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Home & Garden

A LOS ALTOS TOWN CRIER PUBLICATION • SPRING 2022

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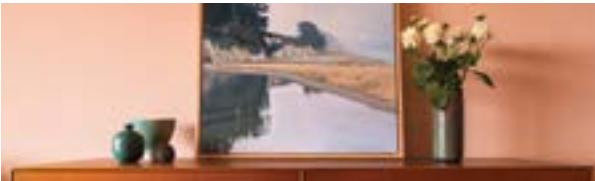
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Los Altos Town Crier

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ON THE COVER:

A dark-eyed junco enjoys the native plants in a local drought-resistant landscape.

PHOTO BY SHELLY BOWERS



WASTE NOT

HOW TO ACHIEVE SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH ORGANIZING

BY LYN ROGERS
SPECIAL TO THE TOWN CRIER

Organizing isn't just about having your shelves and cupboards looking "Pinterest perfect," it's also about sustainability, minimizing and recycling.

So many factors go into each of these three main components. At the end of April, we celebrate Earth Day. Organizing goes hand-in-hand with making the world a better place now and for future generations.

First, think about sustainability and ask yourself: Do I have the correct systems in place to consistently stay organized? Am I aware of what I own and in what quantities? Are

my belongings easy to see and keep track of, or are they hidden away and forgotten? Do I keep rebuying the same items because I have no idea if I already own them?

When you own more than you actually need, it creates waste. At some point, you will have to throw out expired foods and medications, products that have decomposed or become unusable and scented products that now have a very unpleasant odor. Not everything can be composted or recycled – much of what we throw out ends up in a landfill, most likely for many years.

When we have sustainable organizing systems in place, there is little to no waste. We know exactly what we own, where it's located and only own what we will actually use on a regular basis. If someone were to go to our cupboards looking for a particular ingredient, for example, they would find an unexpired can, box or bottle of what they need, not 12 of the same product in various stages of quality.

Minimalizing is very powerful and empowering. It can literally change your life and your world. It doesn't mean that you have to become a minimalist. You don't have to have a spartan wardrobe, starve yourself or walk everywhere. It does mean that you are mindful of what you buy and why. ➤

REUSE, RECYCLE, REGIFT

Consider your purchases this week: Were they for absolute necessities or retail therapy?

Retail therapy means you are shopping because you may feel lonely, bored or filling something else in your life that may be missing. It's very common and not impossible to overcome. When we buy more than we can actually use on a regular basis, it becomes waste.

Spend this week shopping from your closet and wearing different outfits every day until you have worn everything (except maybe that outfit from the wedding that the bride insisted you wear and you're holding on to it because she might ask about it. Trust me, she won't).

Try creating new dishes from what you have in your pantry and fridge. Use up before you shop for more.

I love recycling. It makes me feel good to know that I am helping the world become healthier by doing the following: limiting the garbage



I throw out, shopping at thrift stores (giving items a second, third or more life), donating what I can so it can be reused many times over and, finally, recycling the few items I can't regift.

I imagine cardboard food packages becoming books for kids, plastic becoming park benches, rags being turned into tote bags.

Being completely organized changes how you live, shop and think. It affects you physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. It may seem hard to start, but it's so worth it in the end. ☺

Los Altos resident Lyn Rogers, a professional organizer, is owner and CEO of Lyn At Your Service. For more information, visit LynAtYourService.com.

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Lawn Gone

BY JENNAH PENDLETON

STAFF WRITER | JENNAHP@LATC.COM

Over the past century, the front lawn has become an American home staple, with millions of homeowners striving to maintain the perfect, green, grassy landscape that will impress neighbors.

The decorative lawn as we know it has Victorian aristocratic origins – once upon a time, the lawn was a symbol of opulence, as only very rich homeowners could afford to maintain one. By the mid-20th century, the lawn became associated with the idyllic suburb, the white picket fence and the American dream.

