

*the* **Secret** *of*  
**Great Decorating**



*you know it when you feel it.*

by Irene Turnbull



The Secret of Great Decorating

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***“There is no such thing as a standard run of the mill human being” ...***

*Steven Hawking*

# ***Table of Contents***

<b>THE <i>SECRET</i> OF GREAT DECORATING!! .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Beyond Fads...To the Heart of the Matter.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>OUR HOME AS A METAPHOR FOR OUR LIVES ...</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>A Need Beyond Shelter .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Our Emotional Connection To Our Space .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>HOW WE FILTER WHAT WE EXPERIENCE .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Seek First To Understand... ..</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>A DEEPER LOOK INSIDE THE SECRET .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Today's Sensations, Yesterday's Events.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>The First Part of The Secret.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>16</b>

**Inside Cover - About Irene Turnbull**

***“There is no way to remove the observer – us –  
from our perceptions of the world” ...***

*Steven Hawking*

# THE *SECRET* OF GREAT DECORATING!!

For many years, I've observed very closely, the struggle that people have choosing the "right" things for their home – the difficulties of husbands and wives and children all trying to feel comfortable under one roof. There can be a range of experience from excitement and joy to pain and anguish, as families strive for harmony with their choices.

I've watched as people try to follow trends and influences of fashion and the current design gurus; yet, despite tireless effort and in many cases, costly investments, they've been left with an "empty" and often disappointing feeling inside. Perhaps you can relate to some of these experiences.

## **Beyond Fads...To the Heart of the Matter**

The truth is the Secret of great interior design and decorating is far beyond the glamour of the latest marketplace trend.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not taking a shot at colour and decorating fads. Change can be a wonderful refreshing thing, and certainly our marketplace is alive with choice. I live every day of my life in the creative world of home fashion, design and product proliferation.

I do believe that keeping our houses fresh and vibrant is as important as our own personal grooming. What I am saying is, before we embrace our products of choice, we need to understand ourselves and our real needs so we can create spaces that support and empower us.

When we feel empowered, we empower others. Our happy energy becomes contagious and together we impact our world in a positive way.

I'm very clear and very passionate about my mission. - and I'm dedicated to making the world a happier place – one home at a time.

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**Home is where the heart is and  
our heart is the gauge of our  
real feelings.**

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In this little e-book, I challenge you to think about your relationship with your home in a different way. I want to reconnect you with your space, by helping you understand it in a far more personal and intimate way, so you can enjoy a lifetime love affair with your home.

Why do I want you to have a love affair with your home?

Because I know, without a doubt, that **when you “feel good about yourself and your home”, your entire life will be affected in a positive way.**

That's a big claim isn't it? And it's a claim that you should take very seriously, because your health and well being are impacted everyday through your relationship with your home whether you know it or not...

There's a Secret to creating great interior spaces and I want to share it with you.



# Our Home as a Metaphor for our Lives

So, what is a “home” anyway?

Most of us agree that there’s a difference between the word “home”, and other words we use to describe where we live, such as “house, residence, dwelling”, etc. A “home” carries a sense of “feeling” and “humanness” as opposed to the more physical structure associated with a “house”.

Obviously, home is not the same for all people. In fact, each of us might have several homes throughout our lifetimes. Some people say, “home is where my heart is!” And others sadly say a house is “just a place to hang my hat!”

Actually, our homes are metaphors for our lives. **They tell the story of our beliefs and values and provide the stage for us to process our day to day living experience.** Our homes are as personal as the food we eat – the way we dress – and the daily routines we follow. They reflect more about us than we probably ever imagined.

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**Our homes tell the story of our beliefs and values and provide the stage for us to process our day to day living experience.**

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Whether you’re happy with your surroundings or not, there’s no deviation about the reflection of your values and beliefs.

## **A Need Beyond Shelter**

Yet, despite our individuality, we humans also share common needs, which our homes provide.

Some are obvious; we have needs for safety, shelter, warmth, relationship and food. These are fundamental, biological needs, which can be met at a survival level. Indeed, a great portion of our world exists at this level, and sadly, even survival is a daily struggle for far too many.

