

5 Interior Design Studios on the Modern Prairie Aesthetic and Why it's the Next Big Thing

A reinterpretation of the Prairie movement of the late 1800s, it's an eclectic capsule of classic and contemporary styles

Chances are, you've never heard of the Modern Prairie aesthetic. After all, it is one of cowboy country's best-kept secrets. A sophisticated take on traditional farmhouse, it's a style that traces its roots to America's Prairie movement of the late 1800s. Lately, we've seen a resurgence of the aesthetic, with interior designers across America reinterpreting the style in their own unique way. Here, 5 designers take us through what Modern Prairie means to them, how it has informed their work, and why they think it's only going to get bigger.

Cortney McClure of Cortney McClure Designs

Bartlesville, Oklahoma

Design journey: As a little girl, I loved rearranging rooms in our home. I started out working in the oil and gas sector but ultimately wanted to find a career path that fed me creatively, and provided more flexibility for my family. When we designed and built our own modern farmhouse, I realised design was the path I wanted to be on.

Modern Prairie playbook: Place is very significant to me and guides my design process. Oklahoma has a wide variety of styles and approaches to home and life. Your home should reflect how you live; it shouldn't be in conflict with your physical surroundings. I incorporate equal measures of grit and luxury in my spaces.

A project I'm proud of: Can I name two? The first would be a property at Starview Estates in Bartlesville, Oklahoma. The space was dark and ornate and the couple's Native American art collection had little room to shine. We lightened up the space with a blue chaise longue, sumptuous sofas, a console table, pillows, rugs, elegant accents, dining tables and chairs, and a reupholstered game table. All the while, we kept the art collection at the centre of the design scheme. The second is a project very dear to me. It is the farmhouse I share with my husband, Travis. We built it on family land outside Bartlesville. It was a true family affair. My husband, dad and other family members worked together to do the dirt and tree removal; something I will never forget. When my family comes back to our house for holidays and celebrations, there is a collective sense of belonging.

Design heroes: Heidi Caillier for her use of colour, pattern, textiles and elements. Leanne Ford for her simplistic and unique approach to creating intentional spaces.

Modern Prairie forecast: I see longevity in the Modern Prairie aesthetic because more and more clients are leaning into their own style and mixing in new items with meaningful and intentional improvements.

Coleen Norris of Nesting Place Interiors

Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida

Design journey: I've learned and grown through countless experiences in the design field. Whether it be working in the hospitality industry in special events for The Four Seasons or working as a Scalamandre rep, each experience helped build the basis for my practice today.

Design philosophy: I've lived all over and borrow bits from everywhere. My traditional sensibilities are inspired by Washington D. C., my boho side comes from California, and I often echo the magical vibe of Florida's Alys Beach in my projects. I focus on marrying form and function when creating beautiful spaces.

Modern Prairie playbook: I love incorporating hand-hewn beams, reclaimed antique doors, and organic, natural elements in my designs. They each add so much warmth and character.

A project I'm proud of: A Florida home built by a lovely couple from New England. The goal was to include traditional elements from their previous home along with contemporary additions. We added reclaimed wood beams and reclaimed wood headers in the Great Room to add a beautiful warmth to the new build. We also incorporated partial stained cabinetry to evoke a Modern Prairie style.

Modern Prairie forecast: I think people are increasingly leaning into clean, open spaces with thoughtful details. Shiplap is being eclipsed by warm, pecky walls and reclaimed beams. Textures are in!

Alyssa Wavra of Wavra Design Co.

Silverton, Oregon

Design journey: I was in the medical field for 12 years and officially began my architectural drafting and design journey in 2014. I took on work for a dear friend, drafting small homes and additions. Years of building relationships with clients and builders has led me to where I am now. I am proudly self-taught. There have been many late nights, lots of mistakes and tears, but what I've gained is a renewed zeal for architecture.

Modern Prairie playbook: Warm, earthy tones; lots of texture and colour. Modern Prairie is a sweeping design concept. It's an approach that gives you room to move and breathe.

A project I'm proud of: A wine-county-inspired home in the Oregon Wine Hills, designed for a family for the 2022 Oregon Street of Dreams Tour. On this particular project, we really focused on the gorgeous valley views that set the home apart from other nearby residences. The key to

this project was layering—not just different grains of wood, but also different treatments, some more aged than others. We complemented the light and dark timber with brick, steel and glass. In creating a rich mix of finishes and details, we could take a more restrained approach to furnishing.

Design heroes: Pioneers! I am so inspired by our ancestors. I am obsessed with old house designs. Frank Lloyd Wright was a genius! One of his homes is on display in my hometown of Silverton.

Modern Prairie forecast: I see the aesthetic as not just another trend, but an enduring design concept that integrates seamlessly into a broad range of architectural styles: from mid century modern (which is so prevalent here in Portland) to traditional and new construction. I also believe Modern Prairie will become increasingly localised to different regions in terms of what materials and colours are used.

Elizabeth Drake of Drake Interiors

Winnetka, Illinois

Design journey: I never planned on becoming an interior designer. I am trained in fine art and have a degree in painting and graphic design. Once, while working on some fabric schemes for an early client, it became very clear to me that interior design is a 3D version of a fine art painting. Slowly, people who saw my home started asking me to design theirs. The transition was an evolutionary process and over time, I gained more experience and confidence.

Modern Prairie playbook: Clean lines reminiscent of the Prairie Style of the early 1900s, but with an emphasis on texture, material and natural colours.

A project I'm proud of: A lakehouse in the woods in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. It had a lot of flaws and trying to fix all of them was like having the tail wag the dog. We ultimately tore the entire thing down and built it back up to look like it had always been there. Its serene location instantly evoked the clean lines and textural warmth of the Prairie style. I was especially inspired by the fact that this part of the US is the birthplace of the aesthetic, and found ample opportunities to bring new interpretations to the iconic look.

Design heroes: Bunny Williams. I used to pore over magazine spreads of her projects, analysing layouts, furnishings and selections. She is masterful at layering elements.

Modern Prairie forecast: Over the past few years, designers have been gravitating towards using beautiful glow effects à la chiaroscuro in a Dutch painting: dark backgrounds with golden colours that glow. It's something that I see pairing well with Modern Prairie in the future.

Kirsten Grove & Sam Salinas of We Three Design

Boise, Idaho

Design journey: I (Kirsten) am a self-taught designer and have worked in the design industry for over a decade. I started blogging and writing about design which led me into my career. My business partner, Samantha Salinas, studied design at the University of Idaho and then moved overseas for further studies. She got her first job at a large design firm. From there, she worked at another small firm before she and I joined forces for We Three Design. We are now almost 4 years old and specialise in both residential and commercial design.

Modern Prairie playbook: Modern Prairie replaces elements of farmhouse style with more simple, primitive details, but it can work equally well against more modern backdrops. Textures like stone, raw wood and industrial metals are our go-to for any space.

A project we're proud of: A family cabin that we redesigned in McCall, Idaho. We stripped away the overly saturated wood and replaced it with clay, linens, brick tiles and pops of raw wood.

Design heroes: Any designer residing in Paris or Sydney has our hearts. Caroline Andreoni is constantly pushing the boundaries of design. And you can't get any cooler than Arent & Pyke.

Modern Prairie forecast: We've noticed a surge in eclectic design of late. Homeowners and renters have got more experimental and aren't taking design too seriously. Whimsical wallpapers, vintage furniture and creative colour palettes are all winning!