

Home As Sanctuary

Pax

*All that matters is to be at one with the living God
to be a creature in the house of the God of Life.*

*Like a cat asleep on a chair
at peace, in peace
and at one with the master of the house, with the mistress,
at home, at home in the house of the living,
sleeping on the hearth, and yawning before the fire.*

*Sleeping on the hearth of the living world
yawning at home before the fire of life
feeling the presence of the living God
like a great reassurance
a deep calm in the heart
a presence
as of the master sitting at the board
in his own and greater being,
in the house of life.*

D. H. Lawrence

In her book *Home Sweeter Home*, author Jann Mitchell shares how she is “a recovering slob” whose years as a frazzled single mom resulted in a sink full of moldy dishes, misplaced and thus unpaid bills, and a home pervaded by TV and rock music. But with time and maturity, she says, she’s changed her tune — literally. Now her one bedroom, home-office condo, decorated in the southwest style, is like a retreat. Visitors love its coziness and warmth and the way it reflects who she is.

Jann attributes her newfound feeling of sanctuary to some key points, not the least of which is the fact that she is now well organized, with everything in its right place. She has avoided fads in her decorating, letting her home reflect her unique personality and interests, such as her love of New Mexico. She has also emphasized the handmade in her choices of furnishings, honoring her own creative (and often experimental) talents and those of her husband, other family members, and various artists. And she doesn’t hesitate to redecorate according to the changing seasons, simplifying the house in summer and adding items like pillows, throws, and table covers in the winter. Jann indulges her love of nature with the shells, rocks and such that she brings inside and celebrates the sacred through the creation of an ever-changing personal altar. “My home is now a sacred space I can’t wait to return to,” she says, “either from the office or half way ‘round the world.”

Joyce operates a bed and breakfast and a small farm on a forested mountain ridge in California. From the outset, she envisioned it as a sanctuary, not only for her family but also for animals, fairy folk, friends, disabled children, and even strangers. “Our home has always been a haven,” Joyce shares. “Everyone knows where the key is. If you’re sad, hungry, or cold, this is the place. The B&B is an extension of that. I want people to come here to relax and play ‘Grandma’s house’ with little treasures,

books and birds' nests tucked about." Her generosity has warmed the heart of many a guest. Not surprisingly, she calls her home "Place of Needs Met."

Michael and Lucy share a home in Ashland, Oregon. Their story is touching in that Michael first found much-needed solace here when his mother owned the house. After years of estrangement from her, he came to heal the rift and lived in a 10x14 foot cabin in the backyard for five years. Michael lovingly cared for his mother during a long illness, and when she died he moved into the house. He subsequently offered his friend, Lucy, refuge when she became exhausted from years of business travel. They have created their separate bedrooms as personal expressions of sanctuary. Michael's reflects his creative outlets in music, writing, and sculpting. Lucy's room is sparse and brightly colored, containing plants, original art, an altar, and a meditation area. The kitchen area, including a large table that easily seats ten, is open and seamlessly flows into a larger community room where guests gather for talk, meditation, chanting, and workshops. The numerous, yet simple art pieces and furnishings hold spirited energy. They have also created a wonderful labyrinth in their backyard, a place for contemplative walking and healing open to the community. Michael and Lucy recently married and held their ceremony, where else, but in their homey sanctuary.

Home may be the most important and readily accessible of all the reverent places on Earth. Yet, all signs indicate that our society suffers from a profound homesickness. Social researchers support this observation with the following fact: people move on the average of every few years. That's a lot of cardboard boxes! Homelessness, in a sense, is not exclusive to low-income or unemployed persons. It is not as much physical as it is a psychological and spiritual malady characterizing a true loss of connection to place. Far from seeking simple shelter, many people question if they are living in the right place.

We have said that sanctuary begins within oneself by perceiving and knowing one's own sacredness and acting more and more from that place. In terms of a physical environment — the *outer* expression of sacredness — sanctuary could be said to begin by accepting the premise that the home, or "the hearth", is sacred turf as well. Just as family is at the root of all our human relationships, testing and training us in all aspects of right attitude and behavior, likewise, how we choose to create our home environment gives us the basis for interaction with all other environments. If we have a harmonious family life and an uplifting home environment, we will most likely possess or gain the strength and wisdom to overcome whatever challenges we might face when out in the world. Whether we are tested by conflictual relationships, a negative work environment, strong materialistic desires, physical pain or illness, or anything else, when our foundation, our home life is secure and strong, we not only survive, we thrive.

HOME FOR THE HEART

Earlier we spoke passionately about the Hearth symbolizing the communal well for the soul. In the brief descriptions of the homes above, there is the clear sense that a Hearth of Life has been created indoors that welcomes, enfolds, and nurtures the spirit. Such places are not so much defined by looks but by an overall sense of feeling. We all know what this means. Some homes are comforting and seem to emit love and generosity, and others make us want to leave.

How can we characterize this *feeling* of home? Thomas Moore, in his inspiring book *The Re-Enchantment of Everyday Life*, suggests that to fully embrace our sense of home (and this most certainly includes one's apartment, studio, one-room cabin, or even a car or tent) we must see ourselves as

practical ecologists of enchantment. That which is enchanting arrests and seizes our soul. We feel taken away, swept into something acting upon us. But the mystery of this experience, as Moore explains — the reason a particularly homey sanctuary enchants and enfolds us — lies in this scientific sounding word itself: *ecology*. “Eco” is an abbreviated form of the Greek *oikos*, meaning home. *Oikos*, however, is a sacred word that embraces our *emotional search for place* as home, both for human and Spirit alike. It symbolizes the spiritual need to find a home for the soul. The Greek *logos*, the other part of “ecology,” speaks to the very spiritual force itself — Divinity — we seek to contain in our sacred places. Moore summarizes by suggesting that “ecology” is an “infinitely deep and mysterious notion of home. Thinking of ecology in this way, we approach one of the great mysteries that motivates every day of our lives: *we are always making a home for the heart and always looking for the house of divinity.*”

Many people find it foreign to believe their abode has energy, let alone a spirit. However, every item in your home has its own energy and the energy from the people who live in the home is always present. How else can we explain why some homes or rooms simply *feel right* while others seem chaotic, uninviting, or depressing? As you might recall, the Greek word, *temenos*, helps explain this energy as well. *Temenos* means sacred enclosure and refers to containment of the *spirit of the place*.

We believe it is exactly this — the Spirit of the Place, as first *envisioned and called up* by you — that should be an initial consideration in creating a home sanctuary. It is the clarity of your intention as the Keeper of Home that directly leads to the purposeful formulation of that right sense of place from the inside out. This is true inner or interior decorating — determining your intent before actually seeking to fulfill it with objects. It doesn’t matter if the place you have chosen is an absolute pit, you must simply begin to see its potential to be something more.

To create a special feeling in a place and to do it so that it emits the essence of sanctuary — this takes both thought and commitment. Remember what it is about sanctuary that stirs your need for it. You want a little time and space to yourself. You want a place that feels peaceful and/or spiritually rejuvenating. You want a spot to show your special connection with life: perhaps therein is a family or spiritual altar, some natural crafts or favorite art, pictures, books, plants, etc.

