





Culture is a complicated subject. It's not just our past—where we came from and what our heritage is. It's also our future —where we're going and who we want to be when we get there. Since founding Lara Michelle Beautiful Interiors more than 20 years ago, Lara has been fortunate to have had clients who've come to the U.S. from all over the world, many of them looking for ways to blend the culture they came from with the culture they came to. "I find that my clients want to embrace American culture," says Lara, "so while they absolutely want to represent their heritage and where they came from, they don't want to solely hold on to their past, but rather remember it as they move forward with their life here."

And while Americans often don't think in explicit terms about their culture, Lara finds that her clients from other countries do. "I've had clients who were originally from India and South Africa, and when we began our discussions about what they wanted, they talked about having their culture represented in their homes." Lara's job then becomes finding ways to marry the client's native culture with American culture. "I never want the ordinary or the cliché in my designs," she says. "Specific color palettes, textile patterns and textures are all ways I'm able to subtly represent a client's native culture."

Many of her clients have children, and that factor also plays an important role in Lara's designs. "Since my clients tend to be young families, practicality takes precedence. I always choose furnishings that are beautiful, but they have to be comfortable, durable and easy to clean as well."

Starting from a neutral palette and using sumptuous fabrics that look and feel good, Lara adds just the right amount of bold colors and patterns, like the jewel-hued accent pillows and throw blanket in this cozy living space. The furniture is plush and cushioned, avoiding hard woods and edges, to prevent bonked heads and bruises should little ones be playing nearby. Soft and subdued colors in the bedrooms give the spaces a somnolent, soothing ambience that is perfect for winding down and relaxing before bedtime.

Culture is our past, present and future. It binds us in time and place, and whether consciously or not, we all seek ways to express that culture in our lives and homes.