE so familiar as to be cliché: Staggered along a staircase wall or atop a dusty mantle, prom-night snapshots and Sears portraits perch haphazardly. Why do family photos always seem to get short shrift? Displaying these mementos stylishly can feel like a daunting challenge—but “a well-designed family gallery is one of the best storytelling opportunities you have,” said Paulina Perrault, a Sausalito, Calif., designer. Thankfully, sprucing up your snapshot act needn't take long. Here, interior stylists share five strategies for creating displays that dodge both chaos and cheesiness.

Keep It Simple

When family photo groupings go wrong, it's often because they look disorderly. To combat that, designer Danielle Colding of New York City relies on cohesive frames that all employ oversize white mats to give snapshots presence. Keep frames “sleek and clean,” she



Local designer Kara Miller used pics to invite visitors into a family's world in a Jupiter, Fla., entryway.

said. Montecito, Calif., designer Jessica Jubelirer offers similar advice: “The simpler the better, [because that] unifies the visual.” Designer Shea McGee of Salt Lake City, another fan of generous mats, turns mess into order by hanging photos in neat grids (see right). She suggests laying elements out on the floor before picking up a hammer and nails.

Think Beyond the Snapshot

To chic-ify a family gallery, many pros prefer an eclectic approach

Select images that trigger a...memory or spur conversation.

over a monotonously sentimental one. (Really: you don't need to hang every school picture.) “Sometimes a small piece of artwork mixed in can act as a foil,” said Amanda Reynal, a designer in Des Moines, Iowa. To find affordable pieces, Birmingham, Ala., designer Danielle Bloodworth Balanis suggests scouring thrift stores for period portraits, sketches and silhouettes. Another approach: Lindsey Jamison of Rumor Designs in Steamboat Springs, Colo., said, “Gallery walls can be a great place to display [souvenirs] from travels and children's artwork or showcase your own creativity.”

Stay in Sight

Don't banish photos to bedrooms just because they're personal, says Jubelirer. When displayed in hallways or other high-traffic areas, family galleries can “invite people to pause and reflect” in unexpected ways. (Brace yourself



GRID IS GOOD Salt Lake City designer Shea McGee styled up an orderly sextet of family photos with simple frames and oversize mats.

for spirited opinions!) “No need to hide your happiest memories,” said Helen Bergin, a Palm Beach, Fla., designer. Some of her favorite living-room perches are built-in bookshelves, consoles and *étagères*.

