



Selecting Accessories For Your Home

The Personal Touch

Accessories are the most personal part of interior design. They give rooms personality and express you and your taste. These functional and decorative items tell something about the interests and activities of the people who live in the home. Since you have the freedom to create unique rooms that provide excitement and vitality for you and your family, why leave it static and boring? Instead, use careful selection and arrangement of accessories to transform a *furnished* room into a *finished* room with a personality all of its own.

Selecting Accessories

The selection and placement of accessories in a room are usually the most enjoyable parts of decorating. These accessories can be either functional or decorative, with some being both. For instance, you could hang baskets on the wall (decorative) and then use them for displaying fresh fruit or for organizing magazines (functional). Another example would be a carefully selected wall sconce that is decorative in addition to shedding light on a lackluster wall.

Functional accessories usually serve a specific purpose or need. Examples include clocks, mirrors, pillows, vases, table lighters, lamps, books, spices in a kitchen or bowls of fruit.

Take extra care to choose attractive functional accessories. This is especially important in small spaces since your functional accessories may have to carry the entire load of finishing or completing the room. For example, an elegant vase or bowl makes an attractive art object as well as a container for flowers or other things.

Decorative accessories are those that you can choose for their beauty alone. Plants and flowers, paintings, photographs, sculpture, handcrafted items and collections play an important part in enriching our home and our spirits. A home without any decorative objects would be almost like a world without sound. The decorative accessories you choose help to set a mood and to make a statement.

It's important to think through exactly what finishing touches are needed in a room, but a rigid plan or arrangement is not necessary. You'll probably change your mind as you go along, find better places for objects and move them around for better balance. Or you may happen upon some unusual placement or combination that will give just the spark your room needs.

Neither the style nor the design of furniture and accessories must match, but they should be equally formal or informal. The way a piece fits in its environment is important, but there are very few rules on the use of accessories.

This makes it doubly important that you experiment and train your eye to see what makes a pleasing combination of accessories.

Accessories All Around You

Interesting and inexpensive ideas can be found everywhere and used throughout your home. Look for personalized ways of accessorizing your home. Regional characteristics of the area where you live might be reflected in your choice of accessories. Or you may have interesting or cherished items that have been handed down through your family. Hobbies or special interests of family members may solve the problem of what to do with empty wall space, table surfaces or shelves. Here are some suggestions for interesting home accents.

- **Folk art** is the term for simple, traditional objects made by artists in many countries. It is meaningful, beautiful and often useful. These pieces can come from such faraway places as Africa and Mexico or from your own regional craft shops and artists. Folk art includes pottery, weaving, woodcraft, metalwork, glass-blowing, basketry and many other crafts. If possible, keep a record of the artist's name and purchase date.



- **Heritage items**, whether true antiques or collectibles, can be family treasures or purchased from antique shops and flea markets. An old sign, maps, a stained glass window or old tools and household utensils add interest to any interior whether it is modern or traditional. One family, originally from upper New York

state, has collected items from the old Erie Canal. Old lock signs, posters, pieces of early equipment and other items decorate one room.

- **Family photographs** can be valued and treasured accents in any home. Snapshots can be composed in collages and placed in one frame. Formal portraits are perfect in any room of the house. Casual snapshots are best used in informal rooms. Assorted framed pictures can be grouped in a wall arrangement, or placed on easels and used on tables or in bookcases.
- **Travel mementos** from places you've visited provide conversation starters and pleasant memories. You may decide to collect state plates, artwork, travel posters or crafts representatives of areas you have traveled through.



- **Natural materials**, such as flowers, fruit, vegetables and other "found" items can provide important accents in the home. With an alert eye you can spot interesting seashells, rocks, minerals, stones, weeds, pods or flowers for dried arrangements, or even a bare branch to place in a glass container. Display potatoes on a wooden tray, polished eggplants and purple grapes in a crystal bowl and an assortment of fruit or vegetables in a large basket. Consider mixing fruit, and cones in a large wicker tray and sprinkle a few fall leaves on top for the holidays. Bowls of nuts always lend warmth to a decor. Flowers, whether brought in from the wild, cut from the

garden or purchased at the florist, can be effective when loosely placed in a vase or arranged to accentuate a particular theme. Even an assortment of greenery with a variety of textures and colors will create a very pleasant accent. These materials help to create a *living* environment.



- **Plants** give immediate vitality to a room. They are a wonderful ecological decorating accessory that feeds on carbon dioxide and emits oxygen. Consider where they will be placed in the room so you can select plants that have the appropriate humidity and light to grow and flourish. Plants can sit on window sills, tables, shelves, or pedestals, or hang from the ceiling.

To arrange a large groups of plants on the floor, always begin with the largest plant first, intermingle plants of different heights, shapes, colors and textures. It is pleasing to finish the bottom with low-flowering plants. Hanging baskets should be hung at the height where they are viewed from their best angle.

Choose containers that blend with the decorative character of your room. Rough textures such as terra cotta, pottery, or baskets are appropriate for an informal look while brass, porcelain, glass, and delicate baskets create a more formal look.

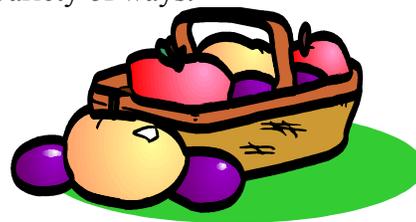
Highlighting plants with lighting is very effective. Inexpensive spotlights can be placed on the floor among the plants, or under trees. Light shines up through the leaves and casts dramatic shadows on the

walls and ceilings. Accent lighting from the ceiling emphasizes specific plants.

