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20 Shelf Décor Ideas That Turn Your Objects Into Wall Art

Learn how to style every shelf in your home with these interior designer-approved ideas.

By [Heather Bien](#) | Published on November 7, 2023



PHOTO: ONURDONGEL / GETTY IMAGES

Shelves are one of those design elements that appeal to every style. You'll find sleek, industrial floating shelves in a minimalist's condo, bright built-in shelves filled with colorful vignettes in a [coastal grandmother cottage](#), and, of course, collection shelves full of plates, books, and curiosities in a [vintage lover's home](#). What's more, shelves combine personal style with an opportunity to increase your home's storage potential. But in order to maximize their aesthetic potential, knowing how to style them is key. When looking for ways to decorate your shelves, turn to these beautiful (and functional) ideas from interior designers.

RELATED: [13 Small Space Storage Ideas That Find a Place for Everything](#)

01 | Create a Naturalist Display

of 20



PHOTO: RETT PEEK

Shelves are the perfect place to show off your [secondhand treasures](#). "I love a good puzzle and styling shelves is my favorite piece of a room," says Jen Bienvenu, interior decorator and vintage dealer at [J. Bienvenu Interiors](#). "As a naturalist and former teacher, my collections on display include

natural specimens, vintage sets of classic literature, and thrifted pottery and ceramics." In this room, she offsets her vintage finds with a muted sage green that feels both fresh and historic.

02 | Arrange by Color

of 20



PHOTO: ERIN MEYERS DESIGN

If you miss the days when bookshelves arranged by color dominated home interiors, then Erin Myers of [Erin Myers Design](#) has the perfect updated take on that organized look. She used both books and styling items, all arranged by hue, in this gorgeous shelf. A backdrop of printed wallpaper adds another layer of interest.

03 | Make it a Piece of Art

of 20



PHOTO: ALBERTO STRADA

Choose a shelf that acts as an art installation all on its own. "The shelf

itself can become a piece of art with the incorporation of a dramatic material," says Marzia Dainelli of [Dainelli Studio](#). This reflective gold shelf makes a statement on its own, and a few minimalist items add just enough style.

04 | Go Dark and Monochromatic

of 20



PHOTO: CHRISTY KOSNIC PHOTOGRAPHY

Dark navy shelves feel like a throwback to a vintage library, but Sallie Lord, founder of [GreyHunt Interiors](#), kept the look luxe by adding white and blue wallpaper and gold accents. From the mirror to the hardware, the space feels luxurious and intentional.

