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Summer Refreshment

Lighten up your Cottage-Style look



With summer's rising temperatures comes the imperative to both freshen up and lighten up. Those who love cottage style could find this a challenge, however, since these homeowners are often collectors at heart (myself included).

"A room can be like an overdressed woman," cautions Kat Robbins, owner of Kat Robbins Interiors in Wayne, Pa. "Don't wear all of your accessories at once!"

To begin the de-cluttering process, Robbins says, strip a room of all items except for large furniture pieces. Then ask yourself the big question: Which accessories do I really value? Decisions, decisions!

For me, the winners would be my pottery collection and handmade goods from my travels. "Take care to organize and display collections or similar items neatly to create a sense of calm," says Robbins. "Your treasures can only shine if they have space to do so." Consider rotating collectibles if you have an overwhelming number of pieces.

While you're eliminating tired treasures, you'll want to introduce fresh finds. "Cottage style incorporates natural materials, salvaged wood and metal, handmade goods, and flea market buys," says Robbins, who recommends Vintage Home in Paoli (www.vintagehome.us) and Cottage Home (www.cottagehome-maine.com) for cottage décor.

Next, tackle window treatments. Fussy, frilly drapes just won't do! Instead, choose single-width, tack-top panels. Robbins hangs them close to the ceiling to create perceived height in low-ceilinged rooms. For a punch of pizzazz without going country, try Roman shades.

Rethink drapery hardware. How about a piece of driftwood, painted twisted iron, or a fluted rod with finials? (Who says rods need to be boring?)

"For a big statement, choose hardware that is oversized. But don't overpower the soft treatment," warns John Kelly, president of John Kelly Interior Design, Inc., in Philadelphia. Kelly has designed several award-winning designer showhouses in the cottage style.

"For traditional

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treatments, the rules of scale are dictated by the room's size, especially the ceiling height," he says.

Kelly finds that sometimes windows are best left undressed. Such instances are a window framed with beautiful millwork, arched windows, French doors, or a window with a great view. Of course, if any sun or privacy issues exist, "naked" windows are a no-go.

Now it's playtime... with pillows and rugs, that is. Remember, keep it simple! If a sofa or chair is bursting with bold color, Robbins brings it back to earth with a solid pillow or contrast color that coordinates with the slipcover fabric.

Conversely, use patterned throw pillows to introduce bold patterns that would overwhelm a large sofa, says Maria Viola-Kuttruff, principal of Viola Interior Design, LLC in Merion Station, Pa. She believes that how clients feel about their interior spaces directly affects their mood, spirit, and outlook. Aubusson Home in Wayne (www.aubussonhome.com) offers an extensive selection of fabrics.

Sisals and jutes as well as wool and cotton hooked rugs provide a clean, timely look. For newbies to natural textiles, sisal and jutes are natural fibers from plant sources that typically arrive in neutral colors. Appealing hooked rugs are available in a variety of fun, bright colors and patterns. Viola-Kuttruff recommends the Dash and Albert Rug Company for area rugs, pillows, and cotton throws.

Lamps and lampshades are another bright way to free yourself from a design slump. Drum shades, everybody! Choose pendant lights dangling over a dining table for a dash of modern flair. Don't forget to go green. Cottage style dovetails perfectly with sustainability, says Robbins. She became passionate about educating customers on the health risks of many interior treatments and the benefits of green products after she developed a chemical sensitivity to petroleum and formaldehyde products used in renovations.

"Cottage style is about living in smaller spaces (which saves energy and reduces consumption in general), reusing furniture (such as painting vintage pieces), and restoring the beauty and quality of a bygone time instead of tearing down and building new," she says.

"For me, green design is not just a trend," Robbins says. "It is also an opportunity to be of service to others, making homes not only beautiful but healthy and sustainable as well."

Lastly, and perhaps the fastest and least expensive way to update your cottage look, is by painting furniture and walls. When changing a wall's color, choose one that will provide contrast. "Do you have a lot of white furniture? Select a bold color to make a wall pop," Robbins says. "If dark wood dominates, consider using lighter shades to open up the room."

Viola-Kuttruff adds, "Homeowners long for fresh colors and playful patterns again. However, don't overdo it! More vibrant colors, like citrus and mango, are great for small pieces like painted side tables or lamp bases." Check out Cottage Home magazine, Pottery Barn, or visit Martha Stewart's website, and Maine Cottage furniture, whose line comes in 40 different nifty colors, for design inspiration.

I love how changing a wall's paint color and replacing a large area rug makes a space feel refreshingly new. "These are the largest surface elements in the room, so they are going to make the biggest difference," says Viola-Kuttruff, who recommends paint from Benjamin Moore and Sherwin Williams. "Both carry many colors that are perfect for cottage-style interiors."

Cottage is a fun way to decorate. It's easy to create this look because it is not too serious.

"My work is never dated because I don't use elements that are trendy or might be—especially when it comes to color and decorative items," says Kelly, whose experience in cottage design has been mostly with clients' summer homes. There, the lifestyle is casual, unpretentious, and individual. "Good design repeats itself and always has." □

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