But, we have another need that sets us apart. We also have emotional requirements from our homes. We all know this to be true, because we “feel it”. Have you ever walked into a room where everyone is admiring the beauty and wondered why you feel like running out through the closest doorway? Have you ever looked at a beautiful magazine photo of a featured room and said it’s very nice and I know it’s put together well, but I would never want to live there? Have you ever wanted to adjust a friend’s artwork on a wall because it felt too high or too low?

## **Our Emotional Connection To Our Space**

This is what I’m talking about when I say we all know our emotional connection because we feel it. When things feel good, we give off good vibes! Everyone knows the difference between good energy and bad! What we don’t always know is why we’re experiencing an emotional and/or physical reaction to our space.

It’s not by chance that we like certain colours, need certain architectural features; feel better in some spaces than others or have passions for certain possessions or lack of them. You may crave large open space or tight closely-knit corners. The clues are found in your personal life story. You’re unique and your needs are real.

The bigger challenge is that this is true for everyone and so finding common ground in shared spaces needs to be addressed with new sensitivity.

Listen to a few examples of what I see every day...does any of this sound familiar?

### **Meet Mary... “About To Second Guess Herself”**

Mary called for help with her living room. She had lived with her furnishings for many years and while her draperies were still in relatively good condition, they were dated and somewhat heavy feeling. Her sofa and love seat had stood up well, but were now showing the wear of time and an active family. She and her husband were now empty nesters and it was time for a change. Mary was excited about re-energizing her home and sharing this new sense of freedom she and her husband were feeling.

She began her search for decorating ideas, fabrics and so on. After many hours of deliberation, she decided that she really liked her furniture and so she planned to have it reupholstered, updating it with some minimal restyling and giving it a new look. After several days of agonizing over samples and negotiating with her husband, she finally selected some fabrics she really loved and decided to ask her daughter to come along as she fine-tuned her plans.

Much to Mary’s disappointment, her daughter was not as enthusiastic about her choices. “Why would you want that old sofa, she asked. “You should dump it and get a new one”. Mary’s heart sank. She began to doubt her choices and to follow the influence of her daughter, who challenged her selections of fabrics. I could see by her face, she had lost that spark of pride and enthusiasm she had been feeling. With her confidence eroded, Mary was about to make a costly mistake.

### **Meet Anne... “According to Whom?”**

Anne asked me to help her hang her pictures. “I just can’t seem to get them right”, she said. “I listen to the experts on TV, but they don’t feel right to me, .... And what’s more, my husband and I can’t agree either”. She went on to explain what she had learned about placing pictures at eye level, but whose eye level? – and that she had tried the instructions that a celebrity decorator had suggested, measuring a specific distance from the floor to the focal point of the picture, but nothing “felt” right. So, what’s the answer to this dilemma? Who determines where the “right” spot is?

### **Meet Sam... “Opposites Attract?”**

Sam wanted the house painted with dark colours. Alice was adamant that they use light tones. Who could possibly win this battle of opposites and at what costs?

## **HOW WE FILTER WHAT WE EXPERIENCE**

So, What *is* the Answer?

**First of all, it’s important to remember that interior design is *not* an exacting science.** It exists as a profession because there’s a need among human beings to nest and find comfort in their surroundings. With knowledge of colour, form and an understanding of principles that have evolved over time, a qualified designer or decorator can predict results of possible combinations of choice with a high degree of accuracy. However, we can’t see or feel what our clients’ experience. We can only process life through our own filters.

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## **The only truth is the one which each of us knows ourselves.**

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While we're all one in a universal sense, we're individual at the same time. Just as there are many species of flowers and numerous varieties within the species. Not all flowers have the same needs for nourishment and no two grow identically. We all share the same carbon, oxygen, hydrogen, and nitrogen; yet we have different needs from one another.

Why does one colour feel great to one person but not another? Why does something shiny attract the attention of some people while something velvety and plush feels better to someone else? Why does one sister love green and another love blue? Or one craves space while another likes to cocoon? What makes them so different even when they had the same parents, were raised in the same house and shared the same space?