The American obsession with lawns is real. In 2005, a NASA satellite study found that grass lawns took up 49,000 square miles of the U.S. – roughly the size of the country of Greece.

Despite their popularity, lawns have huge fiscal and environmental costs, with not enough utility to make up for it. Lawns are the most irrigated crop in the U.S., and lawn care requires the use of up to 80 million pounds of pesticides and 90 million pounds of fertilizer per year.

That's why efforts to get rid of lawns in favor of landscaping that features native plants are expanding, especially in California. GreenTown Los Altos is among the organizations encouraging residents to plant California natives that will ultimately use less water and promote needed biodiversity.

There are several benefits to planting natives in the garden. Plants native to California tend to be both drought-tolerant and fire-resistant,



Los Altos homeowner Susan Moss removed her front lawn and relandscaped with native plants that are adored by birds like dark-eyed juncos. PHOTO BY SHELLY BOWERS

meaning they can survive with very little water once they have matured, assuring that the yard stays beautiful and hospitable as an ecosystem throughout dry periods.

By replacing some or all of a lawn, a homeowner will be conserving water, reducing greenhouse gas emissions by eliminating the need for gas mowers and reducing the consumption of pesticides.

In addition to the aesthetic and environmental benefits, Cal Water offers a rebate of \$3 per square foot of replaced landscape.

Of course, grass lawns hold social value, as many families use their yards to play sports and host gatherings. Grass also serves a vital role in keeping urban temperatures down. GreenTown recommends relandscaping with native plants rather than other popular alternatives like a rock garden, because rock gardens can trap heat and drive temperatures higher.

However, the goal of the effort is not to get everyone to totally replace



GreenTown volunteers, at left and above, work to ready the newly revitalized Woodland Branch Library garden for its unveiling at the end of the Lawn-Be-Gone Bike Ride April 9. PHOTOS BY SHELLY BOWERS

their lawns, GreenTown board member Glenda Chang said, but to teach people about the options they have to incorporate attractive plants that are both drought- and fire-resistant.

DEMONSTRATION GARDEN

Among GreenTown's major projects was the recent revitalization of the garden in front of the Woodland Branch Library in Los Altos. A local Girl Scout planted a demonstration garden in 2017, but many of the plants did not survive due to a lack of upkeep during the pandemic and problems with >



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Susan Moss' Los Altos home was used as a picturesque stop on the GreenTown Lawn-Be-Gone Bike Ride.
PHOTO BY SHELLY BOWERS

the original irrigation system. The garden was due for an enhancement, and Chang saw it as a learning opportunity.

"Some things survived, others didn't," she said. "Now we know what works."

GreenTown brought in drought-garden expert Nikki Hanson of California Sisters Landscapes to direct the reconstruction of the garden, from revamping the irrigation system to designing an intuitive and appealing layout for the new plants.

Hanson said the methods they used to revitalize the garden can be used to plant drought-resistant native plants at home as well. In fact, the ultimate goal of the garden is to teach people about local flora and how to care for them. The garden was fully unveiled in early April as the final stop on GreenTown's Lawn-Be-Gone Bike Ride, a tour of Los Altos homes that replaced their

lawns with native plants.

According to Hanson, creating a drought-resistant landscape is not as difficult – or as expensive – as it sounds.

Hanson and GreenTown volunteers began the process of replanting at Woodland by placing cardboard over the soil to smother weeds and then adding a layer of compost. Eventually, the cardboard will break down and add to the soil. They then spread a woodchip mulch that helps the soil retain moisture and nutrients. Next, they created do-it-yourself cages out of chicken wire, which they placed in the ground before the plants to protect the roots from gophers.

The revival of the Woodland garden has been a community-driven effort, with volunteers turning out every weekend to help relandscape. The renovated garden serves as an education tool, with signage displaying QR codes people can scan to learn more about each plant and how to care for it. ➤

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DOING IT YOURSELF

Following are a few tips from GreenTown's Woodland garden overhaul that can be implemented when planting and maintaining a garden at home.

