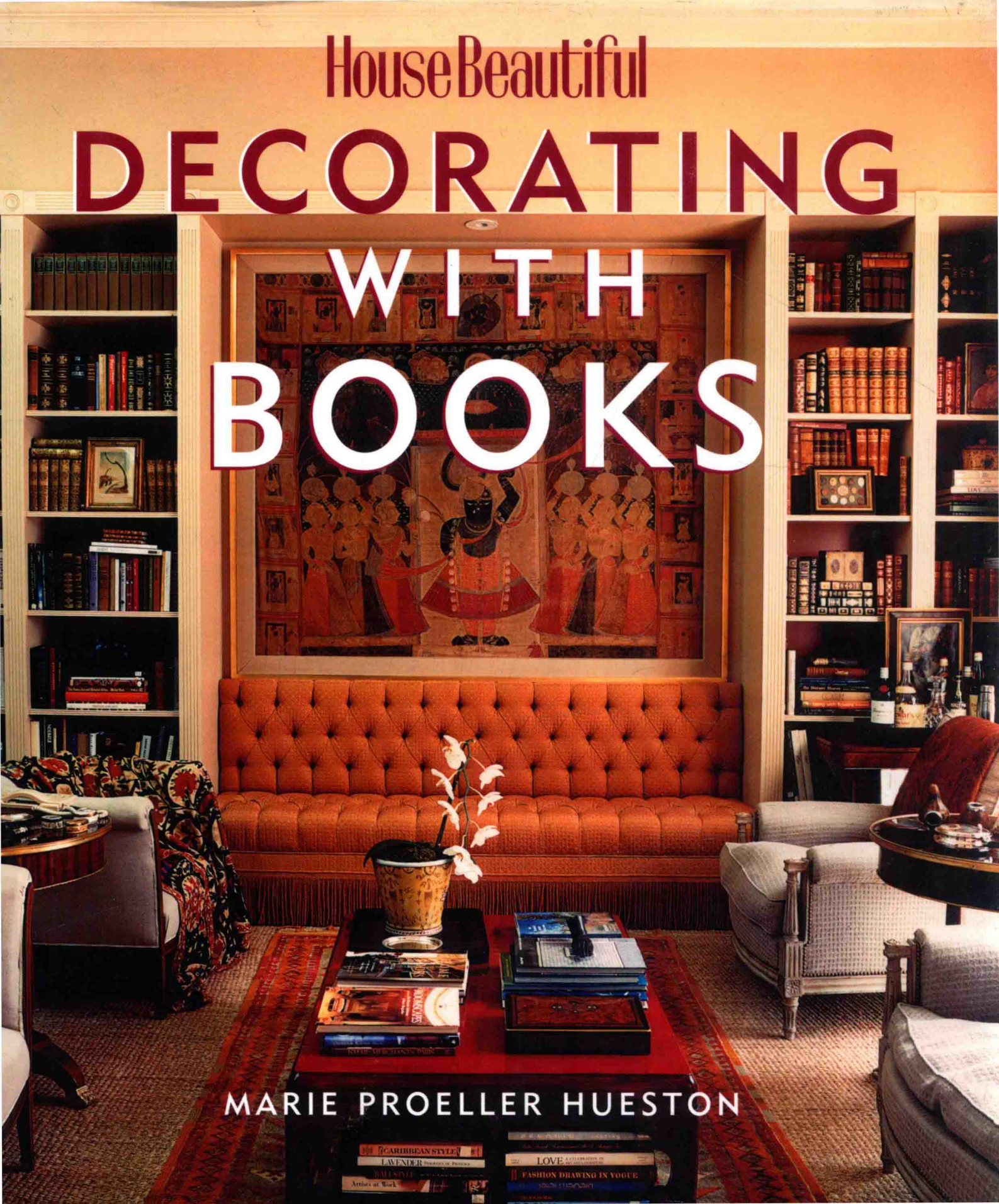


House Beautiful

# DECORATING WITH BOOKS

A photograph of a cozy living room. In the center is a large, orange tufted sofa. Behind it, a large, colorful tapestry with figures in traditional attire hangs on the wall. To the left and right of the sofa are tall, light-colored wooden bookshelves filled with books. In front of the sofa is a low, dark wood coffee table with a red top, holding several books and a small vase with white flowers. The room is carpeted with a patterned rug, and there are armchairs on either side of the sofa.

MARIE PROELLER HUESTON

House Beautiful

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DECORATING  
WITH BOOKS

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USE YOUR LIBRARY TO  
ENHANCE YOUR DECOR

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MARIE PROELLER HUESTON

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HEARST BOOKS

*A Division of Sterling Publishing Co., Inc*

New York



**PAGE 1:** Books are frequently incorporated into decorative arrangements in the home. Four volumes chosen for their all-white color scheme add height and visual interest to this still life on the mantel.