In your sanctuary, no matter its size or placement, you want a place to relax, contemplate, simply *be*, unfettered and undisturbed by worldly cares. This asylum is your little retreat from the world. It’s not like asking for a two-week vacation, nor even one day off! Great regeneration can occur in a mere thirty minutes or an hour. This is a daily need you should want to think about and make a regular commitment toward. It is a small form of loving yourself everyday. It’s important that once you realize your own need for sanctuary that you begin to take concrete, incremental steps to manifest it in your daily life, especially your home environment. Don’t let anyone talk you out of sanctuary, but certainly don’t succumb to feelings of guilt for not providing it to yourself. Be guided by your heart.

FOUR KEY QUALITIES TO CREATE A PERSONAL HAVEN

Close your eyes and visualize your ideal home sanctuary setting. In your mind you may see your whole living environment — living room, kitchen, bathroom, bedroom, basement, attic — or simply a room or an area within a room. Dozens of books have been written to inspire and assist you to create and design a welcoming living space (see Resources at the end of this chapter). Numerous books focus on clearing and shaping the energy, and inspiring the sought after feeling of home as haven. Whatever the approach, the key to success is beginning with the essential *feeling* you want your home or room to emit. As such,

there are four key qualities worth considering. Compare these to your present setting, then to your “ideal home sanctuary,” and finally, test them with memories of others’ homes or specific rooms in which you have felt fully comfortable, like a cat dozing on the Hearth of Life.

The Quality of Mood

What feeling or state of mind do you want to evoke each time you visit or return to your sanctuary space — one of contentment, coziness, focus, serenity, inspiration, etc.? The amount and type of furnishings, even the use of color and lighting can help shape the mood or ambiance of a setting. Some people desire a more simple or austere looking haven in which to interiorize, meditate, or commune with God. Others may create a much more cozy and lived-in setting, for reading, writing, listening to music, contemplation, dozing, or simply watching nature outdoors.

Our 900-square foot home has forced us to look hard to create that mood of sanctuary. Vaulted ceilings create spaciousness, but the house is still barely the size of a modest apartment. Downstairs has an open plan with kitchen, dining and living room flowing together as in a cabin. Our daughter Sonji’s bedroom is enclosed upstairs and our “bedroom” is simply the remainder of the upstairs as a large open loft. Oh, almost forgot, the house has barely any storage, but windows (and wonderful views) almost everywhere you turn.

Although the overall mood of our haven is warmly inviting, we have managed to create “little havens” in several places. A sectioned off part of the living room serves as a quiet little corner with a small couch, bookshelf, sea trunk with adventurous objects, a captivating lamp, and a mesmerizing view up the woodland garden path. When weather permits, the large windows are opened to reveal the sound of our small cascading pool. The mood here is nostalgic, a good place to read a book in the late afternoon or on a stormy day, to take a nap like a tuckered out child, or simply to contemplate taking a long walk in the woods towards the lingering late-afternoon sun.

With the recent reclamation project of our “lofty” bedroom (i.e. de-cluttering and refurnishing) we established a meditation corner with an altar. But the mood of surrender was missing until we found the perfect area rug that helped contain and ground the energy. Sometimes you’ll feel that the mood you want to create in a space is eluding you, but you may be closer than you think. Just keep experimenting with various furnishings and their placement until you get the desired result.

The Quality of Aesthetics

What makes a setting *visually* appealing? Beauty and artistry feed the soul, and be it artful crafts, furniture, artwork, nature objects, even special plants or a floral arrangement — each can add to the overall mood of a setting by inviting our absorption and contemplation of their unique quality. For this reason your personal sanctuary space should reflect your mindful consideration in selecting each object — from the tiny seashell on your altar to the texture and design of an area rug. Again, a reminder that the objects with which we surround ourselves hold, emit, and enhance our settings with their energy.

Tricia loves taking photographs *into* our house from outside. In fact, that is exactly how we initially fell in love with our home-to-be — by peering like voyeurs into the open downstairs arrangement of the renters. The pot-bellied woodstove was a definite winner, as was the expanse of maple flooring with an area rug and other sensitively placed furnishings. But we imagined something more: a rocker by the front picture windows looking into the park-like meadow, herbs and dried flowers hanging from the rafters in the dining area, large plants looming up into the open ceilings as if trying to escape, walls painted with murals, colored decorative lights strung around windows to frame a nighttime “view.” Our haven is small, but it aesthetically contains the Spirit of Cortesia like wine with a fine bouquet holding and enhancing the Parent Grapes.

The Quality of Invitation

What do these words have in common: beckoning, enticing, lingering, comforting? Each speaks of an energy that draws you toward it, an *inviting energy*. It is hard to imagine that a sanctuary can exist without some quality of invitation. Perhaps it is the way furniture is arranged, how color and lighting are used, or a scent in the air (is that Tricia's banana bread I smell?). Maybe it's a relaxing chair or pillow, the display of nature objects, personal mementos, inspiring quotes, or soothing music. All this, and more, should give one a feeling that they can truly relax and sink into safe comfort. This is not possible if there is the feeling of too much clutter, or alternately, that of stiff formality.

Why did we pick *that* particular corner of our living room to create a little isle of grace? Part of it is the six-foot long bank of four multi-paned windows. Through these windows the low afternoon sun casts muted earth tone colors and backlights the leaves of the nearby deciduous trees. The sound of the pond is inviting. And the eye can wander over forty feet up the woodland garden path to the entrance of the meadow garden. Of course, one can also watch birds and our cats frolic around beneath the green canopy of the nearby 200-year old fir trees whose limbs reach down as if to cradle and bless our home. But all this revelation came *after* we rescued that end of the living room from a terrible fate of many years: a dark bulky brooding broken player piano against the wall, on top of which perilously perched a bazillion dust-buried *things*. And an unsightly six-foot tall bookshelf plus two smaller bookshelves haphazardly crammed with papers and books, like French fries stuffed in a cardboard sleeve. Oh, not to mention the worn, torn bamboo area rug. Oops, almost forgot, the supposedly "quaint" windows had so many panes that it was literally a pain to look out!

Now, however, this corner space *feels* right. The piano went to charity, as did the rug. The smaller bookshelves were dispersed, while the taller one was positioned differently so as to act as a partial room divider. The two middle panels of windows were replaced by one large clear pane (incredible transformation!), and the walls were painted a desert earth tone to starkly capture the late afternoon sun. Add a small womblike couch, round muted ornate rug, intimate lighting, reverent spiritual icons, a hanging plant, and a scented candle. Voila! Fifty square feet of flat out inviting soul space! Reservations required.

Perhaps one of the keys to creating this inviting quality in a particular setting is sincerity. Somehow you just know if a place is a real sanctuary or is only pretending to be. It takes time and energy to make a place look and feel lived in: human energy being invested continually over months, even years until good associations and warmth and heart literally soak into the furniture. This inviting quality can't be faked. The Velveteen Rabbit had to be well-loved and well-used to finally become real.

The Quality of Enfoldment

One of the primary qualities of any sanctuary should be the opportunity for *interiorization*: to go within oneself and sip from the contemplative well of peace. A home or certain area, by the way it is consciously stewarded by its Keeper, should *feel* as if one can easily *claim sanctuary*. This feeling underscores the sacred nature of time and place — that one can easily let go of the world, even if for brief periods of time, if we somehow feel peacefully restored beneath the sheltering wings of sanctuary. Thoughtful effort to create an inviting heartfelt entrance (what we call the *entrance threshold*) does well to enfold our soul. A personal or family altar that honors and celebrates life and/or Creator or teacher serves to enfold us in endearing memories or devotion. The feeling that nature (plants, animals, stuffed toy animals, stones, wood, water, art pieces, natural light, etc.) is invited, embraced, and honored in the sanctuary space allows us to subconsciously reconnect with the roots of our planet. The opportunity to

read inspiring literature or listen to moving music also helps to insulate our soul from the mass media, politics, worries, and the like.

