

OFF THE WALL, ON THE WALL

Tiles, curvy glass panels and greenery are showing up on feature walls at home now



Natasha Ann Zachariah

Forget solid-hued feature walls to jazz up your home.

When it comes to drawing the eye to a single wall in a room, more off-the-wall ideas are catching on.

Feature walls, also known as accent or focal walls, have caught on among home owners here in the last couple of years. This is largely due to more people buying LCD televisions, says interior designer Areea Wong of Space Vision Design.

The 40-year-old says: "In the past, clients never asked us to design a feature wall. But with the LCD television, they want something that will hide wires. So we build a feature wall around the television."

He adds that feature walls have gone beyond having just a single solid colour, which was the common option when the trend first surfaced.

Citing a project he did with curvy glass panels, lit with LED lights against a black backdrop, he says: "Younger clients are also really into design, so they don't just want one colour. They don't mind trying new materials or different shapes."

Take Mr Yee Dingyang, 31, and Ms Lee Jing Jing,

29, who created a feature wall with cheery yellow stripes. A wire mesh panel runs the height of that wall and continues on the ceiling.

The married couple, who live in a four-room HDB flat in Ghim Moh Link, worked with interior designer Li Ziqi, 31, from Oats on the look.

The designer added white to the original paint colour, The Dulux All Sunshine, to create a lighter hue so that there were two shades to create the stripes. The couple then painted the stripes with Mr Li, taking about five hours to complete the job.

Mr Yee, a wedding photographer who works from home, says: "We wanted to bring a little bit of the outdoors inside, so we added green, by having plants, and sunshine, through the colours."

Designer Li adds: "The decor of the whole apartment is about lines and angles, so using a single colour for this wall would be overpowering."

Besides, "it's a cheap option if you are on a budget", he says.

"Paint is cheap and you can easily create the lines using masking tape."

While most designers and owners tend to stick to decorating a single wall, Archiology's Bu Shukun designed three different-looking walls in the same space in a client's house.

The company was also the architect for the project.

Enter the terrace house in Upper Thomson Road and you are met with a green wall at the farthest end. Covered in lush greenery, it is fed by sunlight from a skylight, three storeys up.

Turn to the left and you will see a floor-to-ceiling television console and shelves that run the length of the room. On your right is a white brick wall with four portrait paintings that add pops of colour.

Owner Wong Siaw Wei, 33, is not worried about

"You don't have to worry about seeing the stains on the wall."

Ms Jeannie Cheong (right, with husband Jason Wong) on her tiled feature wall in her kitchen

Lit by LED lights, curvy reflective cutouts juxtaposed against a black background on this feature wall give the living room a club-like feel. PHOTO: SPACE VISION DESIGN



ST PHOTO: SEAH KWANG PENG

the room looking too busy because the white unifies the look of the space, even with the use of different textures.

The banker, who lives in the house with his wife and three young children, says: "We wanted the outside to extend to the inside of the house, which was why we chose a combination of outdoor materials such as brick walls and cement flooring."

"Our furniture also isn't matching, so three walls each with a different look in one space isn't a problem."

A pretty feature wall sometimes can be functional as well. Couple Jeannie Cheong, 28, and Jason Wong, 30, worked with interior designer Katy Chong of Artistroom to create a grid-patterned feature wall in their cafe-like kitchen.

The wall, of white tiles and black fillers, stands out in the couple's five-room HDB improved flat in Bukit Merah - all the other walls are plain white.

Ms Cheong, who entertains and cooks about once a week, says: "You don't have to worry about seeing the stains on the wall, and the tiles are easy to maintain."

Mr Jeremy Rowe, managing director of Akzo-Nobel Decorative Paints for South-east Asia and the Pacific region, says home owners tend to shy away from creative accents, preferring to stick to solid-colour feature walls. Others go overboard and incorporate too many ideas or hues into one wall.

He advises: "Decide which you prefer and don't overload the wall with too many design elements at one go."

