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HEALTHY HOME



Sense-ational homes

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When we were growing up, my older sister had a beautiful way of saying how she felt about me. She'd say she wanted to "cottonball" me, meaning that she wanted me to feel as comforted, protected and pampered as a baby would, lying in a soft ball of cotton wool... And that is exactly what our homes should be like – a cocoon to escape the stresses of the outside world and restore the body and soul. Here are a few simple steps that will help you create a home environment that will indulge each of your senses.

Sight

Coping with the uniformly monochromatic landscape of the desert, and the constant view of construction sites all around us, our homes need to be a sight for sore eyes – literally. And the best way to do that is through the intelligent use of colour. Nathalie Lorenzo, assistant interior brand manager, Jotun Paints (04-3395000), says, "Colours are known to have a psychological impact on people, therefore knowing what colour to use where, is crucial to creating the right feel in every room."

Amna Saqib from Dulux (Al Gurg Leigh's Paints: 06-5343919) adds, "Scientifically, colour is the first thing we register when we are assessing things, and it affects our behaviour and mood. For instance grey rain and clouds tend to make us feel low, while red and yellow flowers and sunshine make us feel livelier. The colour of our environment where we live affects us in a similar way."

It is essential that a lot of thought and attention is paid to choosing the right colour for each room. The first thing to consider is the function and the sort of mood you want to create in a room, as well as individual preferences. For a living room, yellows and oranges work well as these are happy, warm colours. For the bedroom, calming blues and soothing greens – which have a strong affinity with nature – provide the right environment for relaxation. Red is good to add a dash of vibrancy and energy into any room, but it is very powerful, so is best used in moderation – for instance, on just one wall of the dining room.

The other important aspect of décor that affects our visual sense is lighting. "In our homes, a well-planned lighting scheme plays an important role in

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creating a balanced and comfortable atmosphere," says Mary Rose, Ikea's communication and interior design manager (800IKEA). "Natural daylight flowing into a room should always be considered when planning lighting solutions. Window treatments such as sheer or light-coloured curtains may be used to filter and diffuse strong sunlight, while dark curtains serve to absorb sunlight and create shadows. Blinds can be a good solution to control the amount of sunlight entering a room."

According to Hameed Khwaja, visual merchandising manager from Homes r Us (04-3213444), "Lighting directly affects our mood – bright lights can uplift a dull mood in an instant, and a soothing indirect light helps to calm down and have a comforting effect." Using dimmers helps to control the intensity of light and works well in bedrooms, while bright ceiling lamps over areas like the dining table can have a cheerful effect.

"However, make sure the lamp is not within the line of direct visual contact, and shades over table lamps cover the light bulb completely," says Hameed, "to ensure the direct light doesn't affect the eyes."

Other ways to indulge your visual senses are through the use of art and decorative artefacts. However, it is not enough to just have a stunning looking house, you need to create a sense of comfort and individuality that will make you feel 'at home'. "There is nothing quite as comforting as being surrounded by those you love," says interior decorator Coral Nafie, so placing photos of loved ones and fond memories around the house can contribute to a sense of well-being. Riot Art (04-4224166) creates canvases from your favourite photographs, using effects and colour correction, to make for some funky artwork for your walls.

Try this at home:

- "If colour is a new concept in your home, you can start by painting one wall with a distinct colour," suggests Nathalie. Amna says, "To help pick a colour scheme, choose one from your existing furnishings, or get ideas from accessories like a picture or a vase. Nature always has the best combination of colours – so find inspiration there." - "Using different types and heights of lamps in any room can create an interesting play of lights," says Hameed. "Spot lights over art works make for an aesthetically lit room, and enhance the beauty of the spot lit object."

Hearing

Did you know that the aural sense is the first to develop in the womb? Music is probably the best antidote to relieve our ears from the white noise of modern living. According to music psychologist and consultant, Michael Griffin (<http://www.musiceducationworld.com/>), "Memory is powerfully associated with music – it is very emotive. We respond emotionally more to music than any other audio stimuli."

Therefore, it is important to choose the sort of music you are playing in your home, according to the time of the day and the mood you want to create, as different music will generate different responses from you.

