

“SOMETHING AS SIMPLE AS A BEAUTIFUL PIECE OF FABRIC OR FURNITURE CAN BE THE INSPIRATION BEHIND A WHOLE DESIGN”



Bourgeois

on a budget

Experienced interior designer and founder of Lavender & Sage **Mayke Hogestijn** has worked in both France and the UK. Here she provides helpful advice on how you can achieve the bourgeois look on any budget

Bourgeois is a French word that originally meant ‘a freeman of a borough in France’ before it was broadened to signify the whole class lying between the workers and the nobility. Nowadays, the term ‘bourgeois’ is used generally to describe the trading middle class of any country. So what denotes a bourgeois interior? Luxurious fabrics, ornate designs, damask patterns, flock wall-coverings, delicate embroideries, crystal and anything else that exudes expensive taste could constitute a bourgeois backdrop for the aristocracy. Unfortunately, most of us don’t have the aristocratic budget to splash out on such luxurious settings. However, as with all design styles, you can recreate the look in your own home and it doesn’t have to break the bank.

There are a few tricks of the trade that can help you get the bourgeois basics. The most important thing to remember is that imagination and individuality are much more important to any room (bourgeois or otherwise) than your budget. Much more importantly than money, what you need is the guts to be completely individual, a steady nerve to ensure you don’t go over the top, and some time to put in a little elbow grease.

BOURGEOIS BEGINNINGS

The beginnings of a bourgeois room can be a bit daunting. With so much to choose from and so much to do, it can be difficult to know where to start. Instead of tackling the project in its entirety,

it’s best to start the process by picking a few key pieces and using these as your building blocks. These pieces should encapsulate the look and feel that you want from your bourgeois room – often something as simple as a beautiful piece of fabric or furniture can be the inspiration behind a whole design.

As the bourgeois look is based around luxurious furnishings and accessories, you may think that you will have to shop around expensive boutiques, spending a small fortune on your key pieces. However, the best items come from flea markets and auction houses. These places are real treasure troves where cheap second-hand furniture and home accessories can be picked up at bargain prices. They are also full of quality pieces that have real character to them. Furniture, like wine, gets better with age, taking on a distinct character as the years go by. Just think of the tales your centrepiece could tell. Flat-pack furniture is obviously a total no-no in an interior like this. Quite apart from the fact that it will lack the character, originality and craftsmanship of a flea market or auction house find, it will probably also turn out to be more expensive.

When visiting a flea market or auction house it is essential to keep an open mind. Picking a piece of furniture that really stands out or requires a bit of work can be particularly daunting and you need imagination and fortitude to go for truly individual pieces. If you see a piece that looks exhausted, don’t dismiss it, but imagine it cleaned and polished, with a fresh lick of paint, »

Right: Accessories complete a bathroom. For best value, pick up second hand items at a local flea market;
Facing page: Mix and match antique furniture and fittings for a bourgeois kitchen interior. Rustic materials like stone and wood go best with a simple colour scheme



“CONSIDER SHAPE AND DESIGN – OPT FOR ROUNDED, CURVED LINES OVER SHARP EDGES”

or reupholstered, as even the most tired of pieces can be given a luxurious edge to fit with your bourgeois room. You should also consider shape and design when choosing furniture or accessories for your new room. For the bourgeois style, opt for rounded, curved lines rather than harsh lines and sharp edges. Look for carved wood, old pitted mirror glass, old handles, beautiful feet and any other feature that makes this particular piece of furniture stand out from the crowd. Go for complete individuality and, if your room can hold it, be bold when it comes to size.

FROM DRAB TO FAB

Customising old furniture is a great way to cut down on cost. If you've never done this before, don't be put off, as everyone can be an artist – all it takes is a bit of time and determination. Even if you paint something and it doesn't work out, it can always be painted over again. Painting on patterns or filling block areas are great ways to update furniture. For those who are less artistically

minded, copying a design or using a stencil are other ways of achieving great results. The internet and even your local library are great resources and there is a lot of information on the bourgeois look to fuel your inspiration.

For soft furnishings, again see what you can find in flea markets and auction houses. Fabric shops often have remnants of expensive materials that could be used on smaller pieces, such as a scatter cushion. You'll also be surprised what you can find by rummaging through old cupboards or asking friends and family to do the same. By covering the front panel of a cushion with beautiful, expensive material and the back panel with a less expensive material you can significantly cut down on cost, creating the illusion of bourgeois living without splashing the cash.

You can also transform an inexpensive pair of curtains into luxurious bourgeois drapes using a similar approach. Using cheaper materials or curtains that you already have, and edging them with some plush material will make a huge difference. You can also use a small piece of the more expensive material >>





Left: Don't be afraid to repaint an old piece of furniture if it needs a new lease of life; Facing page: Carefully chosen fabrics provide the finishing touches to a bedroom interior – cushions, tablecloths and curtains can be made fairly easily with a sewing machine and a bit of imagination

“THE MORE INDIVIDUAL AND CHARACTERISTIC YOUR PIECES ARE, THE MORE EFFECTIVE YOUR ROOM WILL BE”

to make tie-backs that will also add to the effect. If your ceilings are high, you can edge your curtains on all four sides, or if you have low ceilings it is best to just edge them from top to bottom as this will help make the room look taller.

For a true bourgeois look, you should absolutely avoid the ubiquitous ‘three-piece suite’. Instead, opt for sofas and chairs that don't match, but that sit well together in shape and upholstery. You can always reupholster furniture yourself or make use of throws and fabrics to revitalise an old piece. Mixing together different designs and fabrics will work well, adding to the exquisite feel of your room.

FURNISHING TOUCHES

To complete the look, place a large mirror or alternatively a big picture above the mantelpiece. You may like to go for something large-scale with an interesting frame to ensure that the bourgeois tone runs through every detail of your room. Again, flea markets and auction houses can be invaluable in finding

individual pieces. It's important to think big and be sure to stay within the general feel of the room.

Wallpaper in a bourgeois room isn't necessary although it can really complement the look. Local DIY stores usually have a broad selection and an increasingly good choice. However, wallpapering a whole room can be expensive and may turn out to look quite boring. Try wallpapering one feature wall and painting the rest. This will add another dimension to your room and also save you time and money.

When going for the bourgeois interior, remember that things don't have to be perfect. Furniture with scratches or in need of repair only adds to the ‘lived in’ feel. The more individual and characteristic your pieces are, the more effective your room will be and, most importantly, the more you will feel at home in it. **fm**

Lavender & Sage offers traditional, stylish French inspired accessories and furniture for all areas of the home and garden. Visit www.lavenderandsage.com for more details.