Popular author on spirituality and the home, Denise Linn suggests that environments are more powerful than affirmations because our environment becomes a living affirmation, a living *temenos*. A space naturally reflects current interests and who we want to be in the future. It also supports the kind of relationship we like or aspire to have with others or God. In one sense Tricia, Sonji, and I are a family of many: our home enfolds the energy, gifts, and art of many generous and inspired people, most times of the year the doors and windows are open to nature passing through. We have no curtains, so the sun, moon and rain can peer in, feeling honored. Even our five-foot tall wood sculpture of Quan Yin provides a key touchstone in our living room, reminding us by the perpetual light we keep at her side that compassion itself emanates from the enfolding embrace of sanctuary.

If we see our home as a true temple of enchantment, then we are assured of manifesting “peace in the house of the God of Life,” as D.H. Lawrence so eloquently suggests in his poem above. Resting, as it were, on the hearth of the living world — our Home — we recognize that true sanctuary is of our own making. Sacred homemaking, sacred place-making: these are our ongoing duties if we acknowledge our role as Keeper of the Home as Sanctuary.

7 SPECIAL WAYS TO ENHANCE YOUR HOME SANCTUARY

Part of the appeal of the seven sanctuary garden design elements we shared in *The Sanctuary Garden*, was their universality. Thousands of people from all over North America have found their own unique interpretation and application for their outdoor setting. Yet each has experienced the beauty and quality of the feeling of sanctuary. We now want to share seven key strategies you can immediately apply to your living space. In doing so, we hope the many examples inspire and serve you well.

IDENTIFY AND PREPARE POTENTIAL SETTINGS

While every home is unique, most contain one or more areas suitable for designating as a personal sanctuary. Even if you aspire to create your entire home as a sanctuary, it is best to begin with the selection of one space. Then that space can be properly prepared and joyfully utilized, setting the stage for possible expansion in the future. Beware of taking on more than one space at a time and thus feeling overwhelmed with the task. Remember, creating a sanctuary should be fun. It is also a privilege and an honor. Take your time, and do it right.

Even if you feel that your choices of an appropriate space are limited, consider first the more private locations, such as an unused or underused spare room or “guest room”, a closet, a basement or attic area, or any other special room. If you have no options there, then consider designating all or part of your living room or bedroom. Even a corner of a room can become a lovely sanctuary spot, with the proper preparation. Our dear friend Terra has claimed a small corner of her and her husband’s bedroom, screening it off with beautiful tapestries. This is her meditation sanctuary, which reflects her particular need and expression for sacred space. Over the years, that tiny little corner has literally become saturated with her spiritual devotion, and yet the rest of the room is more normal. This juxtaposition of two very different needs and energies in one space is fascinating and entirely doable. It speaks to the

inventiveness of the human mind that comes when one is deeply motivated to fulfill the needs of their soul.

Because of her great fondness for long bubble baths each evening after work, Mariya chose her bathroom as her first sanctuary space. To enhance the ambiance of the cedar-paneled walls she has a huge fern hanging above the tub below the skylight, a Japanese style candle lantern, sticks of fragrant incense to light, artwork and inspirational quotes on the walls, a full-length mirror, a nice selection of inspiring literature, and an elegant wood and rice paper light sculpture that her partner Stephen created for mood enhancement. Who wouldn't spend hours in a bathroom like this?

We once had our office, bedroom, and meditation space all in the open upstairs loft. It never worked. Eventually, the office clutter spread and usurped the rest of the space, totally dominating the energy. We felt that we were literally sleeping in an office, hardly conducive to sweet dreams or marital harmony. Thus, we finally had to reclaim the space by moving the office and *all* related objects to another building. We were thrilled to have our bedroom back. Subsequently it was much easier to make it into the sanctuary space that we had been wanting and to build in the means for shared meditations there as well.

Once you have selected the most suitable sanctuary space, then you must prepare it. This may include getting rid of objects that have outlived their usefulness and otherwise deep-cleaning. In her excellent book about the art of space clearing (*Creating a Sacred Space with Feng Shui*), author Karen Kingston has this to say about clutter. "Never underestimate the effect of clutter on your life. . . Clutter accumulates when energy stagnates...Most people who have lots of clutter say they can't find the energy to begin to clear it. They constantly feel tired. This is because strands of energy connect everything you own to you. When you live surrounded by clutter it is like dragging the ball and chain of your past around with you everywhere you go. No wonder you feel tired."

"Clearing clutter actually releases huge amounts of energy in the body. When you get rid of every thing in your life that has no real meaning or significance for, you literally feel lighter in body, mind, and spirit. When everything you have around you is sacred to you, your whole life becomes sacred. You can live in the present and move with the flow."

For more ideas about space clearing, see the box-out "12 Simple Guidelines for De-Cluttering". Then get busy. I know it's easier said than done, especially for some of us. Over the years, I've managed to accumulate a vast amount of stuff, no doubt a reaction, in part, to growing up in a large family with little extra money. (My allowance in high school was \$2.00 per month!) But I am determined to bring my many years of hoarding to an end; and I've come a long ways, although Forrest may not always agree. I simply have to keep working at it on a daily basis, interspersed, now and then, with a de-cluttering marathon. I try to limit the majority of my collecting to shells and rocks that mostly live outside in our large garden, and slides/photographs that can be organized in a relatively small place. When I travel, most of what I buy is eventually given as gifts. (Don't ask a woman to refrain from buying gifts!) And the overflowing clothes closet? Well, that's my next project...Packrats aren't converted overnight!

Alas, we've witnessed firsthand how a cluttered home can become more like a mausoleum than a sanctuary, as countless unnecessary objects pile up higher and higher. Eventually the life force is all but sucked out of a space or even an entire house *and* its owners, and a guilty paralysis sets in. Although it takes strong intention to turn around this state of affairs, it can be attempted incrementally, one pile, one corner, or one room at a time. It took us about two years to totally overhaul our home. The local second-hand stores and the recycling center never had it so good. And now, after deepcleaning, painting, re-visioning, and reorganizing, we love our little house in the woods. It's just perfect. Well...almost...

Here are some tips for choosing or screening off a location for your sanctuary:

- Consider an area with a window for viewing and natural light.
- Determine how much privacy and quiet you really need, then think about those places in your home or room that can best meet your need. At various times in our lives we have each made do with some space in a walk-in closet. Such a place can be perfect for meditation, private phone calls, and the like.
- Create privacy through effective screening with tapestries, indoor plants, room dividers, a bamboo screen, hanging beads, curtains, or specially arranged furniture. A bookcase or dresser with plants or art objects on top can also make a perfect privacy screen.
- Make sure to receive input and coordinate your sanctuary space selection with others. Win their cooperation, not their resistance. Sit down and talk about their needs and yours, the value of such a place in the home, and expectations for its use.
- A door, of course, creates a formal entrance and the opportunity to secure privacy, but this is not always possible, and that's okay.
- Don't be afraid to experiment with rearranging furniture in an entire room in order to create some private space.
- If you're working with a very small space, be particularly careful not to clutter it unnecessarily. Even special objects, if there are too many of them, can get in the way and actually detract from the simple peace of your sanctuary. I actually rotate my favorite items. At any given time, some are put away in a box for awhile until I miss them and decide to put them back out.