One thing I can tell you for sure—it's not genetic. The science that once proclaimed that our health and fates were programmed in our genes, a concept referred to as genetic determinacy, no longer prevails. Science is now revealing how we are actively involved in the unfolding of our physical lives and how our beliefs influence our health and the quality of our day-to-day existence on this beautiful planet.

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**We are actively involved in the unfolding of our physical lives and our beliefs influence our health and the quality of our day-to-day existence.**

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Take a look at it another way...

When you have an experience, where is that experience taking place? It's happening from within us.

When you're admiring a beautiful room and feeling the joy and pleasure it's giving you, who's having the experience and where is that experience taking place. Who's feeling the pleasure or displeasure and the accompanying emotions? When you look at colour, where are you experiencing it? From the inside!!

**For more about the nature of colour be sure to read my book Colour Sense-abilities.**

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**Colour is not experienced by the eye!  
It's experienced as an emotional  
reaction based on our experience and  
beliefs about it.**

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**Seek First To Understand...**

You are unique and your needs are real! We must honour our differences. How do we do that when we share space? How do we make sure we satisfy ourselves *and* our loved ones at the same time?

It would be so very easy to just tell Mary to ignore her daughter and please herself.

However, Mary's belief and value system requires approval from her daughter. She wants her daughter to like her choices and to know that when she visits, she too will "feel good" in their home. The issue **is not about whether this is right or wrong**, the fact is that this is how Mary "feels".

**The Secret lies in understanding just what our needs, wants and desires really are and what they mean to us.**

***“We must not allow other peoples’ limited perceptions to define us” ...***

*Steven Hawking*

# A DEEPER LOOK INSIDE THE SECRET

How do we experience life?

In a nutshell, life is perception and projection. What we believe to be true becomes our reality. Our perception shapes our beliefs and our beliefs create our values. Our values, in turn, influence our behaviour and we play out our lives accordingly. We project our beliefs onto others and we're emotionally charged by what we believe to be true about ourselves and our world.

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**Life is perception and projection. What we believe to be true becomes our reality.**

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(Take a moment to re-read that last paragraph...it's a really profound one.)

## Today's Sensations, Yesterday's Events

Every event that has ever happened to you in your life **has happened in a space**, whether it's outdoors in nature or inside a mansion or the smallest of abodes. We're inseparable from this space while we're in this life form on earth. How we define the space may vary, but the space and ourselves are inseparable.

When we experience an event – say we touch a hot stove – we simultaneously feel the burn and the discomfort on a physical level and we know that hot stoves can mean pain so we form the opinion that we will avoid this in the future. We make the connection between the hot stove and our discomfort and we store the memory of the event and the emotion we felt in our memory. In the future, the memory of this event might be triggered by the sight of a red hot



burner, or the smell of burning flesh, or a pot that reminds you of the one you were handling when you touched the burner. You don't really feel the burn again, but you certainly get an emotional & probably a physical signal from the past about the event.

Suppose we experience a skunk smell. We don't have to see the skunk to know what's responsible for the smell, but if we see a skunk we're sure to avoid it because we have the memory of that smell and the emotion we felt registered in our memory. We made the connection between the skunk and the smell and we formed an opinion about it. In the future seeing a skunk would be enough for you to go the other way. A dog on the other hand might go after a skunk again and again after being sprayed because it didn't make the connection between the discomfort and the skunk.

We don't actually relive the physical pain of the burn or the actual smell of the skunk.

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**We relive the bodily sensations  
that our triggered emotion  
invokes when recalling past  
events.**

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The same is true about everything that happens to us. We take in information through our senses, sight, sound, smell, taste and touch, and we process it through our brains and we form opinions about this information, which triggers our emotional & physical responses.

The truth is, we can't separate ourselves from our environment. When we experience an event in our lives, we experience the space in which the event is taking place simultaneously. It's all one experience.