05 | Keep a Neutral Backdrop

of 20

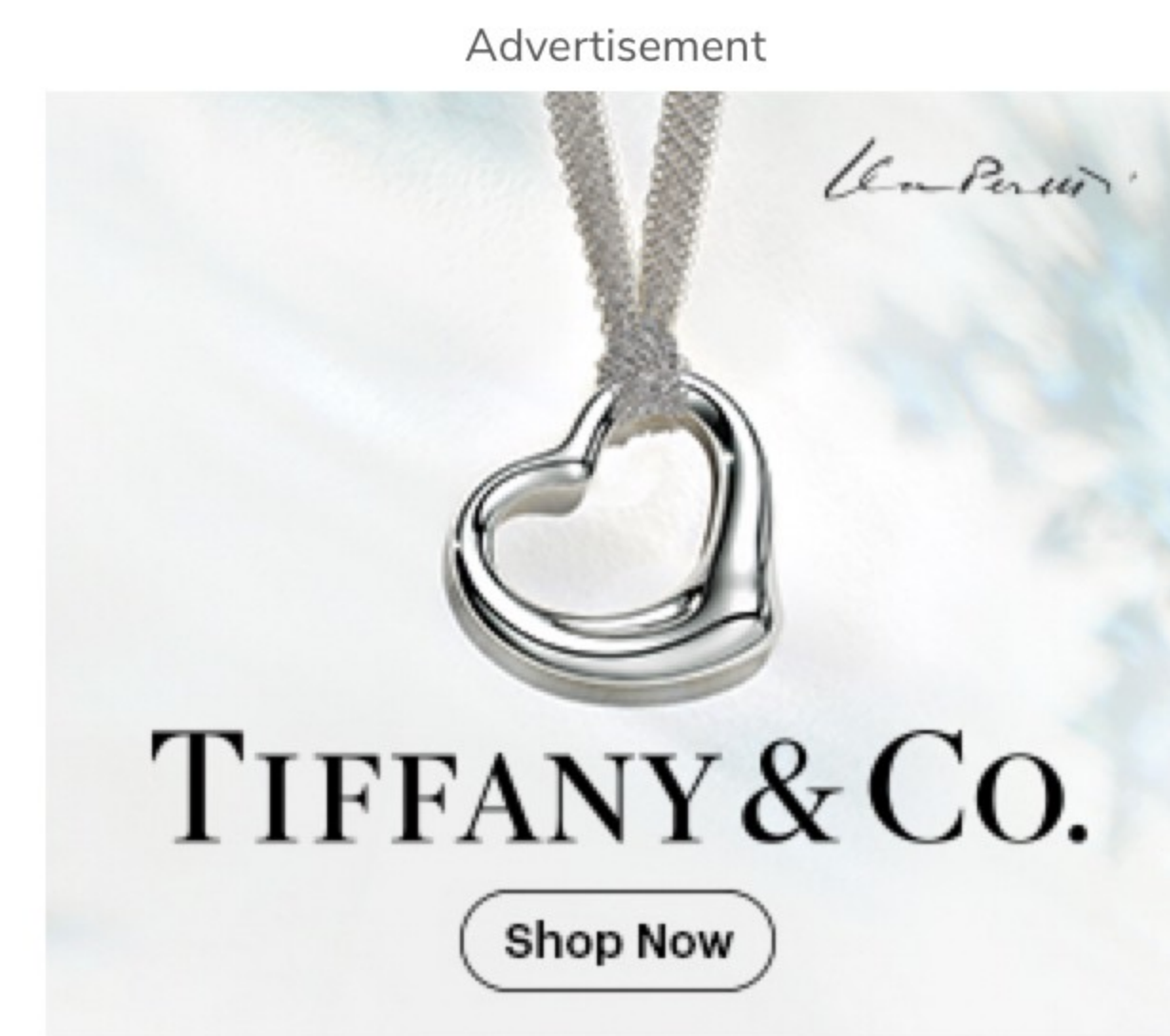


PHOTO: PHOTOGRAPHER: PEAK VISUALS / DESIGNER: KRISTIN HARRISON

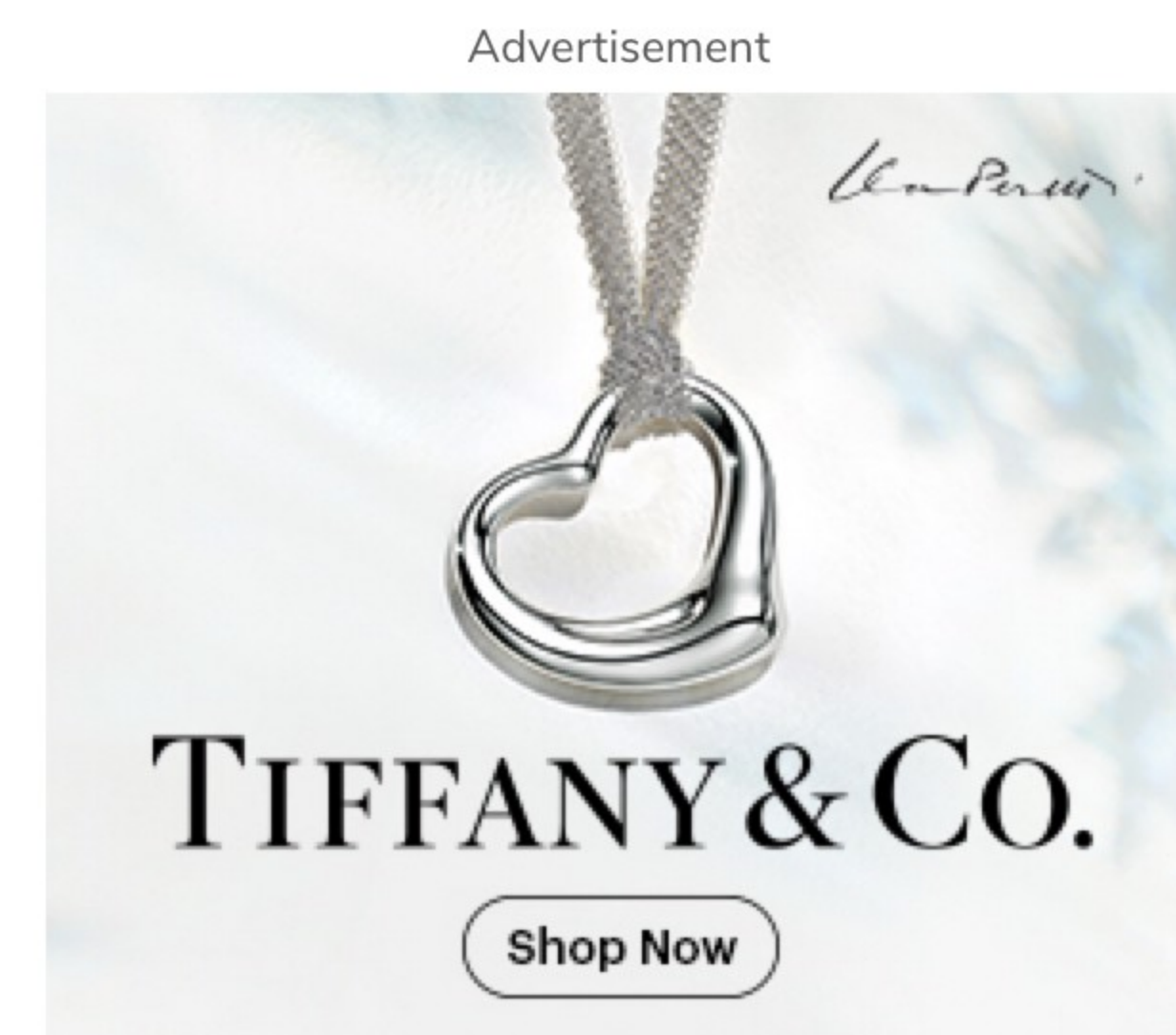
Keeping a neutral color palette on your shelves in an area like your family room can create a very calming effect in the space, says Kristen Alcorta of [Kristen Alcorta Interiors](#). She exercises restraint in her shelf styling, being careful not to add too many items. "The best advice I give people is to not over-style. Let each piece have its space to breathe," she says.