- Many of the materials needed for the process are cheap or free. Los Altos residents can obtain up to 150 pounds of compost at no charge on Compost Days throughout the year. The next Compost Day is scheduled June 4 at the Los Altos Maintenance Service Center.
- Reuse the cardboard from broken-down shipping boxes or gather some from a big-box store like Costco.
- Instead of purchasing pre-made gopher cages, buy a roll of chicken wire to make them yourself.
- When choosing plants, consider not only which plants are native to California, but also those that are well-suited to your garden's landscape. Some low-maintenance plants in the Woodland garden include sunset manzanita, California buckwheat, deergrass and California poppies. *

*For more information,
visit greentownlosaltos.org.*



California native plants naturally tend to be both drought and fire-resistant — in addition to being gorgeous additions to your garden. PHOTO S BY SHELLY BOWERS

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Safe Haven

Native plants protect pollinators

BY TANYA KUCAK
SPECIAL TO THE TOWN CRIER

Some standard gardening practices don't help the pollinators you're trying to attract.

In a talk titled "Bring on the Pollinators," Suzanne Bontempo of Our Water Our World suggests being aware of the following things as you make your garden more welcoming to pollinators and other beneficial wildlife. ➤

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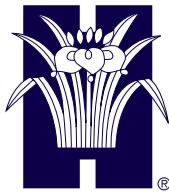


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• **Maintain your garden with a light hand.** Let berries develop and let flowers go to seed for the birds, for example, and leave clematis fluff for birds to use as nesting material.

“Take a pause at the end of the season ... (during cleanup) so the garden ecology can benefit,” Bontempo said.

• **Keep some areas uncultivated and free of mulch to accommodate ground-nesting pollinators and beneficial insects.**

Approximately 70% of solitary native bee species need bare ground to build their nests.

• **Use rakes instead of leaf blowers.** Leaf blowers are detrimental to soil life and overwintering beneficial insects, and should never be used in planted areas.



The lowest-growing native buckwheats have the most intense colors. This red-flowered buckwheat grows 1-2 feet high and can spread up to 3-4 feet wide.

PHOTO BY TANYA KUCAK

• **Prune mindfully.** Consider whether you are removing resources that pollinators use, or disturbing their life cycles.

• **Offer safe and secure places for butterflies to pupate.** For instance, let leaves accumulate under trees or shrubs, and check patio furniture for pupae before storing it away. >>

