

Trusted advice for the curious life

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Nature as Decor

Simplicity, Sunshine and Color Bring It Home



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— Mally Skok, founder of Mally Skok Design

Next time you're hit with a nature-inspired DIY interior-decorating urge, go beyond tacky store-bought, seashells-turned-soap dishes and \$40 rocks with "Peace" and "Serenity" engraved on them. Instead, keep things simple and sparse, filching the best of what the outdoors has to offer in the way of pebbles scooped off the forest's floor and a vase filled with garden-plucked succulents.

Anything that swims -- a goldfish in a bowl or a small turtle in a terrarium -- adds a tranquil element to your environment. Choose a few key objects as focal points for each room, and you'll create an atmosphere that's as lush and luminous as nature's bounty.

Let the Sunshine In

To bring about an earthy, airy feel to your home, start by letting the sunshine in, suggests Mally Skok, fabric designer and founder of Mally Skok Design based in Lincoln, Massachusetts.

"Windows in a room are the eye into nature," said Skok, whose design projects have been featured in "Boston" and "Traditional Home" magazines. "There's nothing more natural than early-morning light streaming through a kitchen window.

"The most unexpectedly beautiful colors come from nature -- the color of sunshine behind leaves, the yellow of citrus fruit or a big bowl of daffodils," Skok added. "The colors are as modern and vibrant as anything you could print up on a piece of paper."

Many times, Skok points out, the best home decor accessories are free: a piece of bark, a single branch, a birch tree or a bough of a beautiful white dogwood in a big glass jar. Even a flattened strand of mauve-y-colored seaweed in a shadow box can serve as a tangible and nostalgic reminder of a romantic seaside holiday.

"These things cost zero dollars and look so incredibly cool," said Skok, who recommends scouring the beach for large stones -- roughly half the size of a football -- to use as doorstops (stick circles of adhesive felt on the bottom so the rock stays put) and collecting heaps of broken "junkie" shells to place around the base of candles.

"Shells are nice if you pick them up yourself and they mean something as opposed to buying them on the Internet or at a department store," said Skok, who also recommends picking up little artifacts like homemade artisan soaps while on the go. "When things are authentic and relevant, they change the whole atmosphere."

True Colors

When it comes to choosing a color palette for the interior of your home, nature's hues know best: the bright blue of the sky; the rich, deep green of a tree's leaves in summer; the sparkling turquoise of the Caribbean Sea. Even the opalescent underside of a muscle shell found on the beach can be a beautiful base color for a room.

"Nature is there to inspire color on a daily basis," said Carley Teplow, a decorator based in Boston. "Paint your walls a deep green-blue to bring out the ocean or leave your walls neutral to let natural light bounce off the walls."

"Kelly green with a little bit of turquoise in it is hugely popular this year," added Mally Skok, founder of Mally Skok Design in Lincoln, Massachusetts. "Also, the color of sand, which is beige-y mauve-y with bits of purple and pink, looks just amazing."

For aesthetic inspiration, take a walk in the woods or a stroll along the beach, suggested Teplow. "Just find

something that you love and go from there."

Bring the Outside In -- Literally

For Mark Christofi, founder of Christofi Interiors, an award-winning firm in Reading, Massachusetts, a walk in the woods, a grassy park with towering evergreens or even your back patio can serve as the perfect inspiration for naturalizing your home.

"Not only does outdoor furniture look really great, but it wears really well," said Christofi, who recommends using an old picnic table as a kitchen island or a wooden bench as an indoor seating area. "It's about reversing what's expected and moving what's exterior into the interior."

To wit, Christofi, who's renovated homes in places from Lake Winnepesaukee to Los Angeles, substituted a stone birdbath for a sink, with a faucet installed in the wall overhead, in a recent bathroom decorating project.

"Anything you'd normally use on the outside of the house -- lighting fixtures, sconces, lanterns -- look really beautiful inside," he said.

Using all-natural materials like soft, cream-colored linen and sisal straw -- the stiff fiber used in making rope -- also lends itself to a cozy, idyllic outdoor style.

For the bedroom, try wooden decor with a rough, rustic finish or "twiggy" furniture -- tables, beds and chairs -- of the sort you'd find in a treehouse in a remote overgrown jungle.

"Wallpaper is another amazing way to showcase nature, especially in smaller spaces like the foyer or powder room," Skok said. "The technology is so advanced ... there are so many beautiful prints with grass or outlines of silvery trees or papers that incorporate organic elements like hemp, jute and grass cloth that really bring nature into the modern world." For a more minimalist look, you can also do a "feature wall," applying paper to just one side of the room.

Ultimately, no matter what accessories you choose, you want to keep things open and expansive and bathed in lots of natural light.

"Bring in as many green things you possibly can," Christofi said. "Bring in as much light as you possibly can. Go out and buy some beautiful plants and trees -- you can't go wrong."

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Resources

- [Mally Skok Design](#)
- [Christofi Interiors](#)