06 | Add Personal Items

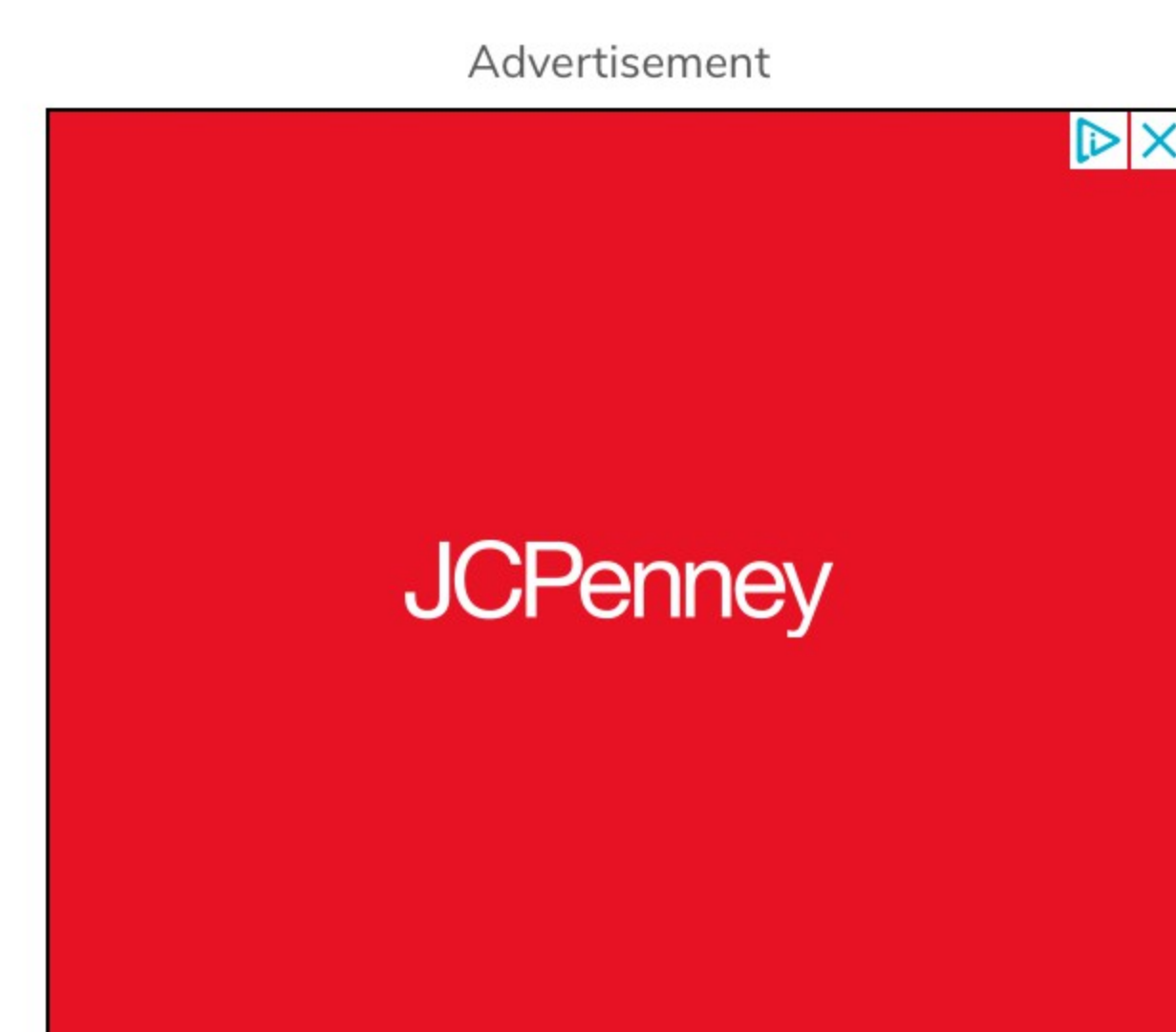
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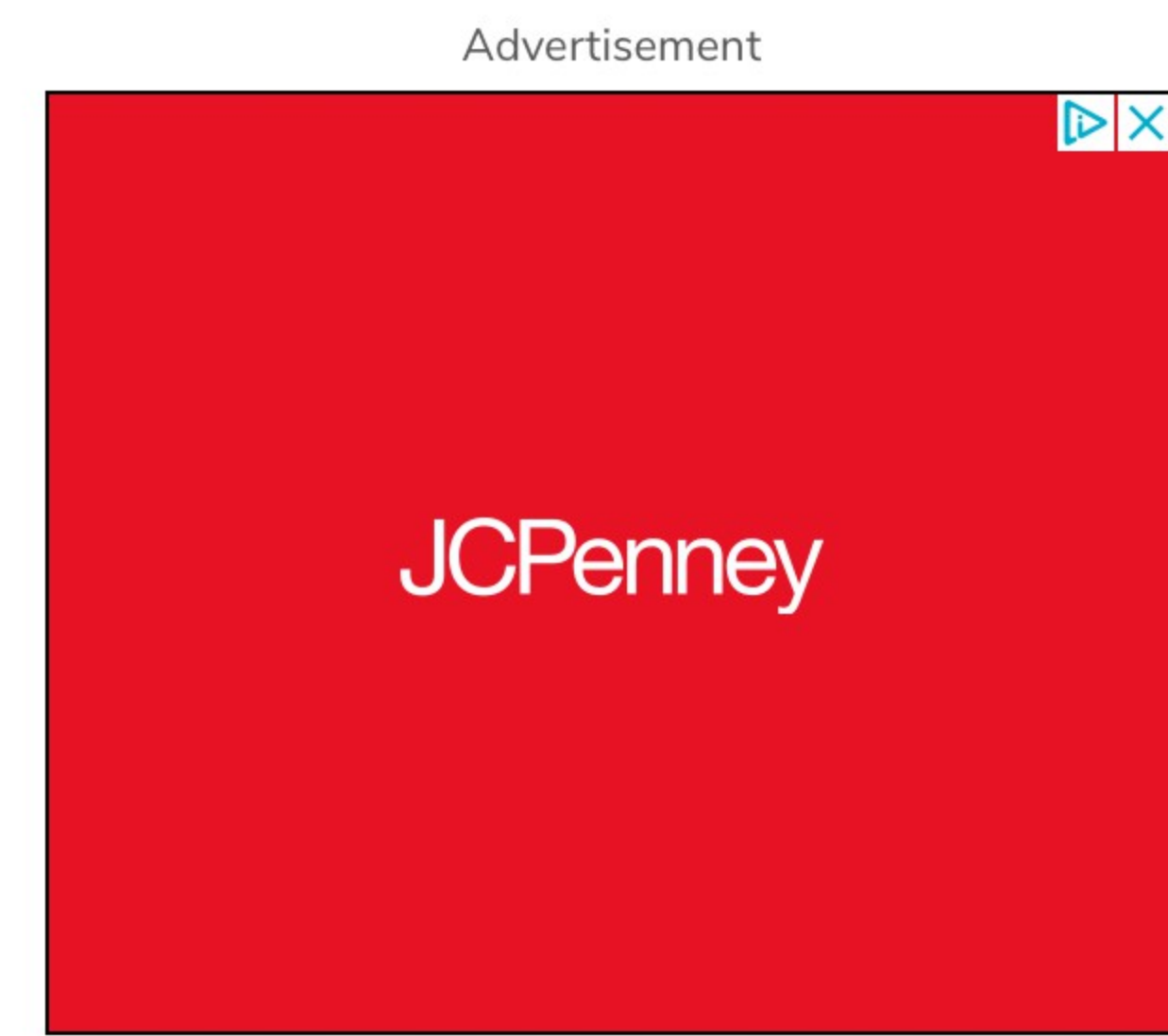