CREATE AN INVITING ENTRANCE

A sanctuary's entrance is more than a physical location; it is a psychological veil through which the soul passes, as in consciously choosing to move from sunlight to shade, from one mood to another. The entrance is where the visitor receives their first impression — it is a psychological handshake or embrace that sets the energy for the sanctuary space. In essence, you are crossing a threshold, and things are not the same on the other side. The world, the past, is now at your back and you want to know that the cares and obligations of the day can be left outside the door, even as a coat is hung on the coat-rack and quickly forgotten. If, from the outset, you clearly designate the entrance of your sanctuary, you will see how you strengthen its power to relax and soothe you from the first moment you set foot in the space. Your body, mind, and heart have all been cued. The rest happens naturally: you are the Guest of Honor in your own sanctuary space; at the same time you are your own Host welcoming your Self.

Much of our day's activities are about *moving through* time and obligations, duties and schedules. This type of lifestyle feels blurred where our personal sense of sovereignty seems erased. We are neither awake nor aware if we feel like robots. We have no strong reference point(s), no "line drawn in the sand," so to speak, that clearly separates what we do, like rooms inside our soul. But to *enter into* sanctuary is about identifying an entryway, both physical and psychological. To enter a sanctuary space should feel like entering the unconditional abode of a dear friend — you feel totally accepted, respected, and beloved. You are where you can be more yourself than any other place. *That* is sovereignty, *which* is dignity restored!

The diversity of entrances makes this element of creating sanctuary absolutely fascinating. An entrance can be formal, as in the door or doorway of a room. However, in many instances the entrance

will be relatively informal — the subtle but effective suggestion that a certain area is for retreat. Plants or screening can do this well, as mentioned above, especially if they (or similar objects) are situated such that an obvious small opening is apparent for one to slip through into the sanctuary space itself (sort of a rabbit hole effect). Here are some other ideas to consider, but most certainly, explore the whole psychological and emotional palette of entrances in your own inspiring way.

- A sign or other special symbol at the entrance makes a formal and public declaration of your sacred space. It doesn't have to be loud and pretentious. Our Cortesia Sanctuary Project provides registrants with a small 6x8" sign of a soft magenta and white color that reads "Sanctuary --- May All Be At Peace Within." One couple has a mandala symbol on the door to their room. Another couple has a sacred quote from a sage. A young woman simply has a small note card nestled among the plants at the entrance to her small sanctuary corner. All it says is "Peace". The door of our teenage daughters room says, "Do not enter." We've noticed that such a sign often reflects a young person's first attempt to uphold their right to claim sanctuary from adults and siblings. Once they feel their need for privacy is being respected, they can afford to soften their message a bit.
- Some people make a formal request for one to remove their shoes at the entrance, and this is kindly noted near the entrance. Forrest and I are so accustomed to this ritual that we do it automatically whenever we enter someone's home. Sometimes they look at us rather oddly, but it is a gesture of respect.
- Consider having a small table or pedestal upon which sits a few special or sacred items. This can set a tone for humility and gratitude before entering. Our friend Harriet has a bowl of small polished stones and suggests that guests take one if desired: the symbolic gift of a touchstone to be carried into the sanctuary space or away upon leaving. Sylvia and Ron have an antique table with beautiful hand-carved fruits and other art objects. Another woman has put small angel cards and spiritual quotes in a couple of bowls, both for the inspirational taking.
- The entrance (or just inside your sanctuary space) is also a good place to invite a gesture of honoring. One couple, for example, has a tithing bowl into which they drop a coin or two. Several people we know light incense or a candle to demonstrate their loyalty and devotion to peace. The candle remains burning whenever the sanctuary is occupied and is reverently blown out (with a prayer) upon leaving.
- The entrance is also a wonderful spot to showcase a vase of flowers, a special plant, a small statue, even a water feature. All of the ideas presented here help to create a spirit or energy in your sanctuary space.
- If your entryway is rather dark or you enter into a hallway, you can place a mirror at the other end of the hall or on the wall opposite the door to make the space seem brighter and larger. A bright painting, perhaps lit from above, will also create a welcoming tone and a good first impression.
- It is very important to keep your entrance clear of clutter, particularly around the front door of your home. Feng Shui consultant, Karen Kingston suggests that the front entrance represents "your approach to the world as you look out, and your approach to your own life as you look in." In addition to various types of clutter, she discourages the common habit of placing coats and shoes just inside the door, or of putting things near the front entrance as a reminder to take them out. Even the placement of recycling bins and piles of newspapers too near the entrance is seen as symbolic of "an approach to life that is a constant recycling the past." However you view this advice, suffice to say that you want to feel welcomed and enfolded as you enter into a sanctuary. Greater simplicity and less clutter in the area of your entryway immediately calms and relaxes whomever comes or goes, even if these feelings are subconscious.

The walkway leading up to Stephen's house takes one through a modest yet very attractive garden. The front door usually has a seasonal wreath hung upon it, so one already feels enfolded. But when the front door is opened...ahhh...one gazes into a beautiful natural area- perhaps four feet square. On a bed of smooth river rocks sits a collection of large plants, a water fountain in a stunning ceramic bowl, and a statue, all naturally lit from a skylight above and another very soft light hidden among the plants. Of course, one knows immediately that they are in for a sensory adventure and a true sanctuary experience. No one leaves disappointed.

Anya and Paul's entrance is charming. They have a bright red door, a bench with a sheepskin just to the left of the door, and a planter box filled with seasonal flowers (some of which have to be red to match the door). A serene statue acts as a guardian and greeter of guests.

Our own entrance is actually through a sliding glass door at the top of a substantial four level deck. As one ascends, one level at a time, one passes by a number of large, built-in planter boxes overflowing with flowers. There is also garden art, a water feature, a small altar, and several different sitting areas, along with two built-in benches. Large decorative, ceramic pots lushly planted with grasses, small trees, lilies, cannas, and a host of other perennials fill in little niches here and there.

One of the nicest aspects of this deck is the fact that there are no railings blocking the view. The height of the planted boxes is more than adequate to safeguard the edges of each level. We have someplace cool and comfortable to sit somewhere on the deck no matter what the time of day. In fact, the lowest deck is a veritable shade garden of hostas, astilbe, and hardy fuchsia, and it is surrounded by huge sword ferns at ground level, that serve to create a smoother transition into the wild meadow in front of the house. If I'm ever too old to continue maintaining our two-acre garden, I now know that I can be quite content with such an artfully created deck. And what a charming entryway it makes to welcome our guests and us into our sanctuary.

FURNISH FOR COMFORT

Your intent and desired mood for your sanctuary space will also affect its furnishings. Previously we stated that each object stores and portrays a specific energy, contributing to the larger space's overall ambiance. I can't imagine a nicer timeless moment than sincerely contemplating the value of a piece of furnishing. This is much different than mere looking or window-shopping. When you have a special place in your life, you become receptive to what objects and furnishings say to you at the moment, wherever you are. A piece of driftwood suddenly asks to nestle on the corner table next to the eagle feather you found on your last hike. A hand-blown vase from a local craftsman promises to hold a shaft of light in all its glory from the morning sun through the window, as you sip your 7:00AM coffee before setting off to work. You hear a beautiful CD in a local shop and know you must have it because it reminds you of comforting feelings while in sanctuary.