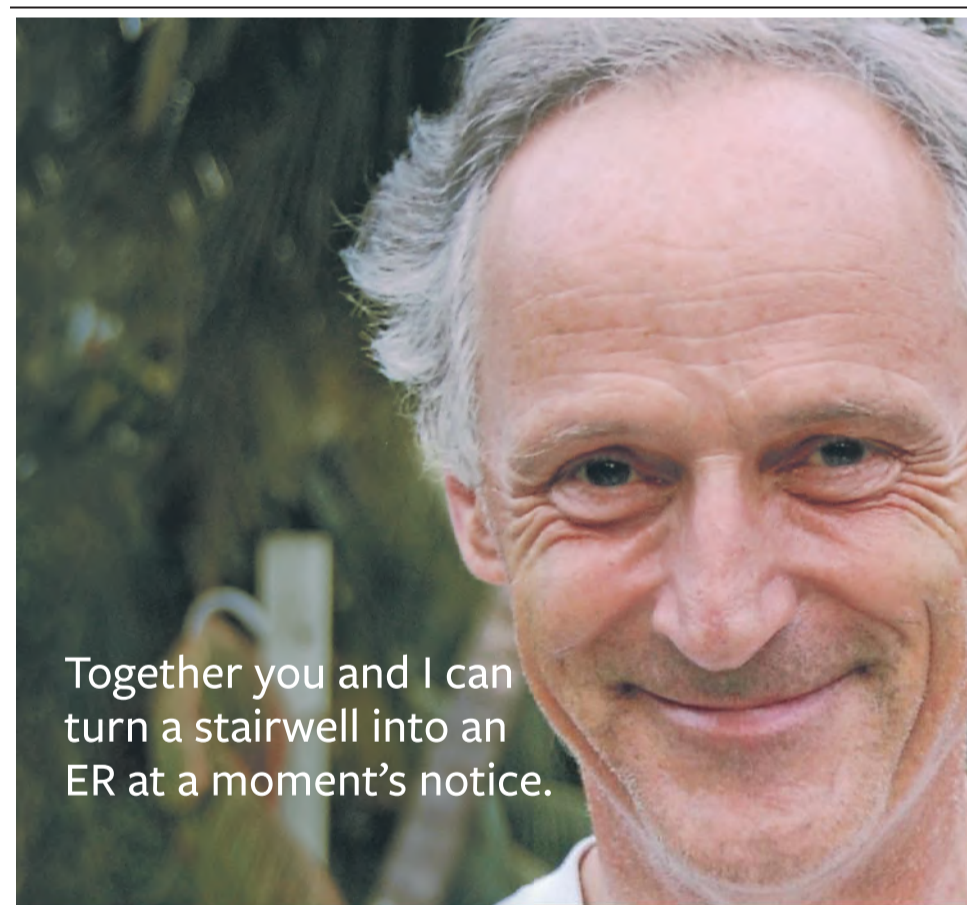
Play with POV

For a happy medium between casual and considered, Reynal likes to mix

professional and informal photos in a single display. “Select pieces that trigger a...memory or can also be a topic of conversation,” suggested Jamison. And when planning portrait sessions, Los Angeles-based designer Cleo Murnane recommends seeking out photographers with an anti-cliche approach. Think: no shots of every family member in matching white cowl-neck sweaters.

Go Noir

To avoid a clashing Technicolor vibe and create aesthetic harmony when plotting out a display, New York City designer Tara McCauley suggests printing photos in black and white or sepia. Bonus: The monochrome look will lend your mementos a timeless quality—whether they were lensed in 1932 or 2023.



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Play Your Patterns On Repeat

Using a print twice or more can pull together your décor

The Appeal

The human brain loves a good pattern. Evolutionarily speaking, we're hard-wired to recognize repetitive shapes. They organize the world around us. At home, the right motif in the right places similarly brings order and structure to an interior scheme, said Barrie Benson. In the library of one Charlotte, N.C., home, the local designer used a tartan print in small doses as roman shades and the upholstery of a settee. “There was a lot going on—textures and patterns, books, oriental rugs. The plaid worked because it added straight lines and a kind of framework,” she said.

A bolder repetition of pattern across multiple surfaces can engender a sense of snugness. Elizabeth Hay, a designer who splits her time between Singapore and the U.K., clad the walls and a big sofa in a TV room in the same motif. “It creates an enveloping, cozy feel,” she said.

The Tips

Such pattern echoes work best when deployed in understated ways—on just seat covers and window shades, say—or taken intentionally over-the-top, explained Benson. “One more place would have been too much—unless I did the entire room in plaid,” she said of her limited use of tartan in the library. “You do it completely, or you pick two places.” Treatments that occupy the middle ground tend to look cloyingly matchy-matchy.

But beware: Heavy-handed repetition can skew old-fashioned if the pattern is too fussy



A TAD PLAID In a Charlotte, N.C., library, interior designer Barrie Benson put tartan in a window and on a settee.

or traditional, says Hay. “You used to see rooms with chintz on everything—the walls, the curtains, the bed, the bed skirt—with lots of ruffles and gathers,” she said. “That can feel a bit claustrophobic.”

“What works very well is what we call in French ‘décalé,’” said Paris designer Laura Gonzalez by way of pattern guidance. The translation: offbeat, like the unusual boho geometric she chose for the wall and sofa shown in the photo below.



Pattern play as featured in ‘Laura Gonzalez: Interiors’ (Rizzoli, October 2023).

The Caveats

Patterns are often available as both wallpaper and fabric, but the two renderings are likely printed at different mills, warned Benson. “Make sure you're getting samples, because often the colors are a little off. They should be very, very close.”

Just as the brain is built for pattern recognition, it instantly detects disruptions. Take care with seaming and matching. The smallest offset can spoil all-over patterning. “When you match the lines perfectly, it can look like a sofa is growing from the wall,” Gonzalez said. “There is an infinity illusion,” which can make even a tiny room seem much bigger.

While liberal use of bold patterns calls for courage, Hay cautions against the wishy-washy accent wall. “Your room will feel much busier with just one patterned wall, because it's not balanced,” she said. If you paper the whole room and carry the pattern to the headboard or the curtains, “it'll actually be softer on the eye.”

—Kate Morgan