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PHOTO: STACY ZARIN GOLDBERG

Shelves provide a spot to design vignettes from family heirlooms, souvenirs, and mementos. And that's exactly what Erika Bonnell, owner and creative director of [Erika Bonnell Interiors](#), does in her projects. "When designing home offices, we always like to create areas that allow for personal collections to be displayed. This keeps the room meant for business and productivity from feeling too stiff and cold."



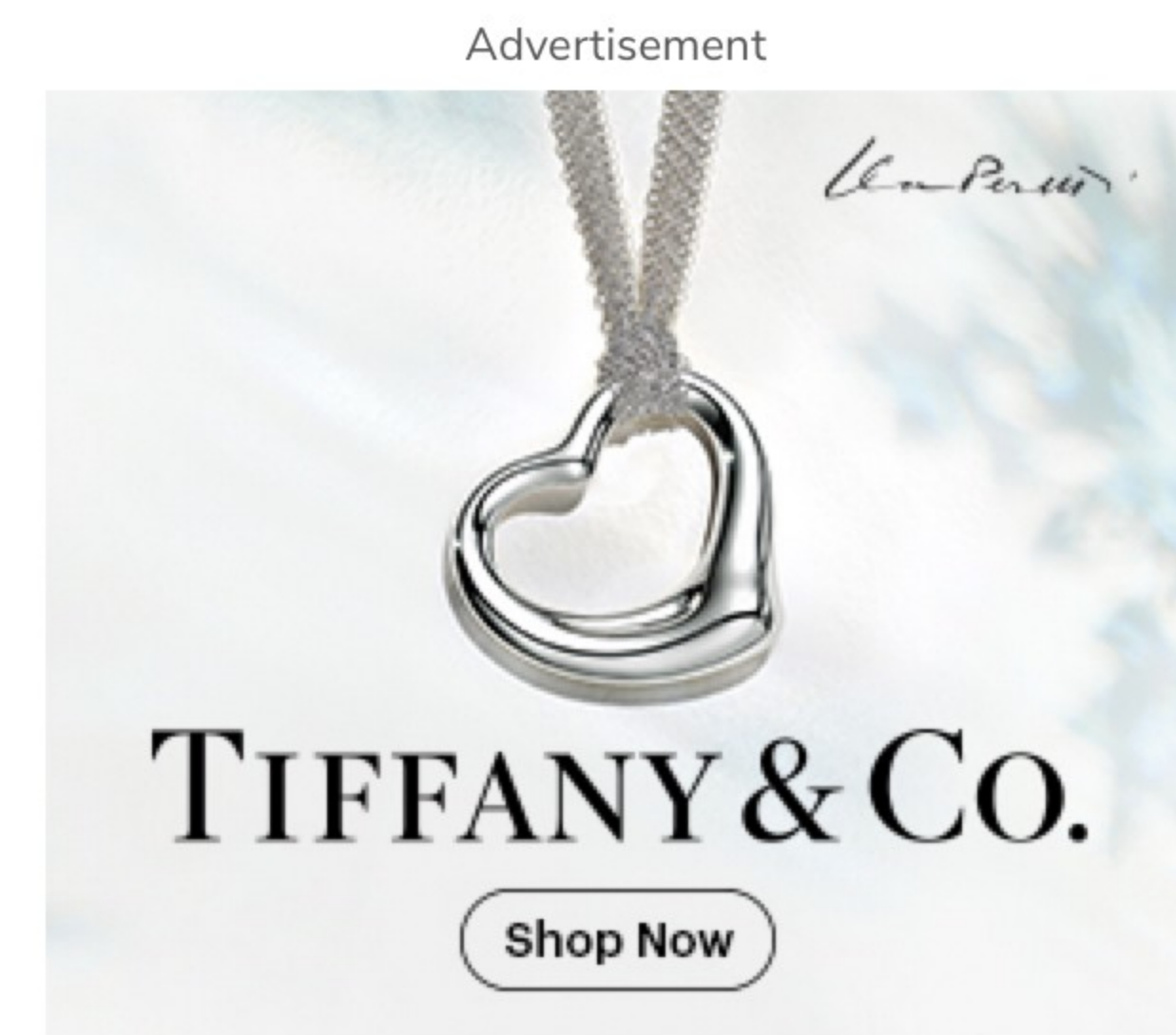
07 | Contrast with Paint

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PHOTO: SARAH WINCHESTER

Make the items on your shelves stand out even more by adding a shadow box effect with dark paint. Contrasted with white built-ins, this look from [Nicole Hirsch Interiors](#) makes a bold impact. The paintings hung on the built-in shelves add a gallery-worthy effect.