**PAGE 2:** In an antiques dealer's library, the walls and shelving are painted a crisp white to balance the heavy wood furniture, like the walnut drawing table and straight chair, which are both Flemish pieces from the seventeenth century. Brass spotlights and a brass ladder rail frame the top shelf on which bound copies of *The Connoisseur* form a strong horizontal band of color. The collection of books is arranged with the eye of an artist; volumes stand up, lie flat, and vary in height from one shelf to the next. Precious antiques and heirlooms punctuate the scene.

**OPPOSITE:** In this writer's work space, his towers of books surround a library table now used as a desk. Arranged in such a manner, the books add to their utilitarian purpose by forming a unique backdrop for the room. Although the placement of books appears random—and a bit precarious—the occupant knows precisely where each volume is and has become adept at slipping one out without toppling the rest. Reference books are kept close at hand atop an old steamer trunk.

**PAGE 6:** Books can be chosen to underscore a room's color scheme. In this airy living room, brown leather bindings and books in deep hues echo the dark wood and woven furnishings found throughout the space. Placing a few books to either side of each shelf creates a natural frame for prized possessions.

**PAGE 8:** Built-in bookcases create an unexpected yet striking backdrop for a dining room. Not only are walls of books pleasing to the eye, they're sure to spark conversations in such a setting.

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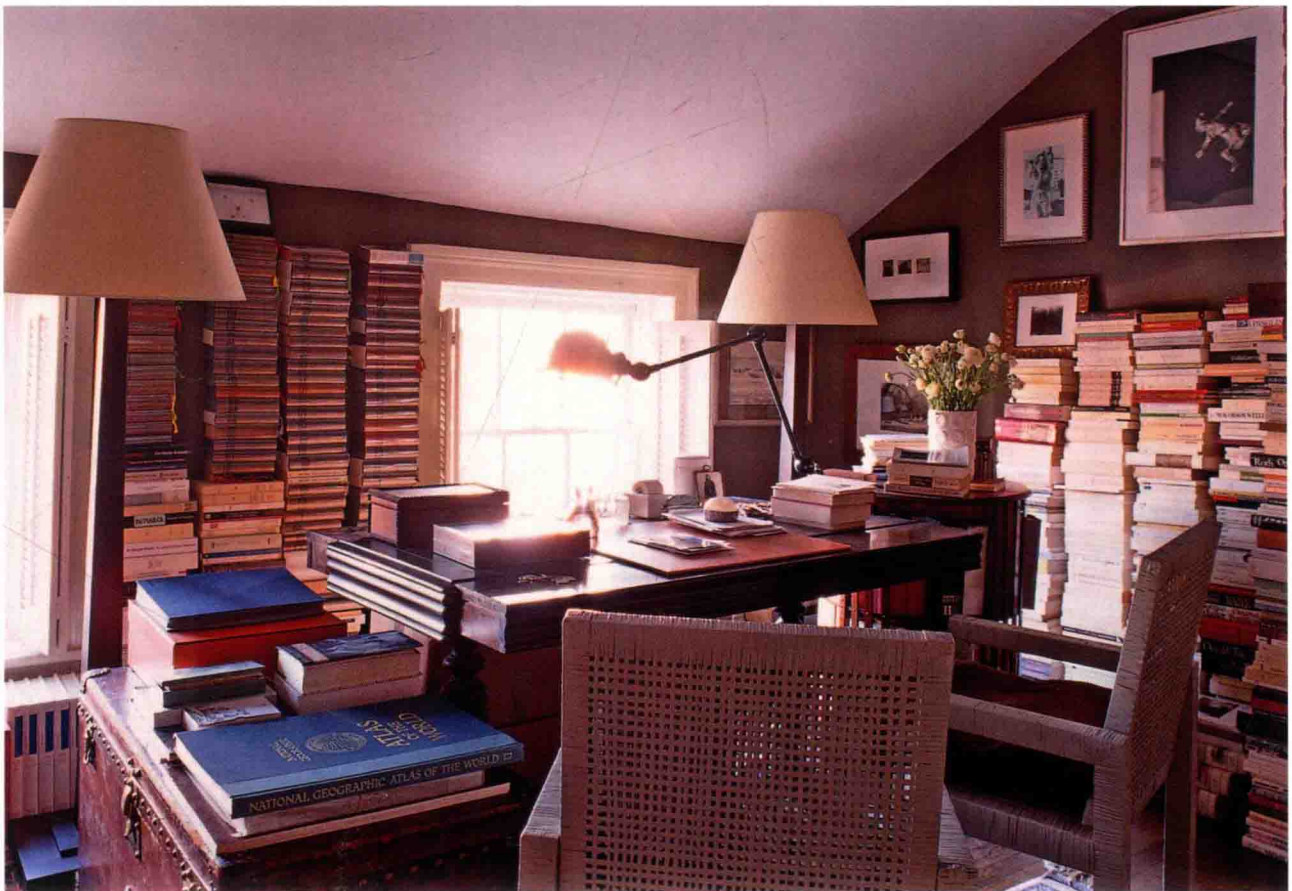
I have always imagined that Paradise will be a kind of library.