The worldly objects you gather around you in sanctuary, like orphans given a loving home, sponge bath your consciousness, serving to soothe, inspire, and reflect the beauty of life. Each item's uniqueness is an entrance itself into the potential to evoke wonder, healing, and celebration. These are not static possessions you own, they are dynamic icons of your soul. They thrive to enfold you because they have your welfare in mind. And well they should — you or a friend thoughtfully selected them!

In a more simple or austere spiritual setting, one may desire just a meditation chair or pillow, an altar, and a few symbolic objects. Obviously, the intent here would be to create spiritual and meditative focus, not to suggest a place to kick back and relax. Contemplate once again what the parameters are of

your intent for a sanctuary space, and furnish it accordingly. Strive to keep comfort and function in mind as well as beauty, so that you avoid creating the picture-perfect types of spaces that are stiff or antiseptic.

A meditation chair is usually special and unique in that its purpose is to give support for proper meditation posture (therefore be forewarned: it will be difficult to read a novel in any good meditation chair because it generally has a straight back). However, the chair should not feel so hard or uncomfortable that it disrupts your concentration. Give careful thought to a meditation chair; trying different kinds of chairs of various heights and levels of comfort. Then once selected, adorn it with a meditation blanket or shawl draped over the chair and down to the floor (wool or silk are considered to be the most psychically grounding). Or similarly, choose a meditation pillow (often called zafus) that comfortably supports your erect body posture while in meditation or prayer.

Any other types of sitting furnishings in your space should feel especially comfortable and enfolding. After all, this is your special place for your special time, and you should give yourself permission to pamper your sitting comfort and needs. This is a perfect place for that incredibly comfortable rocker, small sofa, or overstuffed chair. Always have a lap blanket nearby — you'll know what to do with it! Forrest and I added a cozy love seat to the little used corner of our living room, as he described earlier. We brought in more light by adding a picture window with an enchanting view of the path up to the garden. Now this once dark corner has become a place where Forrest plays his beautiful guitar music and one of the favorite sitting spots in the house. Little did we realize such a transformation of energy was possible.

Many other types of furnishings can enhance the mood of your setting. Bring in a small favorite end table or the like (antique furniture has a way of congregating in a sanctuary space), maybe an old antique trunk, or a plant stand or two. Lay down an exceptionally nice area rug and/or a few floor pillows. Definitely consider a bookshelf and maybe a small writing table, space permitting. You see the idea here? You are creating a type of “space capsule”, a mini-home space, a place in which you can be yourself for whatever reason you crave sanctuary. There is nothing wrong with thoroughly indulging this need, meaning furnishing your sanctuary with whatever comforts your soul, body, and mind desire. One attractive and comfortable piece of furniture is worth many uncomfortable ones. As your budget allows, cull the items that look and feel awkward or detract from the mood you're trying to create.

Furnishings reflective of art and culture are also very important. Showcase an art piece or two, especially one that emits the feeling of sanctuary and gratitude for life. Such art pieces serve as visual anchors, drawing one toward the sacred space. One couple's sanctuary space is in their bedroom. On the wall is an exquisite painting of a Mediterranean verandah by the sea, evoking a mood that is mystical and deeply reflective. Another couple's picture is of a country lane running past a wildflower meadow, framed by haunting maples in autumn. Hmmm, if that wouldn't soothe the world-weary spirit...

Sculptures and art pieces from other cultures also add to a sacred space. Items from India and Indonesia are especially popular and generally easy and rather inexpensive to obtain. I love seeing fascinating objects from people's travels artfully integrated into their setting. In admiring them, suddenly you may find that your imagination has carried you away on a journey of your own. Forrest's and my yurts are definitely taking on more of an ethnic/international feel, as they are decorated with objects from my recent trips to New Zealand, Hawaii, Mexico, and the Southwest.

Music may have a place in your setting, either via your own talents or that of others. If so, make sure you have a good sound system that really comforts you. Jeffrey places small (but high quality) speakers on both sides of his favorite chair. He then totally enfolds himself within the soothing music he plays. Forrest recently took great delight in putting together a state-of-the-art “surround-sound” system in his yurt. If we don't see him for hours on a given evening, we can often find him lost in reverie as he

listens to a beautiful symphony or, even better, plays on his guitar inspiring music of his own creation. Couple this with candlelight, a stick of burning incense or other aromatic offerings, and a spot of tea or sweet treat, and you have an incredible sanctuary experience for the soul!

A window is a furnishing too. Make sure you do justice to a window, hanging it with attractive curtains or a nicely painted or stained frame. Place a few small objects on the windowsill, or hang crystals at the top of the window to catch the sunlight. Years ago, I unexpectedly found a beautiful stained glass window in an antique store (complete with window frame). It was surprisingly affordable, so, on a whim, I bought it for Forrest for Christmas. Then he and a carpenter friend cut a hole in the living room wall and installed it. We were nervous about doing it, but it was easier than we thought. Around the window, we added plants and a rocking chair and a carved statue, and presto, a very magical corner was created overlooking the Front Meadow. The idea of highlighting any good window with a nearby piece of furniture or chair and a special plant easily serves to bring it to life and convince people to sit there, whether they face out or into the room. A room with a view is a sanctuary experience unto itself, as those of us who relish such a privilege can attest.

Sometimes, a unique piece of furniture totally redefines a space. Other times, the particular placement of a piece is what makes it unusual. Sylvia and Ron, who are artists, put an antique desk in one corner of their kitchen. It has a writing pad, pots of colored pens and pencils, other art supplies, and a few small art pieces. Above the desk is a multi-paned window that actually looks into their spacious dining room. Since their art studio is separate from the house, I imagine that this handy niche allows them to take quick advantage of those sudden moments of inspiration that might otherwise go by the wayside. By providing a central location, this “creativity niche”, as I like to call it, affords the opportunity for a spontaneous sketch, a scribbled idea for a project or painting, a quick note or phone message, or a list of food items needed. There is also a chair placed there so one can even sit and write a letter or read a book while dinner is cooking nearby.

It seems to be culturally correct to have matching furniture (either from the same time period, such as early American, or of the same color and design). We decided early on to free ourselves from such constraints; thus we have very eclectic rooms with a lot of personality. Even if none of the furniture actually “matches”, nevertheless everything feels compatible. Again, relaxed comfort is our first criteria, followed by interesting and harmonious combinations of color and texture. Similar to Jann Mitchell, we include in our home many handmade pieces of family, local, or ethnic art, and furniture of both natural wood for its warmth and character and rich fabrics for their stimulating effect on the senses. We believe that life is an adventure, and we want our home to reflect this.

INTEGRATE NATURE

The reflective, peaceful space of a sanctuary seems to be naturally inclusive of our relationship with nature. To honor nature in our sanctuary space is to acknowledge the fact that we cannot ever really separate ourselves from nature. We live within nature as surely as it lives within us. Unfortunately, many people seldom “touch” or acknowledge nature, excepting the need to know what the weather will be like. From the moment they leave their doorstep, they follow the path of concrete to their car, drive down the road, into a parking space, and from there enter into an enclosed building where they stay until they reverse the pattern at the end of the day. (Consider the comment that the last thing a fish discovers is water.) Well, in sanctuary we can reconnect with nature, even if it is in a small, honoring way. We believe that this is one of our duties as Keeper of the Sanctuary, to ask ourselves how we can show gratitude for nature.

Your sacred space is an excellent location for a water feature. We know one man who has a small aquarium and considers this to be his form of television watching — simply sitting in his private space, listening to gentle music and watching the fluid movements of his fish. We've also appreciated seeing aquariums in the cozy waiting rooms of a number of small doctor's offices. That soothing, ever-changing, natural element of water makes the wait ever so much more pleasant. It's almost like sitting in your own living room.