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A feature wall of bright yellow stripes (above) complemented with potted greenery brings the outdoors into this four-room flat. ST PHOTO: CHEW SENG KIM

Accent walls can also divide rooms, such as this grid-like panel (left) that features a rotating television console. PHOTO: THE MONTELLA DESIGN & BUILD



Thrice the fun: This terrace house has three feature walls: (from left) one with a floor-to-ceiling television console, another with a vertical garden and the third, a brick wall decorated with colourful portraits. PHOTO: ARCHITOLOGY

Create a feature wall

1 Do not limit yourself to having a feature wall in just the living room. Any wall can be used, even those behind beds or that are curved.

2 Avoid a wall that has a door or windows. The opening will break the flow of the wall because you can see beyond it.

3 A feature wall does not always need a bright shade. Stronger, deeper colours will make your wall appear closer, which is useful if you want to make a long room seem more squarish. Lighter tones make the wall seem further away and give a sense of a larger space.

4 Experiment with hues and textures. A feature wall need not be finished in just one material.

Wallpaper is making a comeback, especially those with a variety of textures and prints. Consider papering one wall to try out a bold print without overwhelming the entire space. You can also use wood panelling, stones, plants or wall decals to create a 3-D feel.

5 If you do not want to spend money on paint or getting a contractor in, opt for photo frames.

Place frames of equal size to make a consistent pattern on the wall. Or choose frames of different sizes, which work better in a random allocation. If anything, you get a personalised wall of memories. You can use this technique with mirrors or plates of different shapes.

6 Cannot decide on a colour? Look at your furnishings and furniture in the room, such as cushions, rugs or curtains. Choose a hue that will complement them.



Feature walls now do not come in just a single colour but can also showcase designs such as greenery (above). In addition, accent walls can be in other parts of the home, such as in the bedroom (below). PHOTOS: ST FILE

7 Feature walls can be functional, not just pretty. For example, have a chalkboard wall in the kitchen for notes. Chalkboard paints come in different colours, so your wall does not have to be black either.

8 Use the concept sparingly if you are starting out. Do not have a feature wall in every room as this would defeat the purpose of having one standout wall. Pick a wall to highlight something special or to show off your furniture.

9 Turn your ceiling, often known as the fifth wall, into an accent. Choose the correct print or paint, and you could enlarge the feel of the room.

Natasha Ann Zachariah

Sources: Interior design websites ThisisLincolshire, Pascol, Naken, Homelife



Living pictures for the walls

Want to do up your walls but prefer something on a smaller, or perhaps greener, scale? Think plants.

Living pictures - cuttings of assorted succulents woven together in everything from picture frames to pallet boxes - have caught on among garden designers and landscapers as an easy, modern way to add colour and texture to a home.

"Living pictures composed of succulents have a gorgeous sculptural quality that works surprisingly well in a number of different aesthetics - contemporary, bohemian, South-western and more," says Irene Edwards, executive editor of Lonny home design magazine.

"They're great for urban dwellers with limited space."

Living pictures are also nearly maintenance-free, so even beginners or those with the blackest of thumbs can look like the master gardener of the neighbourhood.

Here is how you can create your own living succulent picture:

PICK YOUR STYLE

There are a few ways you can go.

For a larger living picture, you can use a wooden pallet, framing out the back like a shadow box.

But going big right away can be daunting, and bigger also means heavier, so many newbies such as California gardening blogger Sarah Cornwall stick with smaller picture or poster frames.

Go vintage with an antique frame or finish, or build your own out of local barn wood. Chunky, streamlined frames such as the ones Cornwall bought from



Ikea give a more modern feel.

You will also need a shadow box cut to fit the back of the frame, and wire mesh to fit over the front if you are going to make your own.

First, nail or screw the shadow box to the back of the frame. A depth of 5cm to about 7.5cm is ideal. Set the wire mesh inside the frame and secure it with a staple gun, then nail a plywood backing to the back of the shadow box.

