

FEATURE ARTICLE

Book Keeping

Write a new chapter in home decor

By Irene Kew

Roman philosopher Cicero once said, "A room without books is like a body without a soul," to which interior decorators might add, "and a home without personality." After all, in the design world, books play an important decorative role in adding character to one's home.

"[Books] add color and texture to a room and warm up a home," says Jennifer O'Neil, co-author of *Decorating with Funky Shui: How to Lighten Up, Loosen Up, and Have Fun Decorating Your Home*. "The books you collect over the years are a reflection of you. They remind you and your visitors who you are and what you love."

Then there are those who take the books-as-décor concept a little farther – filling libraries and bookshelves with tomes they can't read. California book-décor specialist and **Book Décor** owner, Leni Leth sells Danish leather-bound books by the foot. Fairly new leather-bound books sell for about \$10, while older leather volumes (suitable for those traditional home libraries) go for \$15.

These old Danish books aren't meant to be read, but work well for Book Décor's clientele, most of whom just want an instant library. Her clients are mostly interior designers who work on huge homes with formal libraries. "What happens is people get very wealthy and build big homes for themselves," says Leth, whose largest sale to date was 12,000 books. "They have formal libraries with wonderful ceilings and wood paneling, and when they move, they realize there are no books. Of course, you can't fill a formal library with hardcovers or paperbacks... This is where I come in, because the Danes produced leather-bound books up until the 1980s."

To those who think displaying a collection of books that can't be read is pointless, Leth counters that the value of these tomes goes beyond their content. If properly cared for, the books will last hundreds of years. "Some of them are almost 150 to 200 years old," Leth continues. "The books take on a different value, because now you're looking at the workmanship and the fact that they're beautifully decorated and detailed."

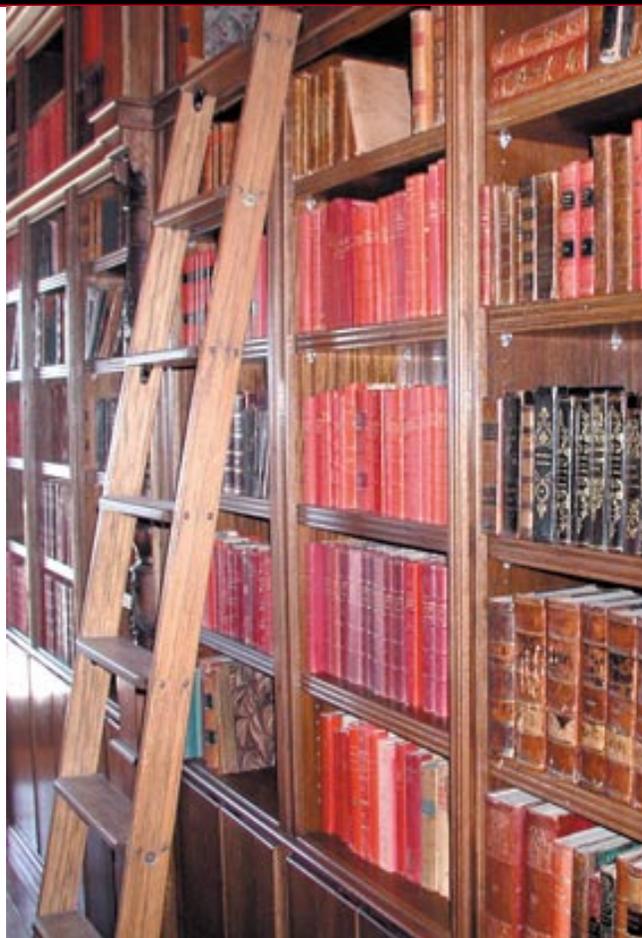
Whether it's a stash of tawdry paperbacks or a collection that rivals that of the Library of Congress, experts say you can never go wrong with books when it comes to decorating. "They can be put together any which way and they'll always look beautiful, because each and every book is in and of itself beautiful," Leth adds.

Here are some tips on dressing up your home with books:

PARE DOWN YOUR COLLECTION

Professional organizer Tamah Vega, owner of **A Sense of Home**, cautions that too many books can be overwhelming and contribute to clutter. "Set aside some time to go through your books and donate, or give away outdated books or ones you've outgrown and keep only those that truly inspire you," she advises.

For storage of extra books, Kitty O'Neil suggests hanging a shelf that goes all the way around a room just above the doorjamb. "Display stacks of books along the edge of your stairs. Cover an entire wall in bookshelves like a library and get a rolling library ladder," says the co-author of *Decorating with Funky Shui*. "Go through your books, keep the good-looking ones and any with 'deep psychological meaning,' then donate the rest to your local library. For paperbacks, try www.paperbackswap.com.



ORGANIZING BOOKS ON SHELVES

Interior decorating experts Jennifer and Kitty O'Neil suggest grouping books by subject so they're easy to find. "Plus, 20 books about bird watching make a statement," they say. "Vary the heights for visual interest. To break up the rhythm of the books on the shelves, turn a stack on its side occasionally. This creates a niche effect, too, so you can use the horizontal stack as a riser for an *objet d'art*."

"Plus it's perfect for too-tall books. If you have some books with gorgeous covers, try facing them out in between the rows of books. Use a plate stand to prop them up (like a bookstore)."

If it's the look of a formal, traditional library you seek, Leth and Vega both recommend placing books with the spine facing out and titles facing the same direction. When storing books vertically (the traditional side-by-side way), try to place books of similar height and colors together.

OFF THE SHELF

According to the O'Neils, books don't always have to be lined up on a bookshelf. Some funky shui ways of decorating with books include turning a stack of coffee table books into a table with a glass round tabletop, and stacking books under a chair to disguise cords or give a spindly chair some mass.

"Arrange your travel souvenirs with your travel guides to create vignettes. You can even create a sort of shrine with books. We made one honoring Betty Crocker to showcase our vintage cookbook collection," says Jennifer. "And we couldn't resist showing one of the recipes inside, so we propped a book open on a plate stand." Painting a wooden ladder and displaying books on it is another creative and space-saving option, Leth adds.

And whatever ways you choose to display your books, keep this in mind. "Guests will read your book titles, so don't put self-help books in the living room," Jennifer says.

EXPERTS

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