Desktop fountains have come into great popularity today. Why? Psychologically, moving water is very healing and comforting, if not archetypal. But the gentle sound of moving water also affects and salves our mood. Feng Shui experts suggest that moving water arouses the fluid and powerful *chi* or life force energy in a room, stimulating healing, regeneration, and creativity. We love the sound of water because it seems to erase many of the less desirable sounds, like the refrigerator or the computer. A well-made fountain is the householder's version of sitting on a mossy bank near a stream. Don't we all need such primal and restful associations as we go about our busy days?

I went on a long search for the right indoor water fountain for my yurt. (We already had a fountain in the house). But for my personal sanctuary, I was looking for something really special and uniquely me: something feminine, yet not cute or sentimental. I figured I'd know it when I found it. After four years I found a luminous tabletop fountain beautifully lit from within. The very natural sound — much like a mountain stream — and the soft light that shines through the rose colored, frosted glass bowl and shimmers across the walls and ceiling, captivate me on a soul level. This fountain, which is bubbling and glowing near me even now as I write, has had a profound healing effect on me. It somehow washes away all the tension of the day, as if I've taken a long walk by the ocean or dived into a cool lake. I seldom write or meditate or go to sleep at night without first sitting or laying near my fountain and letting it cleanse my mind and spirit.

Of course, plants also play a key role in comforting the soul, as we have suggested. In your sanctuary, don't hold back on having those types of plants and vases of flowers that really uplift you. Even if you desire a jungle of sorts, go for it. You will feel more alive (as Feng Shui consultants, once again, suggest), more vibrant and "wellthy". And if yours is a space where only a small plant is possible, don't hesitate. Simply research a little bit to find a plant that can thrive in low light or a modicum of space. In darker areas, such as a windowless bathroom, don't feel embarrassed to place a vase of silk flowers or even a potted silk plant. We have seen some that are so well made that they appear real. Silk flowers in winter can be a wonderful mood enhancer.

Fresh, painted, or dried flowers are also an attractive addition to a room. We have many bunches of dried herbs and flowers hanging from the beams of the dining room ceiling, bounteous gifts from our garden. By the time they have faded, there are usually more to take their place. Freya and her husband, who live in a funky, yet delightful, little cabin in the coastal rainforest of Oregon, have brightened their once dingy kitchen space incredibly by intermingling shining copper pans, hand-painted flowers and birdhouses, and lots of colorful dried flowers. What a visual feast! In the bathroom next to the window grows a veritable jungle of lush plants, including the summer's geraniums in full bloom all winter long. We felt instantly at home and enfolded in the cozy warmth of their place, much like their umpteen cats that dozed in picturesque fashion throughout the house.

Ah, yes — perhaps your sanctuary is a special place to bond with a beloved animal such as a cat, dog, bird, or the like. This is important to consider as well. Sanctuary time especially brings out those tender and loving parts of our soul. A nearby pet can heighten this expression and give us tremendous comfort and companionship. We keep a thick towel handy next to our wood stove to spread on our light colored rug when our outdoor cats come in to lounge in front of the fire. They go right to it, thoughtfully wiping their feet before settling in for some serious licking and grooming. Julia and Jeff have two

flannel-lined wicker baskets for their cats to sleep in. We like the idea of furry pets having their own special place to lay in the house so that their hair doesn't get all over the furniture. Some guests just don't appreciate leaving after a visit and finding their clothes all covered with fur.

No pets? That's okay. Find ways to honor the animal realm. Perhaps a sculpture, painting or drawing brings something out in you. On the windowsill of our bedroom sit an assortment of small animal sculptures collected over the years. They all face out the window, looking skyward. We call them "the Sun-worshippers", but really they're nature worshippers. They keep us in touch with that vast realm of beings that roam the earth, as we do ourselves, and to whom we owe great honor. Another perfect way to honor the animal realm is with a favorite stuffed animal or two (yes, it is difficult if not awkward to use the phrase "stuffed animal", but you understand what I mean). You know from personal experience the type of tenderness and sweetness a teddy bear can solicit from the human heart. This is why a sanctuary space is a perfect home for such an animal.

In our daughter's bedroom lives a whole zoo full of stuffed animals. While Sonji has always very much loved live animals of all types, we felt that three bouncy rabbits and three roaming cats was all we could handle feeding. So she has found comfort and countless hours of imaginative play in the company of her stuffed friends who still, in her teen years, populate the greater part of her bedroom, bathing in the warm glow of her lava lamp, strings of tiny Christmas lights, and the revolving disco ball that hangs from her ceiling. What a life, right?

Lastly, you can choose to celebrate the natural world inside your home with all manner of fanciful shells, rocks, seeds, driftwood, and the like. I like to thoughtfully place a bowl of tiny shells from Mexico or a bottle of perfectly smooth colored bits of glass from our favorite beach in Hawaii. Annie and Essie embedded the best shells from their world travels in a grouted tabletop, a fascinating conversation piece. But beware, this penchant for collecting *can* lead to clutter, at least in *some* people's minds (I won't mention any names). So try to contain yourself by limiting this hobby to certain rooms and/or areas- like the top of *your* dresser- lest your entire home turn into a nature museum, and your husband threaten to move outside. Believe me, this *can* happen (I won't say where)!

CREATE ALTARS & USE DEVOTIONAL SYMBOLS

It is not our sacred objects that reveal our faith; it is our faith in objects that makes them sacred.
Francine Maroukian

We need altars in our life to elevate us, like a small child curiously peering atop grandma's dresser. Upon an altar we see life encapsulated in specific, often small, items. We bring our stories and memories, symbols of our past, inspirations for our future. We also bring the energy of others — the empty nest of the chickadees who rented the bird box on the side of the cedar tree last spring, grandmother's courage caught in a faded black and white photograph, the soothing ocean sound in the nautilus, Whitman's passion in *Leaves of Grass*. Altars exist as unfinished poems of our soul's journey. They capture in a moment of time a timeless life.

The creation of an altar in a sanctuary space serves a key purpose — it is a symbol of honoring and devotion. Many people establish an altar for religious or spiritual purposes, where they show their devotion to a deity or master. Here they may have one or more pictures and other spiritual icons. Other people create an altar that pays tribute to their family and/or their personal life, placing on it pictures, quotes, mementos and various special objects. Still others create a holistic type of altar that celebrates nature, life, and the spiritual realms. Here may be found an ongoing collage of nature objects and

personal tokens (pictures, mementos, etc.) that depict one's love affair with life. Such an altar usually changes with the whims of its creators or with the seasons.

An altar is different than a mantel above the fireplace, where sits family memorabilia and the like. This is not to say that a mantel is not a heartfelt location. It may certainly qualify as a personal altar if it is part of the space in a room that is felt to be a sanctuary. There are no hard rules here, simply the acknowledgment that an altar usually has deep significance and therefore deserves to be located in a special place, possibly a private place. Although Yanna and Raven have created altars throughout their home, we've noticed that their mantel is for them an opportunity to place some larger sacred objects in a studied relationship to each other. In a special space reserved for ritual and meditation, they have also created altars to the four directions, each utilizing the colors and symbols traditional to the Native Americans. By covering each differently colored altar cloth with a piece of the same white crocheted lace, however, they introduced a unifying and calming element that helped to soothe and ground the space.

