In *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, Dutch historian Johan Huizinga uses the metaphor of fall to illustrate a time when art, fashion, and life became more vivid and brilliant before dying to make way for the Renaissance. Just as there are seasons in history, there are also transitions in a person’s life: the spring of young adulthood, the summer of raising a family, the autumn of middle age, and—finally—the winter of old age. Each of these stages provides challenges and opportunities for the interior designer.

The design focus for older clients is different from that of those just starting out. Geoffrey de Sousa designed the living room of the 2008 San Francisco Decorators Showcase with a young bachelor in mind. Using an original color scheme of moonlit blue, sunset orange, and sunlight yellow, the lively and elegant room provides ample seating for entertaining large parties along with places for private introspection. De Sousa chose furniture and fabrics from his San Francisco showroom, which specializes in fresh contemporary design, mixing in Art Deco and mid-century pieces that would appeal to a young client.

From the spring of young adulthood to the summer of raising a family, clients’ needs change. The Nahemow Rivera Group renovated a Mediterranean-style Sea Cliff villa for a young family, mixing playful primary colors with calming neutrals to delight both children and adults. A bold vermillion and gold entry illuminated by a fanciful Murano glass chandelier outlined with cobalt paint is a precursor to the red, yellow, and blue children’s playroom upstairs. Because the playroom’s shell shares color and design
motifs with the rest of the home, it can be updated easily as the children grow.

After the children leave home, a couple may want to pare down their furnishings to what is exquisite and essential. Designer Christian Wright of Wright-Simpkins in Sebastopol has worked with many empty nesters. He has noticed that they are more aware of the quality of their residences. Wright says, “They may want to take a room and give it a new look with more extravagant materials and furnishings, since they are no longer concerned with childproofing their homes.” This was the case for a project that Shelby de Quesada completed for a couple on Russian Hill. De Quesada created a jewel-box guest room for visiting family and friends. Using a burnt coral Fortuny fabric and antique cinnabar Chinoiserie secretaire as the inspiration for the design, she commissioned Claudio Mariani to fabricate a custom canopy bed. The result is a vivid and brilliant room.

Until recently, the winter of life had not been addressed in design, but that is changing as the aging population increases. BAMO, a San Francisco-based company, has worked on various senior living projects in Japan, merging form with function. In contrast to the jejune pastels that are found in many retirement facilities, the design team led by Gerry Jue chose a sophisticated palette mirroring the Japanese landscape. Lighting, furniture scale, and product durability were considered in regard to their appropriateness for mature occupants.

Designers have also begun to remodel residences to allow their clients to age in situ. In his own historic Belvedere home, Paul Vincent Wiseman of The Wiseman Group restored the 100-year-old property in anticipation of his future retirement. He created a lower-level guest suite that can be converted to accommodate a live-in caretaker, as well as a secondary entry for the master bedroom with wheelchair access. Most importantly in the winter of his life Wiseman will be surrounded by what he loves: friends, books, and art.