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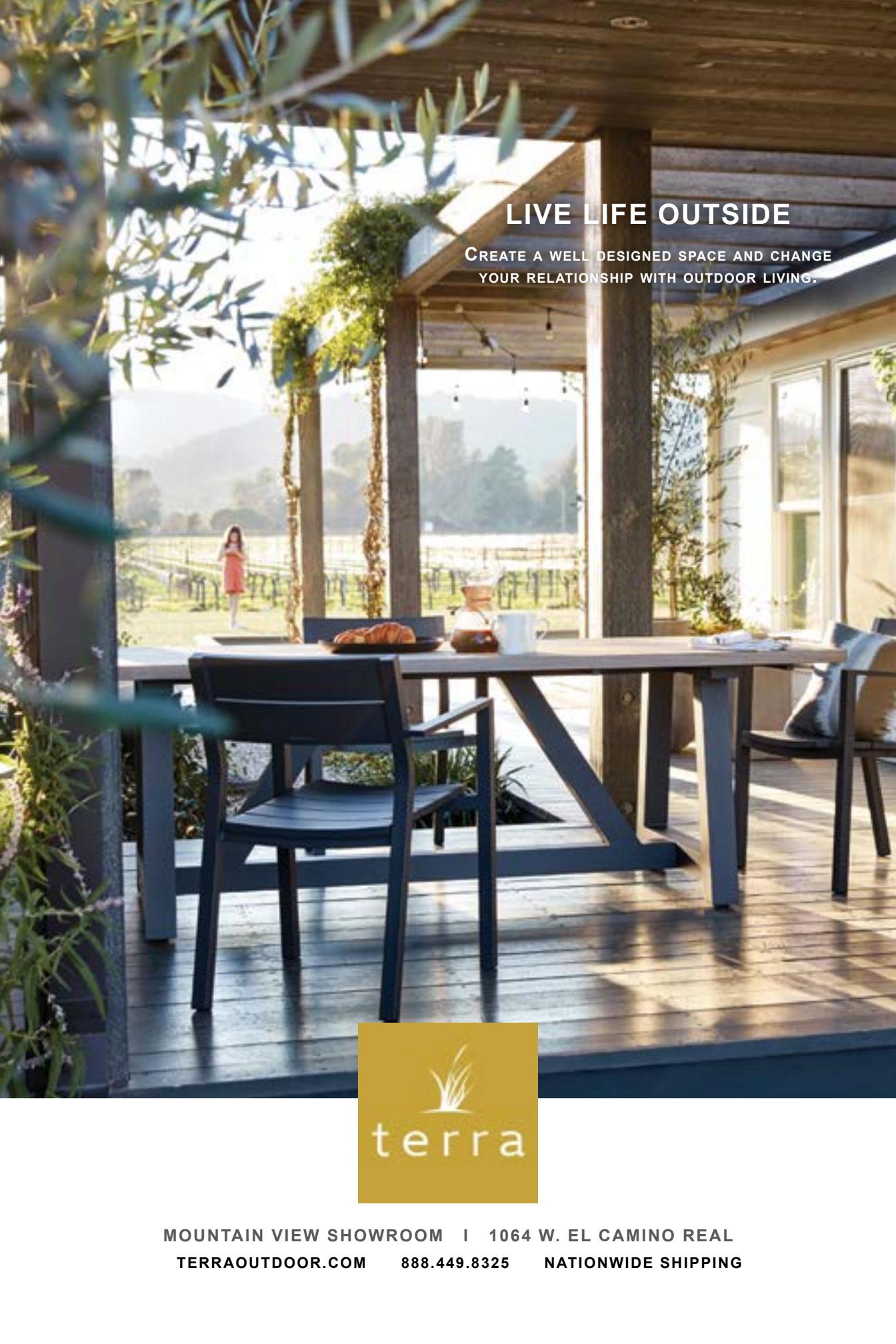


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A photograph of a woman in a red dress walking through a vineyard. In the foreground, there's a wooden deck with a dining table and chairs. The background shows rolling hills and mountains under a clear sky.

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- **Ignore or tolerate leaf damage.** Butterflies and moths lay eggs that turn into caterpillars, and “the No. 1 job of caterpillars is to eat,” Bontempo said. “Plants will recover,” she added, from munched leaves.
- **Monitor for pest problems and address the cause rather than reaching for a pesticide.** Identify insects, find ways to make your garden healthier and more resilient, and learn about integrated pest management.

“Pesticides are overkill,” Bontempo said.

- **Buy plants that have not been treated with neonicotinoids, and avoid using neonicotinoids at all costs.** They are “way more problematic than we once knew,” according to Bontempo, and are “a major factor in pollinator decline.” Neonics are absorbed into all parts of a plant and can travel from the root system through the soil to other plants, she noted.



Valley Violet ceanothus is one of the tough, reliable, drought-tolerant Arboretum All-Stars that does well in gardens. These “habitat heroes” bloom in spring. Mounding 3-4 feet high and wide, this shrub is a manageable size for small gardens.

PHOTO BY TANYA KUCAK

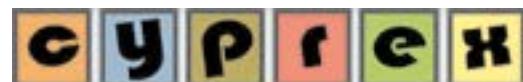


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HABITAT HEROES

For a healthy garden, "variety and diversity is key," Bontempo said. Native plants provide more nutrient-rich food for pollinators than non-natives. Different shapes, sizes and colors of flowers will attract the widest range of pollinators.

