

# Make space for an Insta-worthy shelfie

## INTERIORS

How you style your favourite reading matter can change a room's look, says **Victoria Brzezinski**

The humble book has become the No 1 celebrity accessory of 2019. The actress Gwyneth Paltrow caused eyebrows to be raised in August when it emerged that she had hired a book curator to add “five or six hundred more books” to her Los Angeles home. This year the supermodel sisters Bella and Gigi Hadid made headlines when they were accused of using books as fashion accessories — Bella with Stephen King’s *The Outsider*, while Gigi toted *The Stranger* by Albert Camus.

While sales of printed books have dipped slightly this year, they accounted for more than 80 per cent of the £3.6 billion combined print and digital book market in the UK last year, according to the Publishers Association. “People still love physical books,” says Stephen Lotinga, the chief executive of the Publishers Association. “[This] is a trend halt. Sales are still up 8 per cent over the past five years.”

So why the renaissance of the physical book? “In an age when everything is digital it’s a beautiful thing to have



Group books by colour for impact

something tangible to hold in your hand,” says Irene Gunter, the founder of the interior design studio Gunter & Co. Books give an interior a lived-in feeling and a flash of personality. The educational reformer Horace Mann once said: “A house without books is like a room without windows.” A quiet, book-filled nook gives the opportunity to slow down from our lifestyles.

“Displaying books has become fashionable as part of the rise of the new eclecticism,” says Victoria Wormsley of French-Brooks Interiors, a design studio in South Kensington, west

London. “People are enjoying the pleasures of colour and collecting, turning away from the mass-produced and towards older, handmade pieces and a layered style.”

Instagram is changing the way books are displayed, consumed and marketed. There are more than 35.7 million posts tagged with the hashtag #bookstagram, the corner of Instagram where bookworms post eye-catching images of their favourite stories and latest novel recommendations, while the #shelfie — displays of books, artwork and other beautiful objects — has racked up 1.7



million posts. Martha Roberts, the author of the book *Shelfie*, says: “Where selfies are a very obvious, overt expression of self, shelfies also tell people about us and what makes us tick, but in a less conspicuous, possibly narcissistic, way. How we style our shelfies is individual. One person’s maximalist ‘embrace the clutter’ arrangement is another person’s minimalist hell.”

Shelfie-stylers fall into two camps, Gunter says. They’re either colour co-ordinated, rainbow arrangements for the more design-focused, or practical, cataloguing books alphabetically or by subject matter. “I also love a stacked pile of books next to a bed being used as a bedside table, or in between a pair of armchairs,” she says.

The look is about making a statement, even in the smallest of spaces. “Bookcases don’t need to be very deep for a big visual impact,” Wormsley says. “A wall of vintage Penguins with their trademark orange covers will only need shelves 15cm deep.”

You can introduce a pop of colour by painting the inside of a bookshelf with a contrasting paint colour or lining it with patterned wallpaper to set off the contents. “Mix it up with unexpected treasures: sculptures, objects found on travels, picture frames and small lamps,” says Sophie Collier, the managing director of Kitesgrove, an interior designer. Use books to create visual interest and use them as platforms or plinths to introduce different heights.

Roberts advises arranging



Modular Canaletto units by Ligne Roset

items in threes. “The eye sees three objects as a group, so it’s visually pleasing.” Add plants for texture — trailing plants are good for enhancing a display. Lisa Price, the owner of Root Houseplants, recommends satin pothos (*Epipremnum pictum* ‘Argyraeus’), which has heart-shaped leaves with iridescent silver flecks. “It’s an easy-going plant. If it’s in a shady spot you would notice larger gaps between the leaves as it seeks more light,” Price says. Or try string-of-hearts (*Ceropegia woodii*) for a softer look. “It’s a delicate beauty that grows fairly fast in a bright spot, and as it’s classed as a semi-succulent vine, it’s best to allow the plant to dry out before you water.”

Sideboards have also become the perfect place to showcase shelfies. At Vinterior, an online vintage furniture marketplace, they are the most searched item and its bestsellers. Sandrine Zhang Ferron, the founder of Vinterior, says: “Some might dot their sideboard with trinkets, photo frames or plants. For renters who are unable to hang framed pictures, a good alternative for elevating artworks is to lean them against the wall atop a sideboard. Book lovers can also stack their favourite titles in neat



Built-in shelving provides plenty of storage space from K&H Design

arrangements — coffee tables are very often used for the same purpose.”

Andrew Martin, a design brand, reports that sales of bookshelves and display units are up 90 per cent, while Habitat, a furniture retailer, says that its modular designs, such as Loki, are “very popular” because you can develop your storage as and when you need it (from £225, in walnut black or white oak finishes). Nicola Shaw, the homebuying manager at Urban Outfitters, a retailer, says: “Shelving is a key category this season, especially the Carter [a plywood shelf that lies on a triangular metal bracket, from £8]. It is essential for the perfect Insta-shelfie shot,” she says.

Another popular design is Joanna (from £35), a mango-wood base with a textural high-shine metal backing “for a glowy take on texture and dimension”. ■