Therefore, while some slow, smooth music will relax you physically at the end of a day, slowing your heartbeat down, playing slightly more up-tempo and happy music in the mornings will get you going. Some people also prefer to listen to chants or hymns in the mornings to start the day on an uplifting note.

Other ways to indulge your sense of hearing are through water or nature sounds.

"Anecdotal evidence suggests that nature sounds have a calming influence. I think it helps people feel more at one with their place in the world," says Michael. While nature sound CDs are always an option (available at Virgin megastores, 04-3414353), you could also invest in a small water feature in the house or in the garden if you have one (various designs are available at Lifestyle) – the trickling sound of water in the background is sure to leave

you feeling relaxed.

Try this at home:

- Some background music during dinnertime, such as jazz or classical helps to create an atmosphere, but keep the volume low. And turn the TV off – the constant background noise can be distracting. - Whatever music you are listening to, invest in a high-end home audio system as it will treat your ears to clear and high-quality sounds. Electronics store DG+ (04-3418918) is a good place to find the best brands and also receive personalised consultations from audio engineers.
- Silence is an important part of indulging your aural sense, so make sure you set aside a little quiet-time during the day, even if it's just 10 minutes before you go to sleep.

Touch

Have you packed away all your good linen so that it doesn't spoil? Don't deprive yourself. "The sensory feel of touch plays a very important role in sketching the personality of the home, with fabrics and soft furnishings playing a major role," says Hameed. So, go ahead and bring out all the embroidered tablecloths and other prized possessions, or splash out on some luxurious, sumptuous new fabrics like silk, satin, velvet or jacquard.

The various ways in which fabric can be used to provide sensory indulgence include curtains, upholstery, rugs and durries, throws and of course bed linen. Jose Segovia, a visual merchandiser at Ikea, says, "For those who are looking for the ultimate in touch sensation, select your textiles from fabrics made with a very fine thread count. These include silk, satin, 100 per cent cotton and some families of polyester." Natural fabrics are always smoother and more comforting to the touch, and the higher the thread count, the better.

Flooring is another key aspect, so depending on what sort of feel you're after, you can choose between tiles or marble, carpeted floors or wooden/parquet flooring. Go to Nordic Homeworx (04-3415010) to find the Swedish Kahrs range of all-natural wood flooring in UAE, which provides warmth and increased sound absorbency.

Try this at home:

- Throw a mohair or cashmere shawl – or something with more personal value such as a handmade quilt from your grandmother that you have stashed away – over a favourite chair and see it transformed into a cosy nook, suggests Carol Nafie.
- Invest in some thick, large, thirsty towels for your bathroom, and a luxurious terry bathrobe for yourself as well.
- Head to Rivoli Silks (04-3374891), a one-stop destination for luxurious furnishing fabrics to get inspiration – and good buys – for luxing up your home. Another store that houses the ultimate in indulgent home furnishings is Brahathi (04-3955610), where you will find a range of silk and brocade cushions and fabrics for drapes and upholstery, as well as pure cotton bed linen at affordable prices.

Taste

Probably one of the easiest senses to indulge, taste doesn't necessarily have to do with sinful chocolate and decadent caviar. It is not only possible, but easy to treat yourself to indulgent food that is also healthy. "Try and experiment with new flavours and textures as much as possible," suggests nutrition consultant and founder of Power Eat Ahlaam Ali (<http://www.powereat.com/>). "To add nutritive value to food while making it more interesting and indulgent, add grains, nuts and seeds to dishes like salads or sandwiches; bring in as many colours as possible to add another dimension of aesthetics to the taste, as well as get the varied nutrition from brightly coloured fruit and veg; and combine flavours that you normally wouldn't, such as chocolate with chilli or paprika or honey in your savoury

dishes.”

Hilton Dubai Jumeirah’s (04-3991111) Chef Ruben Rebuffo agrees, “I think it’s nice to combine sweet foods with sour – two opposing flavours can open up your palate.” He also advises people to take their time to prepare food properly, marinate correctly and cook it at the right temperature so that all the flavours are released. “Acidic or tangy ingredients like lemon juice, vinegar, or even garlic and salt and pepper can help to awaken the taste buds. When I finish preparing a dish, I usually like to add some chicken stock and lemon juice which helps with salivation, allowing you to taste more flavour,” he adds.