The truth is, by the time we are 2 or 3 years old, and certainly by the age of 5, we've already formed some pretty strong beliefs about our world and how we fit into it. Our needs are basic – food, love and safety. We know whether our needs are being met and what it takes to get what we believe we need. We begin to form a relationship with our caregivers. We know what it takes to get attention in whatever form we feel we need in the moment. These relationships begin to shape our lives and our beliefs about ourselves and our world evolves, and we establish our value systems based on these beliefs.

Remember that we can't separate ourselves from our environment so part of this early experience is the space in which the events of our lives take place. Since the experience, whether good or bad, also includes the living space, we can go to the memory of that early living space for clues about our feelings about our space in the present.

For example, say something unsavoury happened to you as a child in a room with a green carpet. You might have long dealt with the event on a conscious level, but on a subconscious level, you can still be triggered by the visual experience of green carpet years later. Perhaps you get a sick feeling in your "gut" or the hairs on the back of your neck bristle. - you just know green carpet makes you uncomfortable in the present.

Similarly, if your Mom taught you that cleanliness is next to godliness, your value of self will be built on this belief and as an adult, there's a pretty good chance that you will be a "neat freak".

Suppose your experience supports the belief that basements are dark scary places. You'll find it hard as an adult to get comfortable in a sub-ground family room. - no matter how beautiful it might appear.

**It's not by chance that you have very personal and real needs from your space as an adult.**

**I can't emphasize enough that your feelings are unique.**

**The smells you breathe in are** not experienced in the same way as your friends or even your loved-ones experience them. The sounds you hear do not sound the same to you as they might to another. The colours you experience do not necessarily invoke the same emotions as they might someone else. You might enjoy the same perfume, music and even colour as someone else, but the experiences themselves are unique to the individual.

## **The First Part of The Secret**

**So, we have the first part of our Secret - our perspective through our early memory and the filters of our life experience, influence our feelings in the present.**

Every second of every day we are bombarded with 4 billion pixels of information per second but on a conscious level, we only relate to 2,000 bits per second. The rest is either absorbed on a subconscious level most of which we never relate to or simply passes us by. We're programmed by the experience of our past and follow this database in automated behaviour.

However, each of us is also evolving, changing and growing. We're influenced by repeating messages of advertising which ultimately shape our cultural and societal perspectives. We may want to be "current" and "hip" and the messages we're receiving may be that the new and latest colours and furniture styles will do this for us. Or, we may genuinely crave change in our lives. We may be wrestling with old values and really want to let them go and replace them with new ones.

In any event, for whatever reason we are confronted with our present day desires.

So, we go out and we find that new furniture and the new colours that we now think we crave and we bring them home. But guess what? They just don't feel right!

You know you loved them in the picture; you were so excited when you purchased them; but when you got them home, what went wrong?

Well, we might be in the position that our old values are undermining our new intentions. We must go back to our value system and our early conditioning. If grandma's house was your safety and comfort zone and somewhere in your belief system there's a big old red stuffed chair in your picture of love and security, guess what, your new tan contemporary furniture isn't going to support your core belief. No amount of logic is going to override the emotional connection to your values, and of utmost significance, beliefs held in the past override present moment awareness.

**You must go to your beliefs and values and either begin the intended process of change or accept that the old red sofa “just feels good”.**

So, let's go back to Mary and her daughter. With respect for both and their points of view, and their love for each other, we discussed the “feelings” that each was experiencing around the “old” sofa and fabric choices.

Mary explained that she really liked the old sofa its shape and comfort; and that it held wonderful memories of their family growing up over the years...She and her husband had purchased it early in their marriage. They had saved hard and it was a token of the success they had achieved to do so. She was looking forward to freshening it up with the new fabrics she had chosen. When she thought about her choices, she remembered that the patterns & colours were similar to those her own mother and father had in their home and that in all of this was the wonderful memory of family and love.

In addition, she felt that recycling fit with her value system. Mary also openly addressed her wish to have her daughter's approval because she wanted her to feel good about visiting with her family.

