

SPECTACULAR SHELFIES

BY ANN KOEHLER

LOCAL DESIGNERS CHIME IN ON HOW TO DISPLAY YOUR MOST BELOVED ACCESSORIES.



MEREDITH OWEN INTERIORS,
PHOTO BY MOLLY CULVER



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As you stand there staring blankly at a wall of equally blank shelves with a pile of books and treasured objects next to you, just remember that this is the perfect opportunity to bring personality to your home by showcasing meaningful accessories and provide a pleasing and interesting focal point in your room. The task may seem daunting but there is a process that designers follow that brings beautiful results no matter what your collection includes.

To begin, edit your collection, whatever it may be. You might love every single piece but including it all might become monotonous. As you go along in the process, consider saving pieces for another area of your home where they might be better highlighted.

Embrace the blank state. This is how Austin designer Meredith Owen begins her process: “The first thing I always do is remove everything from the shelves and start fresh. If you have adjustable shelving, play with different heights to create visual interest.”

Consider tried-and-true approaches like grouping your library of books by color, adding personal touches with family photos, layering objects to accommodate the height and depth of your shelves and adding greenery when needed for color or organic contrast.

Exhibiting collections of like objects always makes for a dynamic display, but mixing and matching a variety of objects can be equally as visually interesting. “We love to mix





BRITT DESIGN GROUP, PHOTO BY MATT BATISTA

in our client's favorite and/or meaningful pieces found while traveling. Plants, books, interesting bookends, sculptural elements, family photos in great frames, small art pieces, mixed metals and stacked boxes all help to create a collected and engaging look," said Gina Roth, principal designer and owner of Abode Interior Design in San Antonio.

Then it's just a matter of arranging your collection one piece at a time. "Place large pieces first to anchor the shelves evenly. Add books for height variation, then add smaller pieces and treasures (think collected objects from travels, family photos, etc.). You can even think about hanging art on the back of the shelf or wall to add some unexpected interest (and height). Lastly fill in with some organic elements to keep the bookshelves from feeling too perfect," advised Meredith. The goal is to create curated scenes or vignettes that focus on groups of objects while the overall design is visually balanced.

And finally, avoid clutter. Perhaps Coco Chanel's advice to remove one accessory from your wardrobe can be applied to all areas of design. Negative space in design is important because it allows specific objects or groupings to be seen more clearly and places emphasis on what you choose as your primary focal points — it tells viewers where they should be looking. The amount of negative space can also help to set or follow a mood within your existing space.

But what if a designer's client is not a homeowner with personal mementoes to incorporate? This challenge was presented to Britt Design Group in Austin. Their task was to transform a dimly lit coffee shop into a show-stopping, two-story sales office for Moreland Properties, and the goal for the office was to evoke the feeling of a luxury residence, matching the aesthetic of the properties the client represents.



ABODE INTERIOR DESIGN, PHOTO BY GLASSLAKE MEDIA

The transformation included a dramatic dual height, back-lit shelving installation as one of the main focal points. “When planning a dual height feature wall of open shelving, one can get intimidated by the number of books you would need to fill them. Books aside, the challenge really lies in how you are to balance the special moments within those shelves — the books are actually secondary,” said Laura Britt, founding principal of Britt Design Group.

The design team collected and disrobed books from local consignment shops, seeking neutral and jewel toned binding. These acted as the props and layers for objects. Vases and sculptural objects were all collected from trade and vintage sources, with many sourced from the popular Texas-based Round Top Antiques Fair.



ABODE INTERIOR DESIGN, PHOTO BY GLASSLAKE MEDIA

The goal was to find a few textural statements and odd proportions to catch the eye. Secondary items in contrast were simply formed and saturated for supplementary layers. This method also kept the designers conscious of the budget. “We allocated higher dollars for the ‘impact pieces’ and got a little creative with the others. Turning a large vintage terracotta bowl vertically on a stand was one item that filled some nice space without the dollar signs behind it!” said Terah Kelley, designer at Britt Design Group.

To get this look at home, Laura and Terah advise to first locate your favorite and most striking pieces apart from each other and on different planes. Next, layer in the secondary items and add books for height or color to where the balance feels a bit off kilter.

Ultimately, they agree that your first intuition is always the best place to start but give yourself freedom to explore and get creative! ♦

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