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08 | Incorporate Negative Space

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PHOTO: AMY BARTLAM

By painting the built-in shelves a monochromatic white, [Kate Lester Interiors](#) created a minimalist backdrop for a collection of books, boxes,

candlesticks, and ceramics. These items are intentionally curated throughout the space, adding a look that's asymmetrical, yet tied together. Rows of books appear throughout, but each shelf has intentional negative space and a visual balance of height and weight.

09 | Flank a Bed

of 20



PHOTO: JASON VARNEY

Shelves don't have to stay in the living room. This moody bedroom from [Kaminski Pew](#) shows that you can utilize built-in shelves just as you would a nightstand. Put your books and other bedside accouterments on the shelves. Add sconces for a space-saving measure.

10 | Echo the Colors in the Room

of 20



PHOTO: ENVIABLE DESIGNS

When styling a shelf, the options can be overwhelming. Books, art, pottery—the choices are endless. But you can help streamline the process by doing what [Enviably Designs](#) did in this room. Draw inspiration from the design elements in your room, be it wall color, drapery, or furniture. Choose your styling items based on that palette.

11 | Use Shelves for Styled Toy Storage

of 20



PHOTO: ERIC LAIGNEL

Even a child's toys can look chic when styled on shelving. "Designed to showcase an extensive Lego collection, we designed this shelving system to accommodate the various sizes of the creative constructions of its occupant," says Carol Kurth, principal of [Carol Kurth Architecture + Interiors](#).

12 Use Vintage-Inspired Etageres

of 20



PHOTO: ERIN MEYERS / KRISTEN HARRISON / AMMOR ARCHITECTURE

Rather than end tables, which provide minimal storage, use etageres to flank your couch or bed. "Two etageres were styled with lamps, favorite photos and art, decorative objects and collections," says Myers. These vintage-inspired pieces add detail, a touch of metal, and height. Their weight is balanced by the large artwork in the middle.

13 Don't Be Afraid of Color

of 20



PHOTO: MEHREEN BALDONI INTERIORS

Bold colors, like this daring chartreuse, can take on a sophisticated, elegant look when used as the backdrop for well-styled built-in shelves. "[It's] a

customized, vibrant yet calming reading room shelf for a reading enthusiast," says Mehreen Baldoni, founder and creative director of [Mehreen Baldoni Interiors](#) describes it.

14 | Paint Shelves to Match the Wall

of 20



PHOTO: EM PHOTOGRAPHY

Make the items on your shelves stand out by painting the shelves the same color as the walls. In this room, the shelves ground the room. "Adding shelving to the niches on either side of this fireplace not only gave much-needed storage to the room but also made sense of the space," says Kathryn Murphy, founder of [Kathryn Murphy Interiors](#). "We added a built-in cabinet plus shelves above to create storage while maintaining a sense of openness to balance the room."