- Flat arrangements of many flowers, such as California aster or seaside daisy, attract butterflies because they need to land before feeding.
- Clusters of tiny flowers, such as yarrow, ceanothus or native buckwheats, attract tiny native bees and beneficial wasps.
- Tubular flowers in all sizes, such as native sages, lupines, columbines or hummingbird fuchsia, attract hummingbirds.
- White flowers such as soap plant attract night-flying pollinators.
- Host plants attract butterflies to lay eggs, such as native milkweeds for monarch butterflies; lupines or mallows for West Coast lady butterflies; or yampah for anise swallowtail. ➤



Santa Cruz Island buckwheat blooms in the summer, then the flowers fade from cream to rust in the fall and remain neat-looking for a long time. Native buckwheats are "habitat heroes" that can fit into any garden. PHOTO BY TANYA KUCAK

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If you can plant only one plant for pollinators, consider a “habitat hero,” Bontempo advised. The following habitat heroes “attract a significant amount and variety of important wildlife, including pollinators and other beneficial insects,” she said.

- Native buckwheats are “gorgeous,” Bontempo said, and one of her “most favorites.”
- Manzanitas.
- Native oaks are large but incredibly important, and she said not to worry when you see oak moths decimating the leaves because it’s actually food for birds; and that oaks can “live through a little bit of damage (because) all these plants have adapted to the wildlife stresses they are in partnership with.”
- Ceanothus.
- Native sages.
- Any culinary herbs that go to flower. (Bontempo said she always lets her cilantro flower “because the pollinators love it.”) *



The tiny fragrant flowers of ceanothus shrubs attract a wide variety of pollinators and other beneficial insects.

PHOTO BY TANYA KUCAK

*Tanya Kucak gardens organically.
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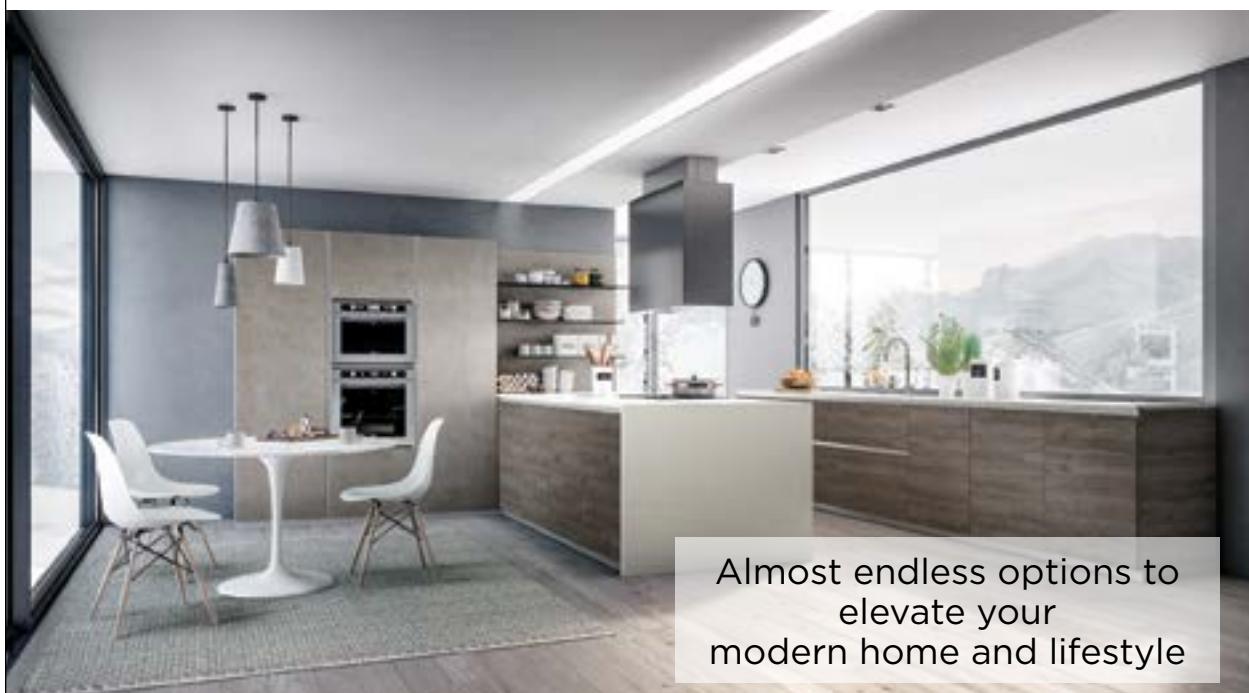
Finding beautiful vintage pieces can feel a lot like a treasure hunt. For some, this is part of the joy of antique furniture shopping; for others, it can sound exhausting.