And finally, a good balanced meal combined with a glass of fine wine will become a gourmet experience to remember because, “when successful, in the marriage of food and wine, the food will make the wine taste better – and the wine will make the food taste better,” says Kelley Michael Schaefer, complex sommelier, The Westin Dubai (04-3993333). “Pairing wine with food can be daunting for most,” he adds, “but following the old adage of white wine with fish and red with meats does have a basis in chemistry which proves its success.”

Try this at home:

- Spice up your drinks – add a dash of paprika to lime juice or grapefruit juice to give it some added zing.
- Try and stick to natural, unprocessed foods, cooking them for as little as possible. Do not over-spice your foods – let the natural flavours of your ingredients come through. - Replace creamy and buttery sauces with yoghurt-based sauces, and try and use as many fresh herbs as possible.
- Eat slowly yet consciously, savouring every mouthful and every individual ingredient.
- Indulging your palate is as much about the ambience as it is about the food, so make a little bit of an effort – light a few candles, play some music and use your finest crockery and cutlery. Your dining room will seem more inviting than the finest restaurant!

Smell

“The sense of smell is the most primitive, enveloping and dynamic of our senses, and is linked to the deepest parts of the brain which govern basic instincts, memories and emotions,” says Geraldine Howard, president of Aromatherapy Associates (The Product House: 04-3918061). It is therefore also the most easy and rewarding sense to indulge. Ever noticed how spas always have a fragrance-infused environment that is instantly relaxing? It is not too difficult to recreate a similar experience at home, especially if you know the effects of different essential oils and their scents.

Since smell is such an intensely personal choice, you have to be careful to choose what works for you. “Lavender and patchouli are found to be relaxing while lemongrass, rosemary or mint are found to be energising,” says aromatherapist Graça Ward (Essential Beauty Salon: 04-3955909). “Ylang ylang and rose are thought of as sensual and romantic, so it makes sense to bring such fragrances into the bedroom. Invigorating scents work well in the living room.”

Try this at home:

- Geraldine says, “Electric burners are a safe way to scent your home. The burner gently releases the aromas throughout the day creating a welcoming experience when you walk in the house. Remember to use the same oils throughout or aromas that complement each other – the last thing you want is clashing smells.”
- Other options include scented candles, oil burners – diluted aromatherapy oils that vapourise and perfume the air when heated by tea-light candles – or scented home diffusers (available at Lifestyle (04-3410523). We love Kiehl’s range of scented candles and Shiffa’s aromatherapy candles (both available at Harvey

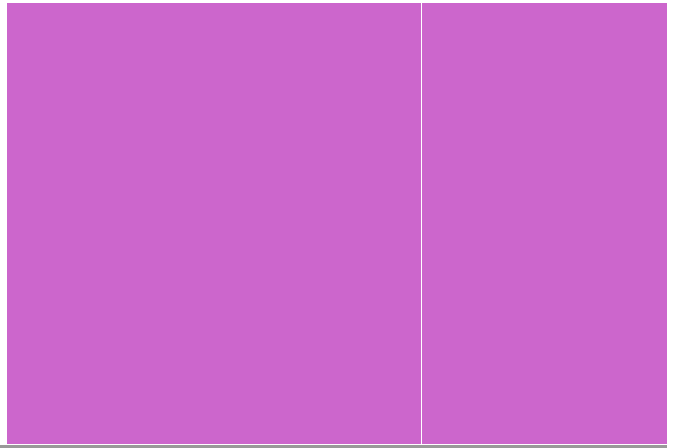
Nichols, 04-4098888).

- Says Graça, "It is always best to avoid scents in a room where food is served and eaten. It becomes overpowering to smell food as well as perfumes at the same time and interferes with ones' enjoyment of the meal." Instead, get the coffee machine going first thing in the morning – there's nothing like the aroma of a fresh brew to wake you up.

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