15 | Style Them With Family Photos

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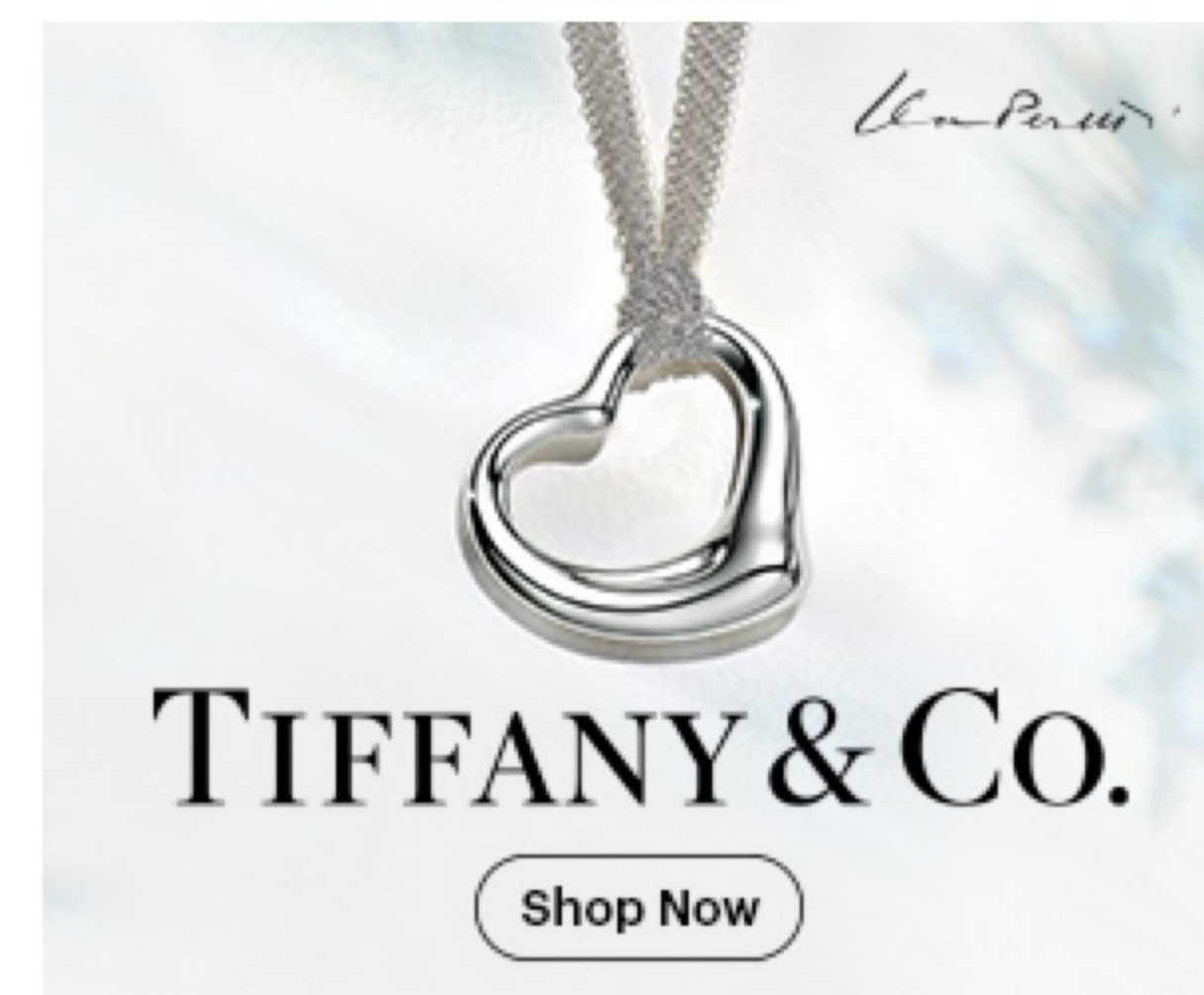
PHOTO: MADELINE HARPER

Styling wall shelves with family photos allows you to regularly update your home's décor when you're ready for a change. "I love to use wall shelves to share family photos, showcase my favorite books and even layer in plants or candle sticks," says Laura Williams, owner and lead designer of [ATX Interior Design](#). "They are an easy item to style and restyle as you feel like you want a design change, which is my favorite quality. You can make an impactful design update without too much effort."

16 | Use Warm Colors

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PHOTO: AMY BARTLAM

Warm neutrals offset the shelves just slightly from the wall color in this living room designed by [Kate Lester Interiors](#). The warmth is continued in the wood detailing, sculptural items, and leather pulls. All of the textures together echo the rustic quality of the fireplace.