Give thought to the physical nature of your altar. Many people believe that an altar deserves to be a special piece of furniture or table, perhaps antique or handmade. But an altar may also simply be a piece of cloth placed on the floor or a very low dais, as in a meditation room. My favorite altar consists of a few pictures and nature objects placed upon a low table covered with a hand-dyed piece of silk, in which the colors flow seamlessly from green to blue to purple. Whatever the surface, strive to keep your altar clean and free of dust and clutter. By dusting your altar meditatively, and lovingly touching, moving, replacing items, you are also dusting off the residue of the world from your soul.

Your altar's location is important too. Do you wish it to be a focal point in your sanctuary? Or would you prefer that it blend in with other furnishings? Is a location beneath or near a window desirable, or an area with more subdued lighting? Do you want your altar to face the east, as is traditional in many eastern religions, or in some other particular direction? Mariya actually maintains a simple altar at the east end of her kitchen table, which consists of two brass candle holders with white tapers, fresh flowers, and a tiny Goddess statue. There is no mistaking her intention. Even if company comes over to share a meal, this altar is not moved. Why not strive to be fully awake during all our activities no matter how seemingly mundane? Why *not* have altars in the kitchen?

In Loreen's cheery kitchen of her remodeled company house in a former copper mining town in Arizona, she has two very special altars. The first is at one end of one of the counters, and the other is a niche carved into the wall. The three small shelves in the niche contain objects that are so personal to her that Loreen decided to place two little hinged doors in such a way that she has the option of shutting them and thus protecting her altar from the view of anyone who cannot appreciate sacred things. The objects you place on your altar should have extraordinary significance to you and other members involved in its care and upkeep. Each item should have symbolic value. And remember, ultimately it is not important what others think — your personal altar is exactly that: personal.

You can even create an altar in the bathroom. Morgan has candles in her bathroom, a fragrant bowl of dried rose petals, and a lovely altar to our Lady of Guadalupe. What with the paintings, fresh flowers, and inspiring reading material, using her bathroom is like going on a mini-retreat from the world. It's a timeless experience, and though I haven't tried it yet, I suspect I could meditate in there with no trouble at all.

We've been amazed by the increasing popularity of altars, with people of all faiths and cultures. Some homes have an altar in every room, while elsewhere, one altar is considered sufficient. It's purely up to you. But let your altar be a reverential and honoring gesture and a place that draws out your unique form of worship, devotion, or appreciation for the abundant blessings you receive. Children often love to have an altar of their own, for which they select (and frequently change) the items. They seem to

especially delight in capturing the passing seasons in the treasures they choose. It's a special opportunity for them to learn how to express reverence for life in a very personal way.

Care for your altar regularly. Light incense, place flowers, have a bowl of angel cards or other inspirational quotes or statements. Consider setting an inspirational book on the altar or nearby. And again, dust it, rearrange it, add and replace items, keeping it always fresh and alive with your spirit. If you have more objects for your altar than it can feasibly accommodate, consider a rotation of sorts that allows you to change your altar periodically, thus using your many treasures, but not all at once.

NOURISH THE SENSES

A sanctuary space is an opportunity to treat the senses. In one respect, we may feel that our senses are already overloaded due to the constant stimulation by the media. You know: See this, smell that, go here, pamper yourself with the latest cream, lotion, chocolate, or whatever. We live in a very narcissistic culture that continuously pushes us to indulge our every desire. No wonder there is a "simple living" movement growing in certain segments of our society. Nevertheless, if you can stay free of fads and gimmicks, there is much to be said for the simple pleasures of sensory stimulation when they are used to touch and comfort the soul.

How, for example, do you envision soothing your ears? Sanctuary space is a perfect place to seek silence, and it is this need for peace and quiet that should be honored, if desired. Gentle sounds, however, are also in keeping with sanctuary. An open window may allow the sound of outdoor nature to filter in. A small indoor, tabletop water fountain, again, may soothe your spirit, as may the chirping of a pet bird. Finally, the use of music that is gentle and inspiring is a worthy addition. Having a box of especially restful CDs or tapes readily accessible will encourage and support a brief period of sanctuary time, and is far more restful than the incessant babble of a radio or TV.

Give consideration to treating your sense of smell while in sanctuary. Incense is commonly used today, as evidenced by its wide availability and the incredible diversity of offerings in stores around the country. Forrest experiments with all sorts of exotic incenses, while I prefer to stick with sandalwood and Nag Champa, my favorites.

Aromatherapy and essential oils, scented candles, sachets, herbal pillows, and flowers are other valuable additions. We each have favorite fragrances that we keep handy in our personal sanctuaries to wear just for ourselves when we are alone. One called "Enlightenment" especially lives up to its name. Perhaps you can select a scent that you only wear during sanctuary time so that the moment you put it on, your mind automatically thinks, "Ah, it's time to relax..."

Fragrant potted flowers such as narcissus and freesia, or vases of sweet-smelling lilacs, roses, lilies, and the like can be most inspiring, especially in the dead of winter, or as an antidote to the long rainy days of spring. You can even grow fragrant vines or shrubs such that their intoxicating fragrance wafts in on the breeze through an open window. Jasmine and honeysuckle vines come to mind, as do wisteria and pots of exotic gingers, which are delightful indoors or out, as the weather dictates.

Your need for touch can also be met in sanctuary. "Touch is far more important than our other senses, says scientist Saul Schanberg. "It's ten times stronger than emotional or verbal contact, and it affects nearly everything we do. No other sense can arouse you like touch; we always knew that, but we never

realized it had a biological basis. If touch didn't feel good, there'd be no species, parenthood, or survival . . . We forget that touch is not only basic to our species, but the key to it."

Diane Ackerman, in her fascinating book "A Natural History of the Senses", also makes a case for indulging our sense of touch, saying that it is the oldest and most urgent of our senses. She notes that any first-time touch or change in touch activates a "complex web of touch receptors, making them fire by exposing them to a sensation, changing it, and exposing them to another." The brain then reads all the firings and stop-firings much like a Morse code, causing it to then register *rough, smooth, hot, cold*, etc. What's more, touch receptors can be blanked out by repetition or tedium, hence the need for a certain amount of newness or variety in the objects we choose to touch or we begin to take them for granted.

The feel of a plush and comfortable chair or sofa, or the beauty of a textured, embroidered pillow can affect the soul *and* pleasantly stimulate the brain. Also consider having a soft or nappy lap blanket or a warm hand-woven shawl, a furry stuffed animal, even a favorite pet. Finally, consider having art pieces of varying textures that one may hold or manipulate. Such objects as pieces of wood, polished or rough stones, sculptures, or cloth may also appeal to the touch. My friend Karen gave me the treasured gift of a small woodcarving that she had further sanded, polished, and oiled until every edge was round and smooth. It fits perfectly in the palm of my hand and has given me hours of simple enjoyment. Similarly, a bowl of smooth agates or touchstones on a table invites interaction.

Lastly, do not rule out your sense of taste. It is entirely okay to use your sanctuary to enjoy a cup of coffee, tea, hot chocolate, or other brew, even a refreshing juice drink or fruit smoothie (our specialty). Similarly, a sweet treat, candy, or the like may feel comforting. You may choose moderation in the use of food, but you may also believe that food is not in keeping with your intent, for example if your sanctuary is to be used strictly for meditation and spiritual communion. I have decided not to allow food in my sanctuary, in general, because of the more spiritual focus, but I do have a small bag of dried fruit to sustain me, occasionally, through the completion of a long writing project. Better for me to minimize any temptation to mindlessly consume candy or sweets simply because nothing else is handy. Forrest, on the other hand, often eats out in his yurt, and loves nothing better than when I surprise him with a nice healthy breakfast or a fruit smoothie that I prepare and bring out for us to share while discussing our latest writing ideas or garden design project.