Her daughter realized that it wasn't the sofa's shape or comfort she objected to but rather the colour and "feel" of the old sofa fabric. It reminded her of a velvet skirt she had when she was young which she hated to touch. When she thought about the new fabric choices she agreed that they invoked great memories of grandma's house. She also clearly wanted her mother to be happy with her choices and she validated her by encouraging her to satisfy her "feelings". They agreed that Mary's "feelings" should override since it was her house and that the daughter would reserve her expression of choice for her own home, and she assured her mother that she was more important to her than her sofa choice.

In the end Mary and her husband got their new look and really "feel good" about their home, knowing their daughter will continue to enjoy the connection of a happy family life.

A very different ending to this story would have resulted if Mary either ignored her own feelings and/or tried to compromise to please her daughter. Chances are Mary would never really feel the same about a new sofa and resentment ultimately could undermine their relationship.

***“There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so”...***

*William Shakespeare*

## CONCLUSION

While form and function are essential to great design and decorating, the real Secret to how these skills are applied for ultimate success lies in the firm understanding of our emotional connection to our homes. The answers lie within us, and if you are not hearing “how do you feel?” about the choices you are considering and you’re listening to someone say “I think you should”, the conversation has moved away from you and is now about the person making the recommendations. Always be aware and remember to consistently look for the emotional reactions... follow them through. Ask yourself “how do I feel”; “when did I have this feeling previously” ... and by all means, don’t settle for less than - **“it feels good”**.

***“The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched. They must be felt with the heart” ....***

*Hellen Keller*

***“The Secret of Great Decorating...  
You’ll know it when you feel it!!!” ...***

*Irene Turnbull*



## ***About Irene Turnbull....***

Irene holds a Diploma in Interior Design & Certificates in both Fashion Design and Business Administration & Textile Courses from Ryerson Polytechnical Institute. She's also a Certified Feng Shui Practitioner FSIA. She opened ***That Country Place*** in Orillia, Ontario in 1988, with her husband William (Bill) Turnbull, which ultimately evolved to the well-known custom interior design house, Turnbull Interiors.

A self-proclaimed addict for knowledge about our mind-body-soul connection, Irene has continued to pursue some of the world's leading researchers and authorities on the subject, attending numerous courses in Canada & the U.S. and studying hundreds of books and research papers. Her pursuit of this leading edge science has enabled her understanding of our physical and emotional needs from our homes and sets her apart in the world of interior design & decorating.

Irene freely shares her knowledge in her books and published articles which are all made available on her website: [www.turnbullinteriors.com](http://www.turnbullinteriors.com) where you will also find a list of her reference materials and recommended reading for those who share her interests.

Dedicated to maintaining the highest industry standards and professional practices within her industry, Irene is a past National Chair, and current member of CDECA (Canadian Decorators Association) and serves on the Interior Decorating and Kitchen & Bath Advisory Committees of Georgian College. She's a member of NKBA – National Kitchen & Bath Association Her full profile is available at: [www.turnbullinteriors.com](http://www.turnbullinteriors.com) .

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Irene Turnbull has a mission "*to make the world happier, one home at a time!*" and what's more, she's doing it!!! Now, she wants to share her ***Secret of Great Interior Design and Decorating*** with you!!

Irene thinks it's time for the design industry to expand its body of knowledge to engage science's undeniable understanding of human perception, as a major component for achieving lasting harmony in our living spaces.

Over and over research continues to prove our inseparable bond between our physiology and our emotions and the role that our thoughts & beliefs have on both. Irene fully understands the impact of perception. She's "in tune" with the reality of how our uniqueness and personal interpretations of our individual experiences directly impact our life choices, including those that affect our homes.

She knows most difficulties for people have little to do with the colour of paint or the furniture in the room; but rather it's our thoughts about our choices that ultimately influence whether we feel good in our space or not. She says good design is about the people who live in the space not the designer.

The secret of creating great living spaces is knowing how to help people unravel the mysteries of their likes & dislikes so they can make the design & decorating choices that connect with their positive feelings of daily comfort & wellbeing.

### ***The Secret of Great Decorating***

will take you to the starting gate...

Other books by Irene Turnbull  
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