17 | Build In a Desk

of 20



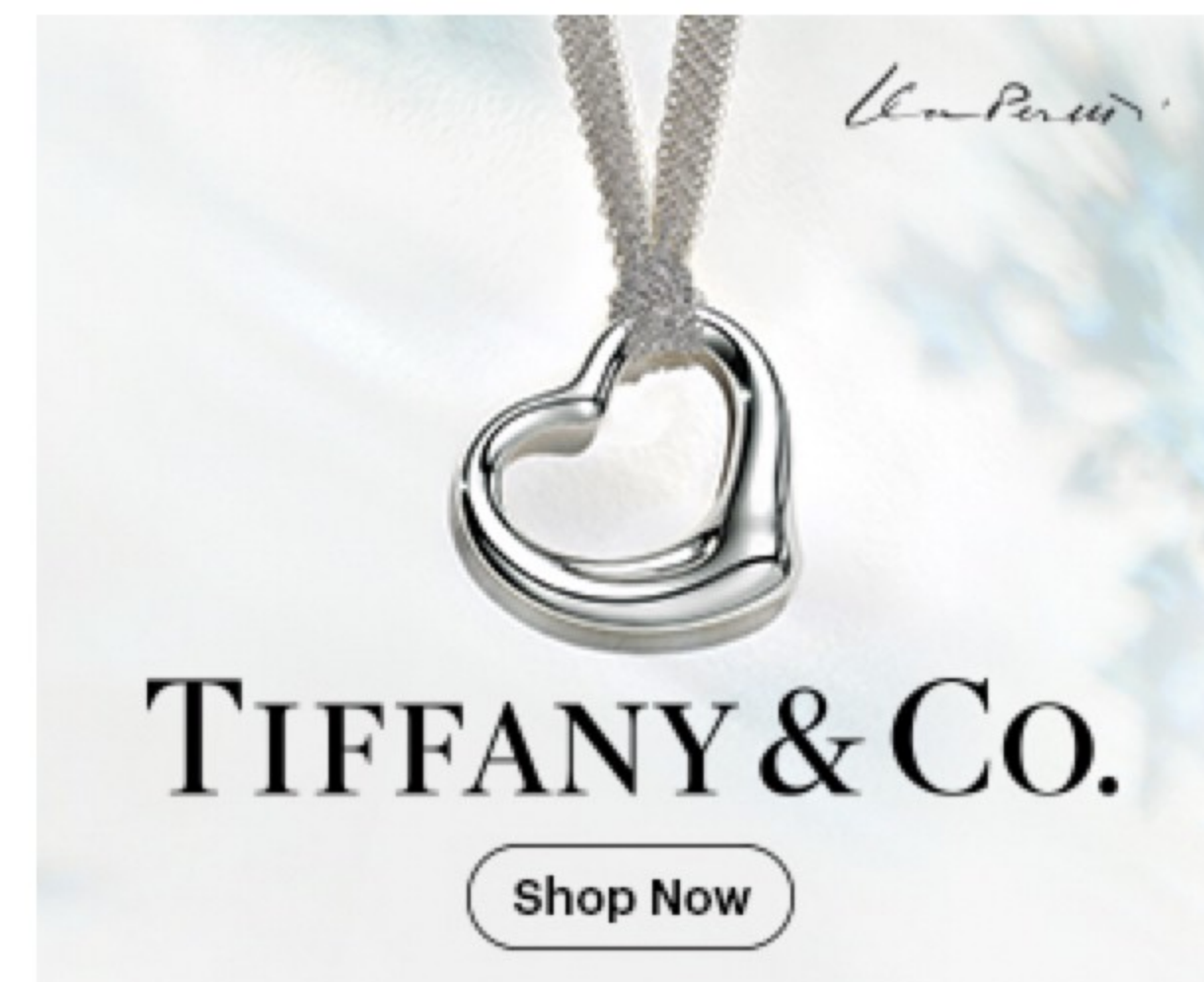
PHOTO: ISY'S INTERIORS

Built-in shelves can find their home around any piece of furniture, including a desk. "For this home office, we opted for custom built-in shelves that frame a stunning mahogany desk from Hardwood Lumber Co," says Isabel Runsewe, founder and creative director of [Isy's Interiors](#). "Practicality, productivity, and elevated design come together with the final touches, which display the creative clients' love for music and sports." A contrasting grasscloth wallpaper was added to draw out the desk even further.

18 | Go Asymmetrical

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PHOTO: SARAH LINDEN

While many built-ins look stunning with straight, consistent lines, these dark and moody shelves go for fun and funky. "This asymmetrical shelving in the primary bedroom provides ample space for literature and displays while infusing personality and style into the space," says Michelle Lynne, CEO and founder of [ML Interiors Group](#).

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19 | Make it a Multipurpose Space

of 20



PHOTO: ERIN MEYERS / KRISTEN HARRISON / AMMOR ARCHITECTURE

You can use your shelves to hold anything you'd like. "Storage for wine and cookbooks was the driving need in creating this bookshelf with custom designed niches," Myers says. "Wallpaper and oversized hardware add glamor and sophistication, while favorite objects among the necessary storage tell a story about the homeowners." It's truly a multi-purpose space.