Adding gorgeous vintage pieces to your home is easier now than it has ever been.

Instead of spending your weekends scouring estate sales and garage sales looking for that perfect Milo Baughman or Eames chair, curated vintage websites and even local stores do the work for you. ➤

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IDENTIFY YOUR STYLE

It can feel intimidating to figure out what sorts of pieces fit your sense of style. The labels can be confusing: What's the difference between Art Deco, Mid-Century Modern, '70s boho and '80s retro?

Begin by searching for inspiration. Snap pictures of furniture and decor you love in your favorite restaurants and friends' homes. Notice when a piece of art or floral arrangement catches your attention. Flipping through a magazine or scrolling through Pinterest or Etsy can help you narrow down your style and find what resonates with you.

Your home and surroundings themselves can serve as a wonderful source of inspiration. Original details in your home – crown molding, built-in shelves and architectural or structural elements, including when the home was built – can lead you to vintage pieces that reflect the details. I love preserving the character and quirks of historical homes and complementing those elements with furniture and decor.

If you're not sure where to start, begin by playing with colors and textures. Incorporate subtle suggestions of burnt orange, moss green and warm neutrals. Wander your local flea market to see what catches your eye. Let your intuition guide you to pieces you love.

LET THE EXPERTS DO THE WORK FOR YOU

Websites such as Chairish and 1stDibs curate vintage and retro furniture and decor that can be shipped to your doorstep. Companies such as West Elm, CB2 and Article offer updated, brand-new options of retro styles.

After doing some research, I found a set of antique Chippendale chairs at an online vintage store. I love the juxtaposition of these retro finds with more modern pieces in my home.

An interior designer can help with actually finding the right piece. I love finding a real treasure that's authentic vintage, because it's often one-of-a-kind. Vintage pieces feel cool and original in all kinds of spaces, whether modern or more traditional.

SHOP LOCAL

If you're willing to do some digging, you'll find great deals at local thrift stores and yard sales. Facebook Marketplace and OfferUp allow you to look for more specific items available for pickup and delivery from others in your area.

I recently found a set of antique, 1930s silver and crystal andirons on 1stDibs for a client's fireplace. They're elegant and classic against the limestone surrounding the hearth.

OLD BECOMES NEW AGAIN

There are many ways to breathe new life into vintage pieces. I love overdyed rugs because the process takes the original rug's pattern and style and gives it a beautifully distressed look.

Reupholstering a chair, or adding a velvet tie cushion to an original wood or cane chair, both updates the piece and injects your own style into it.

Set vintage pieces against contemporary lines for a fun contrast. This interplay of elements emphasizes the character of each piece.

Vintage, antique and retro pieces need not feel stuffy or untouchable. These objects are meant to be part of the fabric of everyday life in your home, as they were for their previous owners. Each has its own story, which adds richness and texture to your space when combined with the elements that make your home uniquely yours. ☀

Celeste Randolph is an interior designer in Los Altos.

For more information, visit celesterandolphdesigns.com.

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