It's okay to love and nourish yourself through your senses, with moderation. It's all part of the joy of being human. Soon enough we may be angels, without so much as a single taste bud or olfactory node. May as well enjoy life while we can!

EFFECTIVELY USE COLOR & LIGHTING

The many moods of our mind are really emotional rainbows that affect our soul. It follows then, that color and lighting, so important in any garden, are also central to the optimal enjoyment of an indoor sanctuary space. In *The Sanctuary Garden*, we devote a long chapter to the effects of color and lighting on an outdoor sanctuary space. I talked about colors through my dearest women friends, and Forrest inspired me to write about colors as musical ragas of the soul asking to be released into service to Nature through the garden. The gardens at Cortesia have rooms, and as in a home each is distinct in energy and design. But their life force is color and lighting. This is what feeds the soul — what we take into our eyes and what sets the mood.

Both science and the intuitive arts have demonstrated that color and lighting strongly affect moods. Seasonal Affect Disorder (SAD, if you prefer) is the medically designated term for the depression many people feel from the drab gray sky days of winter. Surrendering to the palette of color, dabbed with brushings of light, a sanctuary space can be created to therapeutically massage the soul.

What colors do you want to display or highlight in a particular room? For example, reds and oranges energize, yellow tends to increase optimism and communication, while pastel blues, greens, and white soothe and heal, and violets open one's receptivity to the spiritual realms. Feng Shui principles of color and color placement are also worth considering. But beyond anyone else's theory, what colors simply appeal to you, given a pure gut reaction? Do you really want all your walls painted white, for example, or are you just giving in to another middle class cultural norm?

We really broke new ground in establishing a more aesthetically pleasing home environment when we decided to break away from the stereotypical white walls and ceiling lights. It was incredibly freeing to paint the living room, as we have mentioned, in shades of salmon, and the bathroom sage green. Now that we've gotten used to that, I'm ready to go a couple shades brighter. I've been especially inspired by my friend Morgan, who is a creativity consultant. She went from painting all the walls in her northwest home a golden yellow (a great contrast to those many gray or rainy days) to selecting turquoise and a rosy terracotta color for the living room and office sanctuary of her new home in Arizona. It may sound shocking to some of you, but I thought it looked stunning. That place is vibrantly alive! And yet, interestingly enough, the energy of her home is also very peaceful.

Nearly every home I've seen where color was freely played with — be it for furnishings or walls — really felt especially fresh and vital. So go ahead, give yourself permission to expand your color palette. Undoubtedly you will come face-to-face with what one famous painter calls “the bravery test”, as you cross over the threshold of your comfort zone into new frontiers.

Lighting is understandably very important in honing the atmosphere or mood of your sanctuary. You should see yourself as Keeper of the Light of your sacred space. That means to study the effect of light in your life, throughout your day. Wherever you go you are affected by light, as if a beam were following you across stage. Most of your life is conducted under some artificial lighting. Natural light is simply in the background. In a sacred space it is different. Natural light is a first consideration, only accented by artificial lighting. The natural light from a window or skylight, for example, is invaluable for mood. But so is the soft light emanating from a candle or a fireplace, or a bubbling under-lit fountain.

Floor lamps can contribute much to a mood as well, especially if they have a nice lampshade that accents and beautifies the light, as from a stained glass shade. Seek alternatives to harsh ceiling and fluorescent lights that tend to over light and depersonalize a space. Save a little energy while you're at it. Effective area lights or “task lights” give the option to brightly light the exact place where you're reading or working, without shining directly on the rest of the room. Also, full spectrum lights better approximate natural light and seem to be helping their users (such as high school students and those who work inside all day) by counteracting the headaches and depression so common with fluorescent lighting. And don't forget to try some of the energy-efficient light bulbs. Although more expensive initially, they last many times longer and save lots of electricity.

Here's another novel idea. Linda sponge-painted her bathroom. Then she removed the fluorescent light above the bathroom sink and instead placed a mass of tiny golden Christmas lights above the frosted glass panel. The mood created is positively delightful and is further enhanced by the fact that she turned the towel shelf into a simple altar, using silk flowers, a couple of angels, and a framed picture of a pastoral landscape. This more than makes up for not having a window and creates a soothing, intimate effect.

And again, wherever possible, take advantage of available natural light. If you can design your kitchen so that you have a window above the sink, you'll enjoy doing the dishes ever so much more, enjoying the sunlight and the overall presence of nature. If the view out your window is less than optimal, fill the window with plants, or even consider hanging flower planters and a bird feeder *outside* the window, for a cheery effect.

There is not a single room in our house that does not have the option of some type of special mood lighting. The living room that we look down upon from our upstairs loft glows in warm amber (not yellow) — the effect of well chosen and patiently procured lights that found us! During winter it feels womblike, eternal, safe. Summer is more evocative, if not Mediterranean. The open upstairs bedroom loft basks in ethnic blues and oranges of varying cultures — our celebration of Eastern, Malaysian, and South American styles in furnishings and art, all wonderfully interwoven and enhanced by the intriguing choices of light. So let your own imagination ride the winds, and give yourself the freedom to explore and express, through the artistry of color and lighting, the beauty already known and loved by your soul.

In Conclusion

If you steward your setting with devotion, it can only serve your highest good and likewise inspire others. You will find that the more your sanctuary is used and honored, the more peaceful the energy and spirit that exists within it will be. As such, sanctuary will become an integral part of your daily life, and all will respect your need for sanctuary time because you have demonstrated its great importance in your home.

Laura Chester in her reverent book, *Holy Personal*, ends her introduction with these words: “There is still a yearning for religious privacy, a deep desire to create for oneself a holy chamber, a place where creative expression joins hands with devotion. We need a place devoted to tranquility in a world that is always pushing us outward. Here, in these small silent rooms, without distraction, one can sit still, hear the inner voice, give thanks, and be at peace — *Pax Profundis* — before moving on.” The question remains to be asked: Does your home feel like just such a holy chamber; is there some place within it that affords you a view into your soul?

We particularly enjoy gazing up at our small shed roof designed home from the front Park Meadow at night. The amber glow of peace and tranquility downstairs gives rise to a luminous blue glow through the beveled glass windows upstairs, as if Heaven had just entered the loft out of prayer, and we needed to document it on film. But darn it. This is good, standing out here on a cold spring night in awe and wonder of a true place of sanctuary created with another human being over the past 18 years. Healed by the blessed relationship with family and nature through the eyes of Cortesian reverence. Celebrated by our desire as a couple to share the gift of sanctuary with others. This is every bit a *mandir*, a sacred temple for the soul, for the soul of family, and all beings. Undoubtedly, this is one of the reasons that visitors are so charmed by our sanctuary. It shines like a beacon in the night, like a well-lit altar at the base of the vast forest of towering firs, like an island of grace in a little boy and girl's dreaming mind. We humbly bow as stewards to the privilege of co-creating a home sanctuary, in a sense our own holy chamber that holds the Spirit of Cortesia.

When you are ready, give your favorite, most treasured personal place a name. Your heart will tell you the right one. This will be your refuge from the world. It will hold the spirit of your heart's desire. It will truly be an Island of Grace in your life.

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