TAKE CUTTINGS

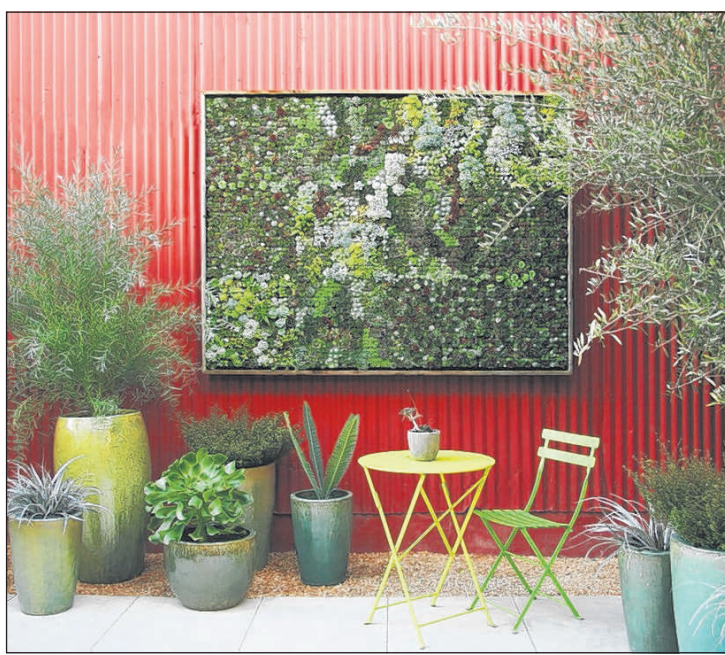
Almost any succulent can be used for

living pictures, though it is usually best to stick with varieties that stay small, such as echeverias and sempervivums, says DIG Gardens co-owner Cara Meyers.

"It's fun to use varieties of aconiums and sedums for their colours and textures, but they may need a little more maintenance, as they may start to grow out of the picture more," she says.

Cut off small buds of the succulents for cuttings, leaving a stem of at least 0.6cm long.

No succulents to snip? You can always buy some at a nursery or trade



PHOTOS: ASSOCIATED PRESS

Bring attention to your wall without a major renovation with living pictures made from greenery (left and above).

with other gardeners in your neighbourhood.

"They grow so easily, so don't feel embarrassed knocking on a door to ask for a few cuttings," Cornwall says.

Make sure any old bottom leaves are removed, then leave the cuttings on a tray in a cool, shaded area for a few days to form a "scab" on the ends before planting.

Set the frame mesh-side up on a table and fill with soil, using your hands to push it through the wire-mesh openings.

Be sure to use cactus soil, which is coarser than potting soil, for better drainage.

Some vertical gardeners place a layer of sphagnum moss under and over the soil to hold moisture in when watering.

FILL IN WITH PLANTS

Now comes the fun and creative part. Lay out the succulent cuttings in the design you want on a flat surface and fit them into the wire-mesh holes in your frame.

You can start either in a corner or by placing the "focal point" cuttings in first and filling in around them.

Waves or rivers of colour are popular designs, although Cape Cod-based landscaper Jason Lambton has gone bolder with spirals of green and purple.

"We painted the pallet different colour stripes to go with the colour theme of the back of the house," says Lambton, host of HGTV's Going Yard. "It looked like a cool piece of living, reclaimed art."

Using just one type of succulent is also a simple yet elegant option, says Mr Kirk Aoyagi, co-founder and vice-president of FormLA Landscaping.

"Collages with some draping and some upright plants can create a more dramatic look and feel."

CARE AND MAINTENANCE TIPS

Keep the living picture flat and out of direct sunlight for one to two weeks to allow roots to form along the stems, then begin watering.

"If you hang it up right away or it rains a lot, that dirt will just pour right out," Lambton says.

Mount your living art once the succulents are securely rooted, which can take four to eight weeks depending on climate.

After that, water every seven to 10 days by removing from the wall and laying it flat.

Be sure to let the water drain before hanging your living picture back up, to avoid rotting.

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