- **Books or magazines** arranged spontaneously on a shelf or table surface add warmth to a room. Combine books with an occasional figurine, a small painting, a trophy or other small article you prize. Tuck in a small plant and let it creep over the edge of a shelf. One collector of cornhusk dolls places them on bookshelves with their feet dangling over the edge, on top of end tables, and other places to draw the eye and add interest and an element of surprise.

- **Sculpture** can be purchased from young artists, art schools or community art shows. Sometimes interesting objects, such as carved newel posts or parts of demolished buildings, can be used as sculptural pieces. Small items can be displayed on rectangular or square plywood bases painted flat black or white. A small spotlight creates a dramatic setting.

- **Baskets** are basic to all cultures. They are meant to be used, but are often works of art. They can be hung on a wall, hung from the kitchen ceiling along with pots and pans, displayed in groupings on tables, or lined and used for flower arrangements. Their popularity has surged because they are readily available, are lightweight, can be purchased at reasonable prices, and can be used in a variety of ways.



- **Hobbies** and activities can be the source for interesting decorative accessories. Do you play a musical instrument, do needlework, collect stamps, build model

airplanes or cars or like plants? If so, use them to enrich your home.

- **Collections** can result from a planned activity or can just happen. They can be as fanciful as mounted butterflies, as serious as beautifully bound books or coin collections, as personal as family photographs or needlepoint pieces, or as specialized as brass candlesticks. Most of us collect something. If things are worth collecting, they're worth displaying where they can be seen and enjoyed.
- **Boxes** of every imaginable type, ranging in size from cricket boxes to huge trunks, can be acquired. Combine boxes that relate and look good together. Use large trunks as cocktail tables or open them to display plants, linens or your favorite hobby. Stack boxes and storage baskets of similar or graduated sizes into decorative wall units.
- **Pillows** can change the look and feeling of a room. By using various fabrics, trims, colors, designs, textures, shapes and sizes, pillows can help balance the room by repeating the colors or patterns found on the other side of the room. Pillows are one of the least expensive ways to give a room a refreshed look, and are perfect for do-it-yourself projects.



- **Lamps** should create light where it is needed. Each room needs general and specific lighting. General lighting illuminates the whole room. In most cases, every seating area in a conversation grouping needs a light source of some kind. Lighting for specific activities such as reading, working and studying is also

necessary. If the lighting is not built in, it must be provided by lamps. Consider the height of each lamp shade within a room. The bottoms of the shades should be close to the same distance from the floor. If you use a tall lamp on a low table, you might use a shorter lamp on a higher table. Most conventional lamps range from 24 to 30 inches in height. They should be placed on low enough tables so the shades cover the bulbs at the eye level of a person seated in the room. White and off-white shades cast the most light, but dark or metal shades reflect their light in interesting pools.

Today, lamps are made to fit any mood or special needs, and they come in several sizes and shapes. Types of lamps include floor lamps, wall lamps, theme lamps and high intensity lamps with a direct beam.

Consider Design of Accessories

Honesty and simplicity are important aspects of good design. A well-designed piece will always be effective, no matter what is in vogue at the time. Develop your design conscientiousness. Observe objects in nature. Light and shadow, shape, texture, pattern and color can develop personal awareness. Does the accessory gain impact from the character of the material, such as with the grain of a wood sculpture, or the texture and pattern in a woven wall hanging? Look for balance, scale and proportion, rhythm and emphasis.

Novel items, materials and designs are being constantly introduced in home furnishings. Applying your knowledge of what constitutes good design will enable you to use discrimination in selecting accessories for your home. Ask yourself these questions about the design:

- Are the lines simple and related to the overall shape?
- Do the lines add to the usefulness or attractiveness of the object?
- Do the lines carry the eye from one point to another and around the object?

- Does the shape of the object help to accomplish its purpose or function?
- Are the shapes within the object in good proportion to each other?

Good design ideas come in circle and geometric forms such as the square, oval, triangle, rectangle and variations of nature's designs. Some accessories are balanced in design—one side is a mirror image of the other. These symmetrical designs are formal and peaceful. Asymmetrical balance, or informal balance, arouses attention and is usually casual.



Applied decoration can be added to an object after it is completed, such as a design etched on glass or a pattern printed on a placemat. Check to see if the applied decoration complements the object's use, basic form, size and the materials from which it is made, or if the surface decoration is showy, elaborate and impractical. Will the decoration tend to "date" the object?

Is the accessory suited to its function? Does it work? A placemat that does not lie flat on a table is not appropriate for its intended use. A lamp that is too tall for a table and produces glare is not suitable for its purpose.

Is the accessory aesthetically pleasing? Is the design of the object simple and well-proportioned? Is it pleasing in texture and color? Is it suited to the material from which it is made? Is it honest, or is it made to look like some other material?

Is the surface decorating appropriate? Does it enhance its shape, beauty and function?

Is the size, shape and color in harmony with the place where it will be used, the background, nearby furniture and light?

Is it needed?

Accessories that are striking and bold in color usually attract attention. How does the color of an accessory affect its visual weight? The natural color of some materials is the most pleasing color. Do the colors suit the mood of the accessory? Bold contemporary designs may suggest vivid, clean colors. Soft shapes and lines may suggest more subdued colors.

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