

Special Reports

How to make a small apartment feel bigger – and top interior design trends for 2021 you need to try

In this time of the coronavirus pandemic, a longing for the wide blue yonder sees serenity and sustainable home furnishings as top trends in the year ahead


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Published: 2:47pm, 5 Jan, 2021 ▾

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Era sofa from Tree. A top trend for 2021 is soft furnishings. Photo: Tree

We all need it, and trend forecasters have called it: 2021 will be the year that brings fresh positivity into our lives.

Canadian paint brand Sico is chirping about a hue called Blue Winged-Warbler (named after a North American songbird) as its colour of the year for 2021, noting that with much of the world still outside our reach, “This fresh aqua colour instils a feeling of positivity, transforming a space into a serene retreat from the world outside our doors.”

Pantone Color Institute has picked a palette of “happy” colours for the upcoming year, which executive director Leatrice Eiseman describes as sparks of energy that encourage and uplift our moods.

Trending blue hues include Cerulean, “the colour of the sky on a serene, crystal clear day”, and French Blue, evoking a vision of Paris in the springtime. Also making the cut is Beach Glass, described as “a watery aqua tumbled smooth by the waves and currents”.

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Combine wooden furniture with organic accents, like this setting by Liquid Interiors.
Photo: Liquid Interiors

And, as it happens, feng shui dictates aqua blue as one of the two lucky colours for the Year of the Ox, the other being metallic grey.

What will this mean for Hong Kong homes?

John McLennan founder and creative director of Indigo Living, foresees interiors looking “a bit more nautical”. “Not ships and knots,” he clarifies, “but the blues that come with water and the ocean.”

Bold jungle birds were popular for a while, but don’t expect the same with tropical fish.

Rather, McLennan expects “slight design features” in home accessories, such as a rough fish or starfish shape, but nothing too literal at the start.

“It will work its way in,” he says. McLennan also believes there’ll be less shiny metal in furnishings, perhaps replaced by antique-look or brushed metal. For tabletops, stone will still be popular, he says, but there’s a pushback against marble in favour of lighter, more cost-effective ceramics.



Cosy, richly textured Interior furnishings from Tree. Photo: Tree

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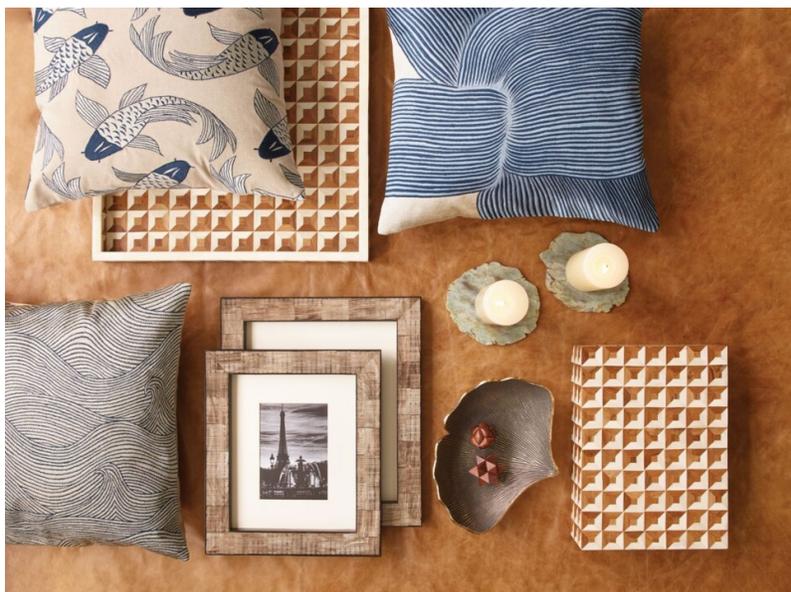


A blend of two enduring trends, Japanese and Scandi – dubbed Japandi – should please those in both camps. McLennan describes this look as “a clean and simple, a move on wabi sabi (a Japanese philosophy that finds beauty in imperfection and honours all things, old, weathered and natural)”, featuring a lot of woven cane and very light, almost raw wood in its natural state, with no stain or colour. Indigo Living will introduce such pieces in its upcoming collections. Meanwhile, he says, “The whole retro thing is still running hot.”

A desire to connect with nature in our homes is also not going away. Kate Babington, managing director of TREE, says this trend endures because “it’s all about creating a calm, harmonising abode in which one can relax and unwind”.

“We recommend incorporating materials such as wood and natural fibres, as well as a palette of earthy hues that brings an abundance of warmth to your home,” she says.

For an easy fix, TREE’s woven baskets, handcrafted in the Philippines, provide stylish storage solutions while also lending plenty of textural interest to your living space.



The season's latest accessories from Indigo Living, from cushions to picture frames.
Photo: Indigo Living

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“Soft furnishings in neutral tones – such as TREE’s refined layers collection, crafted in Belgium from fabrics woven in a family owned mill, will complete your room with a lovingly layered effect,” she advises. She predicts that the wabi sabi trend will continue next year, adding a cosy, lived-in look to the home.

Organic Modernism’s range of wood designs, such as the Phoenix cabinet, brings a touch of rustic nature into the home.

Aligned with the back to nature trend is a growing consciousness around sustainability. And brands can’t merely claim their products to be so, as consumers demand to see provenance all along the supply chain.

As Julia Washbourne, founder of Bamboa Home, notes with some sadness, homewares that are truly sustainably and ethically produced generally come at a premium, which can be a barrier when competing with mass-produced and cheaper products. But, demand is increasing, a trend Washbourne correlates with the pandemic, as people are consuming more consciously.

With quality comes longevity, she asserts: “My bedlinen (made from 100 per cent sustainable bamboo lyocell) will last you 30 or 40 years.”

The technology enables 95 per cent of the water used in its production to be recycled. The pulped fibre is spun into yarn and sent to a local sewing company in China that’s led by a women’s cooperative. Custom orders are tailor-made in Hong Kong.

Bamboo sheets feel soft as silk (at one-third of the price), and are highly absorbent and breathable, making it easier to sleep on hot, humid nights, and towels made of the same material stay fresher, too. All of Bamboa Home’s products are made of organic bamboo – including its new range of face masks.

Going natural with furnishings could be the start of turning your home into a wellness retreat which designer Rowena Gonzales, of Liquid Interiors, says we all need now, more than ever.

“Where in your life have you felt your most relaxed, serene and comfortable? Isn’t that in your own home?” she asks.

“If not, then it may be time to begin to transform your living space into your very own wellness sanctuary where you can retreat and detach from the stresses of urban living, and be at your most positive and calm.”

How to make a small apartment feel bigger



Sliding doors can be a stylish way to create the illusion of space in a small apartment.
Photo: Getty Images

Designer Clifton Leung, of Clifton Leung Design Workshop, reveals these tricks of the trade:

- Use the floor. Using a platform as your bed base allows for handy storage compartments to be tucked underneath. Installing a hydraulic lift-up mechanism allows for easy access.
- Build a false wall. Moving a living room wall out even half a metre can allow for storage at either end. Make it wider if you want to create a full length, walk-in storeroom.
- Find more space. Replace conventional opening doors with space-saving sliders, or to open up a cramped space, replace the dividing wall with a sliding screen.
- Optimise angles. Some apartments have awkward corners and odd spaces that are difficult to use. Turn these into a visual feature – or more storage, if you need it.
- No room for a dining table? How about a foldaway fix? Design one that slides or wheels away into an alcove; just pull it out when needed.