

Interiors

How to elevate the ordinary in your home

Often, it's the little things that bring the most joy. Olivia Lidbury looks at how to achieve true domestic bliss

How does that famous William Morris quote – "Have nothing in your houses that you do not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful" – coined in the late 19th century by the great designer – apply to life in 2021? Can there be a happy union of the two? While a washing machine is obviously practical, its appearance ranks low on the aesthetics scale. When will manufacturers of white goods up their game?

This guide takes on the task of trying, by paying close attention to the sort of scrounger you use to scrub your dishes, and the way you make over the inside of your laundry cupboard, you'll find there are ways to "beautify" even the most mundane rituals around the home.

As Libs Lewis, owner of Cotswolds-based homewares stores Domestic Science, says: "Choose everyday objects that will lift the soul when you use them. Considering both the form and the material of even a simple cup for your morning tea can raise spirits, while going the extra mile in the selection will punctuate your day with small pleasures."

You'll quickly gather that the theme here is to eschew plastic in favour of more industrial and enduring materials, such as glass and wood.

As Micaela Sharp of Micaela Sharp Design, a semi-finalist on Netflix's *Interior Design Masters*, says: "I swap plastic containers in my kitchen for glass jars. Glass feels and looks a lot more high-end, especially if the containers are left on display. I use zinc for garlic, pasta and tea."

And metals such as brass and zinc patinate over time, lending a lived-in feel to everything from handles to sockets. Slowly, you'll end up with that considered look you see achieved in magazines and boutique hotels, where the fundamentals of domesticity are so good-looking (or even better, disguised) that you barely register them.

I canvassed some experts in the field on how to go about it...

REVAMP YOUR ELECTRICS



There's no denying that chunky white extension cables are the scourge of our tech-centric lives. Lola's Leads (lolapalooza.co.uk) has come to the rescue with fabric-covered twisted alternatives, available in 11 colours and starting from £35. They work brilliantly in period properties where sockets are few and far between.

Add the finishing touch to a pendant light with some hand-picked fabric flex (which also works for wall lights where the cable will be visibly hanging down). Labour & Wait (labourandwait.co.uk) sells them in four colourways for just £5 per metre. *Pistachio coloured extension lead, £49, lolapalooza.co.uk*

PAY YOUR DESK SOME LOVE

Pass on the water bottle – you and your desk deserve a carafe and a beautiful tumbler (it'll also stop you wandering to the kitchen every half-hour). You could go a step further like Lonika Chande, who pops some peeled cucumber in hers. "It's so refreshing, and looks great too."



Tidy desk, tidy mind and all that. Treat yourself to some organisational pieces, like box files, bins and letter trays. Host (hosthome.co.uk) has a selection lined in beautiful floral and geometric print papers. *Hexagonal pen pot, £18, hosthome.co.uk*



SPRUCE UP YOUR KITCHEN SINK

"I always put my Fairy liquid in a cut-glass decanter," says Sophie Rowell, the Folkestone-based founder of interior design consultancy Côte de Folk (cotedefolk.com). "After all, you don't spend ages choosing the right tap to then put an ugly plastic bottle next to it." So that's out with the Carex and Fairy liquids – and in with everlasting vessels (Black & Barn, blackandbarn.com, specialises in sturdy brown ones). Once you're out of soap, refill at your local zero-waste store or sign up to subscription services such as Bower Collective (bowercollective.com), who post essentials before you run out and offer a prepaid returns service to recycle the packaging.



Find a home for sponges and scourers, like a tall plant pot with a hole for drainage, or a ceramic jug. Chuck wooden cleaning brushes in there too. "They really help elevate this mundane task," advises Libs Lewis. If your sink has a splashback, hang them with string from a peg rail above, along with scissors, utensils and chopping boards. Finish the look with a considered drying rack, try Lisa Valentine (lisavalentinehome.co.uk) for a rustic style or Dunelm for something more modern. *Copper scourer, £4.95, domesticsciencehome.co.uk*

ADD A TOUCH OF THE UNEXPECTED

Raid your collection of surplus paint tins and get brush-happy inside cupboard drawers – every time you open them it will make you smile. Painting the back of a door has a similar impact.