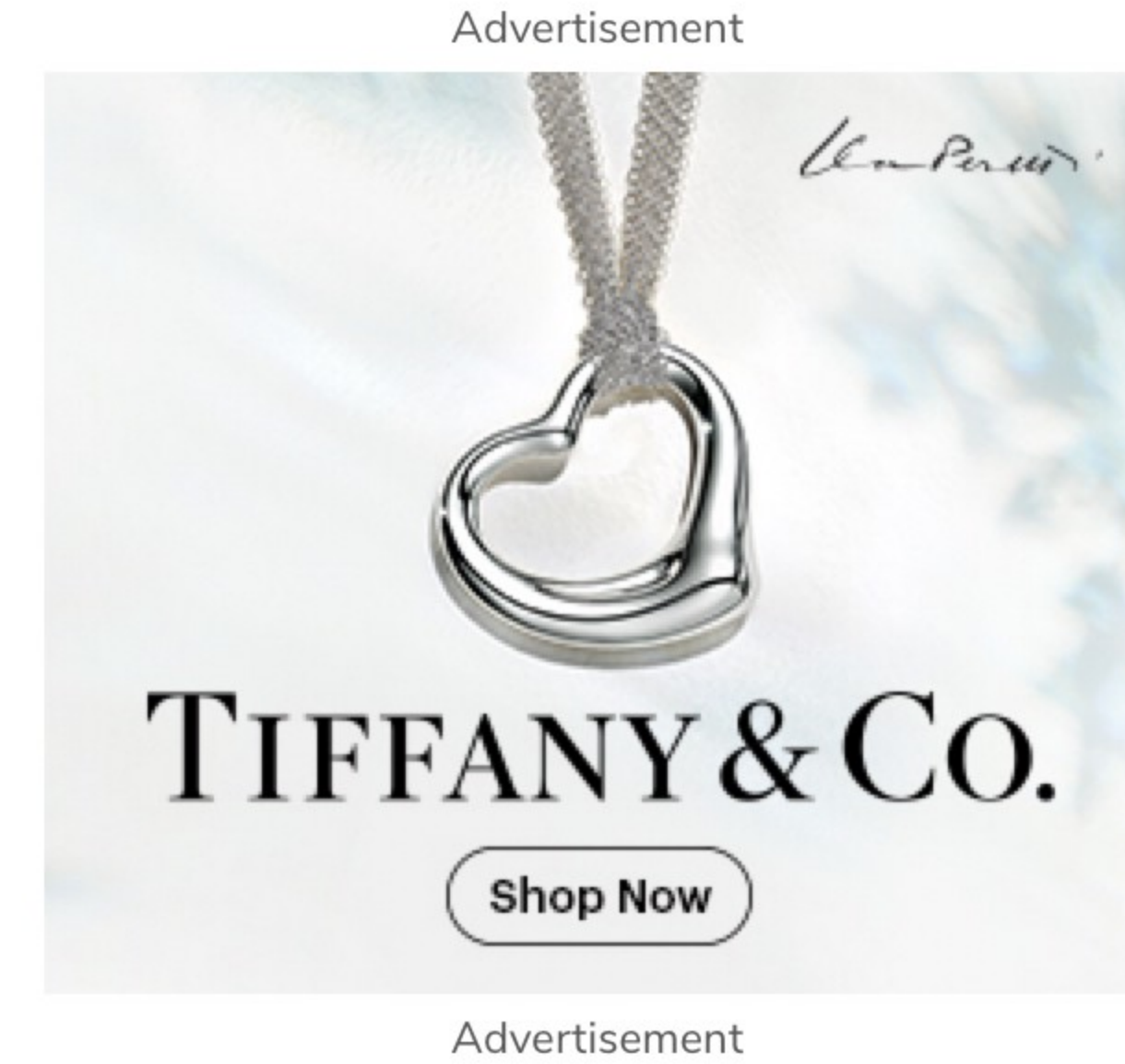
20 | Keep Some Air on the Shelf

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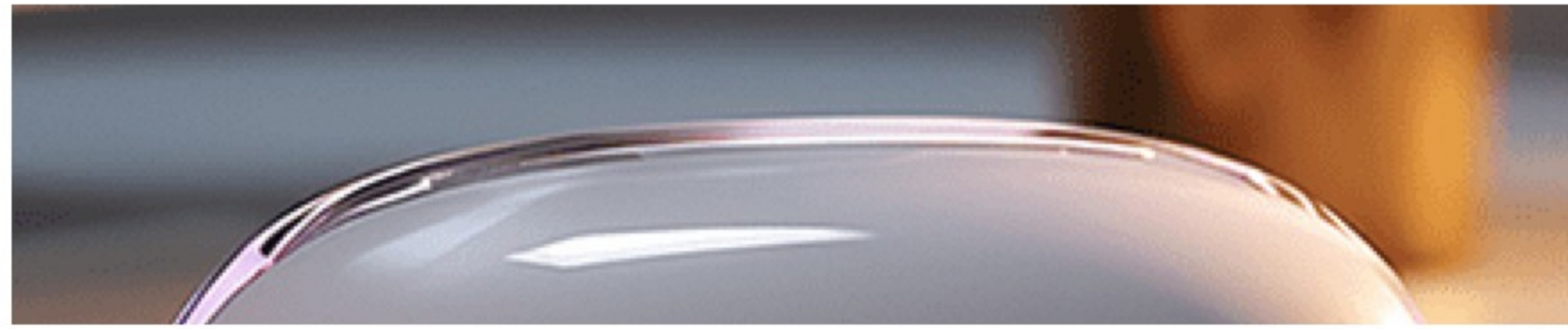


PHOTO: AMMOR ARCHITECTURE

Avoid adding too many items on your shelves if you prefer a minimalist look. "Our general approach is to allow for some 'air' on shelves, with the arrangement emphasizing unique items that are beautiful and important to the people who live there. This heightens each element's status and gives the room a curated feel," says Thomas Morbitzer, partner at [AMMOR Architecture](#).



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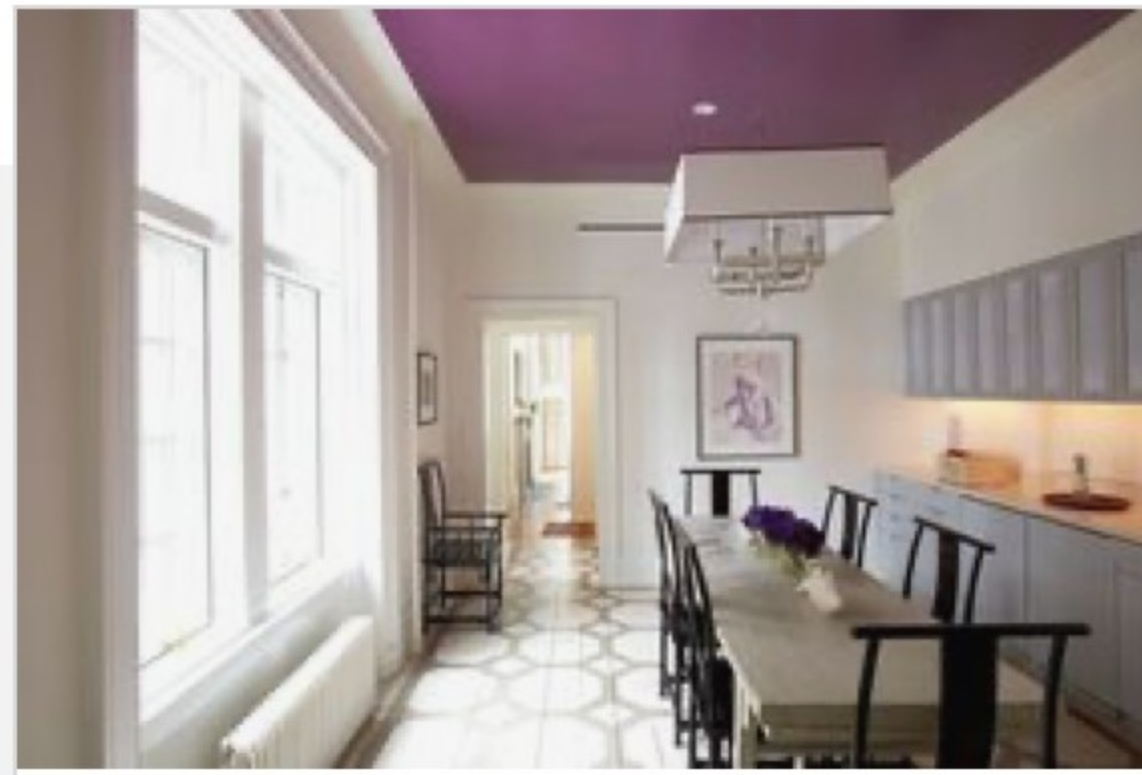
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