

DESIGN IS LOOKING UP

Decorative ceiling medallions and moldings add details and dimension

BY KELLY ROSE

WHEN IT COMES TO HOME DECOR, WALL COLOR AND FURNITURE SELECTION are the usual focal points of decorating. It's easy to overlook the statement-making architectural elements of a room, like decorative ceiling medallions and moldings. Some may see them as exclusively belonging to century-old Garden District mansions, but just as a bold color choice can make an impact, so can a decorated ceiling.

Decorative molding isn't a new design element in homes, in New Orleans or elsewhere. Many French, Greek and Italian palaces dating back to the 18th century had ornate ceilings trimmed with molding, coffers and medallions. In contemporary homes, these types of ceiling adornments offer a chance to add a unique design element — whether the house is a palace or a single-bedroom bungalow.

Moldings typically are made from plaster or wood. They can be simple designs or quite detailed. More detailed ceiling medallions usually provide the framework for a beautiful chandelier and are often showcased in the center of a room.

Jeff Poree Plastering occupies 15,000 square feet in a Mid-City warehouse. Poree and his staff of 30 create custom decorative ceiling medallions and moldings that adorn many New Orleans homes.

A tour of Poree's warehouse shows a massive amount of plaster, molds and artist renderings of new works. The main area has long carpentry tables and various tools needed to perfect his moldings. Poree also collects driftwood he's found over the years and large aquariums for his fish.

"I was born into this business," Poree



says. He grew up in the 7th Ward and was born into a family of plasterers. He learned his trade from his father, Calvin Poree. Under his tutelage, the younger Poree learned what the four generations before him did to earn a living.

Walking through Poree's warehouse, you'll see what will soon be installed in many homes throughout the city. Poree casually mentions the names of a few clients, many of which are familiar and belong to local business owners, politicians and even a Hollywood actress who's restoring a home she purchased recently. He repairs damaged ceiling moldings and creates new pieces to fit in with the original architecture of his clients' homes.

"In New Orleans, almost everything is historic and old," Poree says. "We repair what is broken and missing and we restore it. Clients will call me to match the original crown molding to the ceiling medallions that were original in their house."

Poree doesn't dispute that matching original decorative moldings or creating new ones can be expensive, but he says it doesn't have to be. "We have less expensive things too that can work in any home. We really have something for everybody."

While Poree works behind the scenes perfecting the look and quality of his moldings, designer Susan Currie of **Susan Currie Design** makes sure these decorative pieces enhance a home's artistry.

"Homes that already boast strong architectural bones offer a great foundation for adding ceiling moldings," she says. "A dramatic design statement can be made in any room with molding details, whether

Final installation of custom-made ceiling medallion and molding. Jeff Poree does new construction and restoration of ceiling treatments.

PHOTO COURTESY OF JEFF POREE

you're adding an ornate medallion over the dining room table or trimming out the ceiling in a striking geometric or curvilinear pattern. If you live in a less formal house and admire decorative ceiling moldings, consider creating a coffered ceiling in the family room or study. Even a vaulted ceiling can be dressed up with moldings."

Currie also recommends using decorative ceiling moldings in larger rooms like a living or dining room where the "eye can wander up to admire your ceiling masterpiece."

While decorative ceiling moldings are more common in older homes, Currie sees them in both new construction and renovations. Moldings can blend modern and traditional styles, creating clean lines as well as invoking baroque opulence.

"It's a fantastic way to add character and enhance visual interest," she says.

New moldings made of plaster can take weeks to design and install, but for those with the DIY spirit, there's also a cost-effective way to quickly add this stylish element to a home. Home improvement stores like Home Depot and Lowe's sell prefabricated decorative ceiling tiles made of plastic or resin that can be installed easily with a ladder and some adhesive. These pieces come in various colors and finishes, but to get a customized look, consider painting them in bright hues to make them pop. [C]