Interior stylist Jennifer Haslam, who devises shoots for M&S, suggests wallpapering the inside of a pantry or a shelving unit to add interest. "It doesn't have to be perfect, because you'll have food in front of it. You could use double-sided sticky tape." For an even easier method, look up self-adhesive wallpaper on Etsy and Dunelm, which peels off after application and promises not to mark walls, making it great for renters. *Wallpaper in Maui Green, £24, dunelm.com*



CONSIDER 'TOUCH POINTS'

Author and blogger Kate Watson-Smyth replaced all her basic light switches with antique bronze dolly toggle switches: "They make a very satisfying click! Changing light switches from the white plastic standard ones is a lovely finishing detail that will make the whole scheme look more considered; they're also nicer to touch." Look up Switch (swtch.co.uk) for coloured porcelain styles, Dowsing & Reynolds (dowsingandreynolds.com), right and below, for sleek sockets and Buster & Punch (busterandpunch.com) for lust-worthy toggle plates.

A handle refresh is a cost-savvy update for a tired kitchen, and as Libs Lewis says: "The proportions and the finish need to work in order to get that dopamine hit of pleasure while using them."

For contemporary knurled knobs (yes, that's



a thing) go to Plank (plankhardware.com) and Superfront (superfront.com). For something more traditional, browse the selection of Willow & Stone (willowandstone.co.uk) and ABC Ironmongery (abcfurniture.co.uk).

CRAFT SOMETHING OUT OF WHAT YOU ALREADY HAVE

"If you are installing a new worktop and have leftover material, add protective feet to a small section and place that next to the hob, as it will protect the main worktop from olive oil drips, and keep all of the messy things like salt and pepper together," suggests Beth Dadswell.

The same applies to any carpet remnants you might have. Create a doormat, hallway runner or rug by asking your local carpet shop to "whip" the edges – a binding process which stops the edges fraying. Expect to pay upwards of £4 per metre (which works out far cheaper than buying brand-new).

STYLE YOUR HOME LIKE A MAGAZINE

A tissue box sounds like the most superfluous purchase out there, but Oka's tortoise-shell style (£65, oka.com) is a one-off buy that will glamorise those universally naff-looking cardboard cubes.

Always find a proper home for plants. Interior designer Lonika Chande says: "I love picking up a potted herb with the weekly shop and re-homing it in an old terracotta flower pot, which I collect from eBay and Etsy. They add so much in the way of life and soul to a blank kitchen worktop." Beth Dadswell used oil drums as large planters for her courtyard garden: "Using them over traditional planters saved us a fortune."

Don't let a collection of remote controls ruin your curated coffee table. Find them a home of their own, like a pretty marble box or a lacquered tray from Tinsmiths (tinsmiths.co.uk) which also means you'll never misplace them again.

BEAUTIFYING THE UGLY – BUT NECESSARY

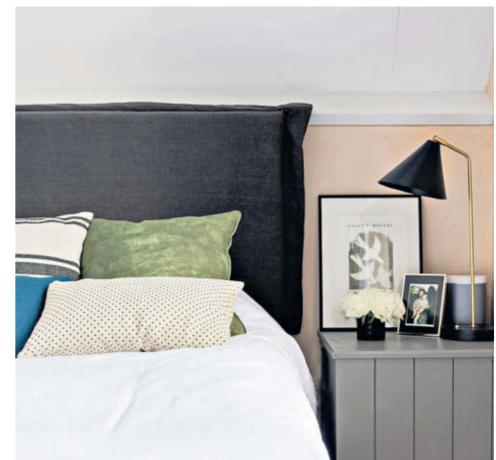
If a sad-looking radiator is blighting your hallway, conceal it with a radiator cover – Wayfair has styles for as little as £40. Blogger India Semhi customised hers by stapling on a panel of French cane (look up her step-by-step guide on her Instagram highlights, @theinteriorsedit).

You'll then benefit from a shelf on which you can lean your local upholsterer to make one."

