

# Taste, design and fashion



What is it with some care home owners? You arrive at their care home via a perfectly nice tree-lined access road, pull up in front of an elegant-looking converted 18th Century country house, walk across the impeccably landscaped courtyard and enter the main hallway. As you stop to sign the visitors' book, that's when it hits you – the matching gold-painted, faux Louis XIV chairs glisten in the light from a chandelier that wouldn't look out of place in the palace of the Sun King himself. The flock wallpaper competes for your attention with the hideously ornate gold painted mirror, whilst the leopard print rugs make you wonder if Donald Trump and Elton John ever joined forces to run a care home, is this what it would look like?

Let me make this absolutely clear from the outset – fashion, good design, and good taste are not the same things. Fashion is something which changes and evolves over our lifetimes and is formed from a whole series of inexplicable external forces which either consciously or unconsciously have an impact on us.

Whether we succumb to clever advertising or simply follow our herd instinct to conform to peer-pressure in the fear of being different, our tastes are transitory. I am unlikely, for example, to resurrect my look of long hair, earring and torn jeans from my youth – although I am still waiting for my mid-life crisis to properly kick in, so don't rule it out just yet.

Good design on the other hand is something that has rules which can be

While there's no accounting for taste, principles of good design are there to be followed, says NorthStar director **DANNY SHARPE.**

followed. Yes, there is always that elusive, artistic element that can't quite be explained but on the whole, building design has rules about symmetry, proportion and rhythm which, if understood and followed, will lead to a well-designed building. English gentlemen of the Eighteenth Century knew this. They packed their bags, gathered up their servants and headed off on The Grand Tour to study the art and architecture of the classical world.

The Grand Tour was basically a gap year (or three) the end result of which was a boom in English country house building which brought the classical columns, porticoes and, crucially, the dimensions of ancient Roman and Greek buildings back into use.

This neo-classical world of Georgian architecture is looked back on today as a golden age, just as the Georgians looked back on the ancient world with admiration. The

point is they studied and measured what worked in terms of proportion and rhythm and copied it.

Care home design has its own particular problems to resolve. For example, the necessity of having such a large number of repetitive bedroom window openings can make a building facade look dull and repetitive. There are many examples I can give here of badly-designed, dull looking care homes but, as with my list of the Top Ten worst Care Home operators, I am once again gagged by the censors.

However, care homes needn't be dull: with the careful use of different external materials, the introduction of a rhythm which intersperses bay windows with full length French doors and balconies, can give life and interest to a building. Oh, and while we are on, can all builders please stop fitting windows flush with the outer wall! I know it takes longer, and is a bit more difficult, to set the windows back into the reveal and create a shadow line but the results are worth it. Again, just follow the rules of good design: it's not rocket science.

Good taste, finally, is something you either have or you don't. People will argue that taste is subjective and that we all have different tastes and what I think is tasteless; others will think the height of elegance and sophistication. This is not the case. If you disagree with me on this, then you clearly have no taste. The problem with all this comes when someone with no taste then tries to design a building. Having read the above they are likely to take my example of learning from the ancient world literally and stick a plastic portico with Doric columns onto the outside of their 1980s care home and declare it good design. That's not what I meant at all. The problem, then, is that whereas good design can be learned: good taste cannot. ct

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