—JORGE LUIS BORGES

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[There is] no furniture so charming as books, even if you never open them, or read a single word.

—SYDNEY SMITH, in *A Memoir of the Reverend Sydney Smith*, by Lady Holland, 1855





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# F O R E W O R D

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LEGENDARY INTERIOR DESIGNER BILLY BALDWIN ONCE DECLARED, "BOOKS are the best decoration." We couldn't agree more. Set on a shelf or lying open on a table, books become decorative elements in a room, as vital to the overall scheme as any piece of furniture or work of art. We can't imagine any home without them.

Among the countless interiors we've featured in *House Beautiful* over the years, some of the most memorable have been the rooms in which books played a major role. We especially love to see them used in an unexpected way—stacked beside a sofa as a side table, arranged in a dramatic display atop the mantel, or resting on the seat of a curvy side chair.

You'll find a font of ideas, both creative and traditional, throughout *Decorating with Books*. In addition to inspirational photographs, useful tips will shed light on topics such as the best ways to organize a large book collection, the optimal placement of bookcases in a room, the proper care of antiquarian volumes, and much more. May this book become a worthy addition to your own library.

The Editors of *House Beautiful*







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# INTRODUCTION

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"HE THAT LOVETH A BOOK WILL NEVER WANT A FAITHFUL FRIEND," proclaimed the seventeenth-century British scholar, Isaac Barrow. More than three centuries after Barrow's death, his words still resonate with book lovers everywhere. Why do these ubiquitous objects continue to inspire such adoration? One reason is that cherished volumes are like favorite family photographs: Each time you look at them, you are transported back to joyful times. Perhaps you remember the day in grammar school when a literary classic you've now read countless times was first placed on your desk. Holding a dog-eared novel in your hands may conjure up recollections of a carefree college vacation in Europe, while the sight of a glossy museum catalogue can trigger the same awestruck feeling you experienced the first time you saw in person the work of an artist you greatly admire. You may even picture yourself among the shelves of the dusty bookshop in which you discovered an out-of-print tome (at last!) after years of searching.

Besides providing a window on the past, books show the world who we are today. A collection of books gathered over a lifetime reflects its owner's pursuits, pastimes, and passions. No matter what the category—be it fly-fishing, French cuisine, Chinese snuff-boxes,

OPPOSITE: Prominently placed on a table in the center of a spacious foyer, the stacks of books in the entryway inform guests that they are entering the home of booklovers. Four groupings of relatively equal height work well with the round table, and the slight disorder of the arrangement complements the home's casual elegance. A single volume is included in a simple still life on the blue table, continuing the literary theme across the room.



Thick shelving of blond wood and neat rows of books are well suited to modern interiors. Keeping the shelves at an equal height from top to bottom creates a sense of symmetry and acts as a grounding force for the furniture and artwork's curved lines. The home's sunlit corners are ideal spots for a comfortable reading chair.

or English architecture of the eighteenth century—a book on the subject has been published somewhere in the world. This may explain the tendency of bibliophiles to steal a glimpse at the bookcases in a new acquaintance's home. If the topics they find there are subjects in which they have little interest, conversation will quickly drift in other directions. But should those shelves harbor familiar titles, especially obscure ones, a lively discussion will ensue, and, quite likely, friendship will blossom.

Books can also be appreciated on a purely aesthetic level. Consider the leather bindings on antiquarian books—florid, gold-leaf designs still visible after centuries of use, and colors deepened by the handling of successive generations. Beautiful endpapers in bold marbled patterns, graceful botanical prints, or strong stripes create a sense of anticipation when a front cover is opened and a sense of closure when the last line has been read. Dust jackets brittle with age showcase the fonts, color schemes, and graphic-design motifs popular at the time they were printed. Even the edges of pages have a distinct look about them, whether ragged, gilded, or dog-eared. From small-press editions of poetry to pulp fiction novels churned out in the 1960s, books possess visual and tactile qualities that CD-ROMs and Internet databases can never replicate.

With all these wonderful attributes to recommend them, is it any wonder that so many of us accumulate and surround ourselves with books? Fortunately, we live in an age when all but the rarest volumes are affordable and accessible. This was not always the case. Before the invention of movable type in the fifteenth century, books were painstakingly transcribed by hand and illustrated with precious tinctures and gold leaf. As valuable as works of art, books were more often stored in a lockbox than displayed on a shelf. Even after the printing press made it possible for titles to be published in larger editions, books remained within only the reach of the wealthy—individuals who had both the financial resources to purchase them and the education to know how to read them.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, advancements in mass-production techniques allowed books to be





Books need not be arranged standing up. Here, in this dramatically decorated living room, oversized art, lamps, and books work together to create an eye-catching display. The books are stacked neatly on their sides in a small dark bookcase which helps draw attention to the books themselves rather than the bookcase holding them.