

How to Style Your Bookcase Like a Designer

Dust off the shelves with these expert ideas.



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SARAH WINCHESTER

Wondering how to style a bookcase? Start by telling a story! A bookcase is a double-duty treasure that can tell guests everything they need to know about you and your home when styled properly. [Bookshelf decorating ideas](#) inspire you to reflect on the memories that matter most. Make room in your precious [reading nook](#) for a photo of your children, and let the cherished antique passed down from your grandmother take center stage—the best bookcase is curated with character. To stimulate your eyes and mind, there's no better way to give your home an aesthetically pleasing makeover.

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"We love styling bookcases in a way that curates a blend of accessories, books, and artwork, each chosen for its ability to tell a story or evoke a memory," says Sarah Stacey of [Sarah Stacey Interior Design](#).

Your bookcase doesn't have to be stacked top to bottom with books or [arranged like the rainbow](#). Break up the shelves by displaying your books creatively—one trio standing up vertically and the next horizontally. Between the stacks, strategically place accessories like a vase, plants, dishes and bowls, artwork, and framed photos (keeping in mind that less is more). According to Nicole Hirsch of [Nicole Hirsch Interiors](#), large coffee table books are a must-have in your bookcase arranging checklist. They're a great way to ground a shelf—just place a cool accessory on top.

Whether you're a minimalist or a maximalist, restraint is essential. You want to highlight the books and decor that put your personality on full display without cluttering the shelves. We tapped designers for their bookcase styling secrets to help you create your own cleverly designed bookshelves. You'll find bookcases below that have wide [built-in frames](#) and feature [floating shelves](#)—one even leads to a secret passageway! It's officially time to dust off your shelves with inspirations from the pros.

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1 Customize the Size

A wonderful display for the antique collector and art lover, this deep blue bookcase is an open treasure chest. "In this project, we specifically designed the sizing of the shelves to accommodate certain pieces we wanted to style on them," says Stacey. "This mixture of sizes and types of objects keeps the bookcase from being too monotonous."

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SARAH WINCHESTER

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Commit to a Color Palette

Not sure where to start? Hirsch suggests choosing a color palette for your accessories and sticking to it. That will allow the prominent pieces you cherish to shine. "Stay within a color family and do not mix a lot of conflicting colors. Less is more—keep your pieces meaningful and not too dinky and small," Hirsch says.

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Organize by Niche

Arrange books by niche so it's always easy to find your favorite. While it may seem like it can look cluttered, you can keep attention on the art in front of the bookcase. A Peter Rogers portrait of celebrity chef Alex Hitz's late friend Nan Kempner hangs in the library of his Los Angeles home. "The room doesn't get a lot of light, so I decided to make it cozy and turned it into an English-style portrait room, which is ridiculous but fun," he says.



LISA ROMEREIN

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Make Room for a Daybed

The ideal midday catnap spot or hideaway from the busyness of home, this reading nook is made for daydreamers. Designer [Jeffrey Alan Marks](#) leaned into all things cozy when building it into his [California beach home](#). With just the right amount of light, shelving for a few books (with covers in soothing tonal colors), and one gloriously plush daybed, it's the perfect spot to catch up on reading.

TREVOR TONDRO PHOTOGRAPHY

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Use Different Textures

Laura Freeman of [Merits Design Group](#) encourages incorporating different textures for interest. "Add bits of glass to offer luminosity and sparkle. Embrace quiet space! You don't have to fill the entire shelf." It's easier to admire one or two special pieces more clearly than a cluttered collection of different sizes, shapes, and colors

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6 Color-Code the Jackets

Don't shy away from color! This rich green living room in a [midcentury Atlanta home](#) designed by [Melanie Turner](#) makes a strong case for a monochromatic paint scheme. (She used [Calke Green](#) by Farrow & Ball.) Taking a cue from the art, she grouped books with jackets that fit in by color.

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Switch Directions

That's one key piece of creating a visually appealing arrangement, says Lisa Schwert of [Innate Studio](#). "Mix groupings of books that are stacked both vertically and horizontally." She also recommends leaving about one-third of the space on the shelves open.



a white table and chair in front of a book shelf

FANTASTIC FRANK

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SARAH STACEY INTERIOR DESIGN

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Keep Guests' Eyes Guessing

From the glorious chandelier to the pink-and-cobalt wallpaper, this dining room is full of eye candy. "For this bookshelf, we were mainly working with just books so we made sure to balance the styling of them not only on each shelf, individually, but throughout the entire bookcase so that your eye moves around," says Stacey. The result is a personal library that showcases a refined taste and love for a curated life.



9 Add Curtains to Cabinets

In this living room designed by Anna Spiro, the pastel bookcase is like something out of a fairy tale. The decorative accents on its fully packed shelves are whimsical and stand out. You can swap out the decor seasonally and tuck what's out of rotation inside the lower cabinets. Their butterfly-printed curtains offer privacy and style.

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Use Natural Materials

This mood-boosting reading nook brings this corner of a grand Palm Beach home designed by Phoebe Howard to life. No matter what angle you're approaching the corner from, you can appreciate its dimensions and quirks. The bookcase captures the home's coastal charm with its rattan and wicker decor, including a strategically placed wall sconce for late-night reading.



PHOEBE HOWARD

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Utilize the Stairs

The awkward space under the stairs can do more than you think. Decorated by [Regan Baker Design](#), this bookcase has room for everyone in the home to have their own dedicated shelf. It also has a secret door that opens into a storage closet. The drama!

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Showcase Your Green Thumb

In the Sacramento home of designer Shavonda Gardner, a reading corner is a welcome invitation to sit and stay awhile. Leafy green plants stand out against the moody inky paint (Caviar by Sherwin-Williams) on the walls.

"Don't be afraid to use plants or greenery," says Hirsch. "Bringing living things into a home is really gorgeous and when used sparingly on shelves or bookcases, looks awesome."

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PAUL RAESIDE

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Catch the Natural Light

Reading with the sun hitting the pages is an absolute dream. This charming nook in a historic Westchester County, New York, home designed by Andrew Flesher features a rainbow bookcase with a balance of restraint and play. Butterfly print Schumacher wallpaper adds a sprinkle of magic, and crisp white paint modernizes the home's farmhouse design style.