

At home

An occasional look at what's new and noteworthy

MATERIALS

Cork's a-poppin' in furnishings

Stories by Maria Puente, USA TODAY



"Friendly" cork: Daniel Michalik's Cortiça Chaise costs \$4,800. The Roost Cork Collection of votives and vases are \$15 to \$35.

Chaise by Mark Johnston; votives by Vivre.com

Good news for green types: Cork, a plentiful and sustainable material, is turning up in other parts of the home besides floors, including walls, furniture, fabric and accessories.

Cork comes from the bark of cork oak trees grown largely in Portugal and is harvested much the same as wool is cut from sheep. Fans say cork is hypoallergenic, waterproof, resistant to bugs and mold, heat and fire resistant, and absorbs sound.

"It's been used in floors for about 100 years, but it's become more popular for other products because it's environmentally friendly," says Wendy Patton, manager of the Cork House, the 190-year-old cork showroom in Ontario, Canada. Its website, corkstore.com, offers a range of cork products beyond the usual bulletin boards and wine stoppers.

Fancy cork wall tiles are a new application, from American Cork Products (amcork.com, about \$2-\$4 per square foot). Cork also is turning up in decorative items such as Vivre.com's vases and votives (\$15-\$35) and Cork-

Store's bathmats (about \$12).

In furniture, Daniel Michalik's Cortiça Chaise (danielmichalik.com, \$4,800) is actually made of cork. "Cork does all the things wood does except faster and easier because it's so soft," says the designer.

Other furnishings feature fabric made with cork, such as Baker Furniture's English Tufted Chair (kohlerinteriors.com for where to buy, \$3,700), which contains 13% cork. "We selected it for its unique texture and colors that you don't usually see in upholstered products," says Shaun Melvin, Baker's lead designer.

DESIGN

'Punk shui': A design philosophy that's as easy as one-two-three-four

Here's how to sum up "punk shui," the new radical home décor: A sofa chain-sawed in half. Smears of blood-red paint across a white wall. A philosophy that insists you embrace discomfort.

Come on, it's a joke, right? Josh Amatore Hughes, author of *Punk Shui: Home Design for Anarchists* (\$10.95), which Three Rivers Press blurbs as "Martha Stewart meets the Sex Pistols," insists he's serious.

It's about providing a creative environment "and that has a lot to do with chaos (or *kaos*, as Hughes spells it) and change," he says. Chaos invites change, "and change is going to bring something new, whether good or bad."

Hughes, 25, a New York art director/set designer for commercials, came up with the concept in deconstructing his own Chinatown apartment. His friends were

amazed and amused; now they're hiring him to do the same to their abodes.

It's no accident Hughes picked feng shui to riff on: The ancient Chinese art of correct placement of furnishings and décor to maximize harmony with nature is still wildly popular (more than 1,100 titles on Amazon.com), but now it's also being used for such things as arranging the baby's nursery and helping people achieve love, money and respect.

Everyone is "jumping on the bandwagon to make money," says L.A. feng shui expert Angi Ma Wong, but she thinks people are drawn to feng shui as an antidote to chaos. "People feel feng shui is empowering, that it allows them to take control of their lives."

Not a concept Hughes would get: "By embracing chaos, you embrace life."



By Josh Hughes

No future for guests: According to *Punk Shui* by Josh Hughes, sawing a couch in half makes it less accommodating for visitors.

BATHROOMS

Sink, tub cost a pretty penny

Adding artistic flair to bathroom fixtures has gone way beyond slapping on sloppy decals or spray-painting stencils. Now you can brush your teeth and take your bath in real works of art made by real artists. But be prepared to pay.

Take Le Bijou's hand-painted blue-and-white pedestal tub and sink, which will run you about \$11,800 and \$2,300, respectively. Made by a team of 12 artists in Miami, the creations are striking enough to star in ads for Expo Design Center's launch of its new blue-and-white color scheme.

"It really makes a statement," says Expo's Taylor Hastie. "Everyone is looking for something unique."

That appears to be the driving force behind this small but growing market: the demands of affluent homeowners to stand out. When Kohler launched Artists Editions, a line of sinks decorated through ceramic ink transfer (\$500-\$1,500), "it had to do with the onset of the powder room and the desire to impress your guests," says Carrie Estella of Kohler. "Now it's all over the house, in the master baths, the children's bath and the kitchen."

Decorated fixtures can help clarify bathroom décor, says Sandra Llewellyn of Sherle Wagner International, a high-end manufacturer of hand-painted sinks, water closets and bidets (\$1,300-\$5,600).

"It's easier to work with the different colors (in a painted sink), instead of just a blank white hole," she says. "We have always said we sell jewelry for the bathroom."



Expo Design Center

Hand-painted: LeBijou sink is \$2,363 at Expo Design Center.



Photos by Swann Galleries

Duncan Yo-Yo: Raymond Gid's 1930 poster sold for \$4,400.

COLLECTIBLES

Old posters pass muster as art

Vintage posters — *not* the kind you had on your dorm room wall — are becoming a hot collectible for affluent young homeowners who don't have the money to buy million-dollar paintings but still want to get into art collecting.

This week, an auction of 211 modernist posters dating as far back as 1894 realized a total of nearly \$600,000 at Swann Galleries in New York. Also this week, an auction of 540 vintage posters by Poster Auctions International netted \$1.9 million.



WWII: Glen Grohe's poster sold for \$900.

"Posters are the people's art," says Jack Rennert, president of the auction house.

Just to compare: At Swann's first poster auction, in 2000, \$127,000 worth of vintage posters sold, says Swann president Nicholas Lowry.

Posters make a strong statement — they were advertisements meant to be seen from the street — and aficionados are drawn to their bold images and bright colors.

"Posters have been popular in America since the 1970s, but since the end of the 1990s, they've taken off like a rocket," Lowry says.

"You have people willing to spend \$20,000 to \$30,000 on images that were worth less than \$100 a few years ago."

The most collectible images feature travel, railroads, beaches, golf, ocean liners, skiing, horses and food. But "the best definition of a good poster is any poster that makes you smile," Lowry says.