Fallen out of love with your bed? Interior designer Beth Dadswell of Imperfect Interiors (imperfectinteriors.co.uk) suggests covering up ugly bases with a linen valance.

"H&M Home has some inexpensive ones, and while you're at it, update tired headboards with removable linen slip covers from Oka, or ask your local upholsterer to make one."

Transform a boring or drab shower curtain into a thing of artfully crumpled beauty by taking a leaf out of Sophie Rowell's book: "I make them out of old French linen sheets," she says. "As long as you sew a plastic panel onto the inside and then make sure that the panel stays inside the bath/shower whenever you are using it, with the fabric on the outside, it works fine."



▲ Sweet dreams: update a tired headboard with a linen slip cover, as in Beth Dadswell's bedroom
▲ The kitchen belonging to Nik Southern, founder of florist Grace & Thorn (graceandthorn.com) features a long oak peg rail from Willow & Stone for hanging mugs, scissors and utensils

DECANT, DECANT, DECANT

Transfer cooking oils into pouring bottles with metal drizzle-top containers. Adki (adkishop.co.uk) has fun, fish-shaped glass styles.

Clean out used candle votives and use them as a pen pot on a kitchen shelf.

Nothing looks sadder than a



▲ Adki's fish-shaped bottles

tower of loo roll; pile supplies high in baskets – H&M has a good, inexpensive selection of both jute and wicker styles.

Having a friend over? "Swap your milk bottle for a jug – using beautiful, well-made vessels will create that café feel at home," says Paul Firmin, co-founder of Earl of East (earlof-east.com).

RETAILERS WHO PUT THE BEAUTY INTO BASICS

Baileys
Housed in a series of old farm buildings in Ross-on-Wye, this exquisitely styled homewares store with a focus on natural materials is a destination in its own right. baileyshome.com



Black & Barn
For beautiful glass dispensers, spice pots and wooden soap dishes to keep forever, this is the site to bookmark. blackandbarn.com

Labour & Wait
Selling a lifestyle as well as celebrating timeless design, this east London store is a Mecca for beautiful brushes and everything enamelled. labourandwait.co.uk

RE-foundobjects
A weird and wonderful mix of recycled pieces, vintage job lots and colourful crafts converge at this quirky store in Northumberland. re-foundobjects.com

A G handy
Available online, but visiting the boutique in Hastings is a treat – like stepping back 100 years in time to a caretaker's utility cupboard. aghandy.com

Willow & Stone
For door hardware, ironmongery and hard-to-find finishing touches, this Cornish store's website is a joy to scroll through. willowandstone.co.uk

Domestic Science
The sort of masterfully curated shop (with sites across the Cotswolds) filled with things you never knew you wanted but suddenly need. domesticsciencehome.co.uk



▲ Lisa Methylene used a fabric skirt to hide white goods

GET GEEKY WITH UTILITY

A galvanised dustpan and brush and a straw broom have a nostalgic appeal that red plastic versions just can't replicate. The same logic applies to feather dusters, the bestseller on homewares site Lisa Valentine has fabulous ostrich plumes. "I hear from so many customers that they love seeing it hanging in their kitchen or utility room as it looks so beautiful, although it really does make dusting easy as the feathers catch everything," says founder Lisa Ridge-Valentine. Apply the same school of thought to peg bags, mop buckets and washing maid-

ens – if it looks like it could originate from a canteen circa 1950, then you're on the right track.

A budget-friendly alternative to cabinetry, simple fabric skirts can conceal a washing machine or below-sink storage. Try Haines Collection (hainescollection.co.uk) for end-of-roll pieces from big-name brands and scour YouTube for a DIY tutorial. Sophie Rowell used founder Lisa Ridge-Valentine. Apply the same school of thought to peg bags, mop buckets and washing maid-

net literally fell apart.

DON'T FORGET THE SENSES OF SMELL AND TOUCH

"All your senses need to be engaged to create a sense of luxury," says Micaela Sharp. "While some candles and diffusers can be expensive, incense is more affordable and just as powerful. Pick a scent to elevate your mood: zingy eucalyptus in the morning and gentle lavender in the evening."



The Telegraph

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