



In every home, at least two areas present a decorating challenge, one being a fireplace mantle and the other being a wall unit or built-in book case.

Perhaps your home has a corner fireplace that gives off heat in the winter and adds interest to the room in the summer. What else does it do? It gives you, the home owner a headache because you don't know how to decorate the mantle. Even without the challenge of a corner fireplace, a mantle that's centered in a room can be tricky to decorate. Some homeowners will add candles to the mantle which is nice, but redundant since the fireplace is already a source of heat and flame. Others mount a flatscreen television or family photos, which are fine just not very unique.

For a different look try using odd numbers of items and remember to think about scale. Do not load up the mantle with little knickknacks. They will look lost due to the imbalance of size. Small items displayed on a large fireplace mantle never work. It's akin to a petite woman carrying a very large handbag - it just looks out of proportion.

For a look that has impact, start by selecting an accent colour that works well with your present colour scheme and build the accessories around that colour. Try using a large decorative plate on a stand in the middle with two smaller complementary vases in different shapes placed on one side of the plate. Another look is to have one large sculpture or vase that catches the eye. Artwork can also look nice as long as it stands out and adds visual interest. Many homeowners fall under the matching match spell, pairing identical items on each side of the mantle. This look is also known as your grandmother's mantle. Please stay clear of this look and try something original. An asymmetrical look is always more interesting than perfect symmetry.



IF YOU REALLY WANT TO PLAY IT SAFE AND HAVE A SIMPLE, YET UNIFIED LOOK, TRY DECORATING THE SHELVES WITH A VARIETY OF ACCESSORIES ALL IN THE SAME COLOUR. NEUTRAL COLOURS WORK BEST FOR THIS TYPE OF APPLICATION. JUST MAKE SURE TO SELECT ITEMS OF VARYING HEIGHTS AND SIZES FOR VISUAL INTEREST.

BEFORE: These decorated shelves don't make a particularly unique statement, but you can see the effects of decluttering and adding some simple, dramatic pieces in the photo below.

AFTER: Creating a focal point and paying attention to scale and balance creates an upscale, sophisticated look and atmosphere.

If all else fails take a picture of your mantle and go to a great store that can assist you. I recommend Soho & Nada located at 820 11Ave S.W. They group all of their accessories using colour and scale so it's practically done for you! Another more affordable option is Pier 1. Their merchandise is displayed with complementary groupings which simplifies the 'does this item go with that' question.

Now let's tackle decorating a wall unit. Typically, the unit is in a room that is used daily and faces the kitchen. It has a wall of shelves with a fireplace in the middle or a television mounted on the wall. It provides great storage and is a real focal point in any room due to its size. The issue is always - what to do with all of those shelves? I have seen a wall of: books, kid's crafts, family photos, DVDs, CDs, hairbrushes, toys and at least five remote controls. A common look but not necessarily a visually pleasing one!

Try removing a few of the shelves to create larger spaces to display items and this will vary the height of each box. Display your items in a zigzag pattern so that your eye travels the distance of the bookcase from top to bottom. For a minimal look, try using one impressive piece such as a sculpture in one of the middle shelves and a few smaller items in the remaining spaces. Try not to get stuck on which items to display. If you have treasures from your travels or the kids' framed art, these may work well.

Any collection can be beautifully displayed on a tray or arranged in a loose pattern. To show off an assortment of books, remove the book jackets so that the spine of the book can be seen. Stack some books and lean others on their sides for a casual look.

If you really want to play it safe and have a simple, yet unified look, try decorating the shelves with a variety of accessories all in the same colour. Neutral colours work best for this type of application. Just make sure to select items of varying heights and sizes for visual interest. If storage is an issue, use canvas, wicker or leather boxes to hide frequently used items such as CDs or movies.

Once you have decorated the mantle and built-in units take a picture and have a look for your self. The camera never lies, unless of course it's an unflattering picture of you! [®]

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