



Organic and Natural Style on the Rise

By Emily LaPointe

The effects of the coronavirus pandemic have been felt across virtually every industry and aspect of American life and business, and it will likely be considered the defining event of the 2020's. Among all the disruptions of the past year and a half, one of the most intriguing is the way it has changed Americans' relationship to their homes. Months of lockdown have made many rethink what they value in the space that went from a rest stop in chaotic days of work, school, social and extracurricular activities to a single location that encompassed all activities of life.

When many Americans looked more closely at the epicenter of their new daily experience, they decided that what they needed was for their home to feel more, well, homey. "We're looking for elements of comfort," explains award-winning interior designer Jeanne Chung of Cozy, Stylish, Chic in Pasadena. "We were amped up and stressed out and now we're really just looking for a soothing environment.

One way this desire for comfort and simplicity has manifested itself is in the accelerated rise of Organic/Natural style. In the National Kitchen and Bath Associations 2021 Design Trends report, which compiles industry insight from hundreds of residential kitchen and bath professionals, Organic/Natural was named the third most popular design style -jumping from ninth place in last year's study. Nearly 50% of those surveyed said Organic/Natural design will dominate kitchens and baths over the next three years.

Chung defines Organic/Natural style as one that seeks to bring the outdoors in, embraces warmth, texture, and natural materials, and rejects elements that feel overly polished or manufactured. Live edge wood, weathered textures, stone and brushed or patinated metal finishes are some of her favorite elements for creating the look.

"In terms of colors, we've been softening them. They've gotten dustier, more watered down. The color palettes are definitely rooted in nature," Chung points out. Look no further than the major paint brands' recent introductions of 2022 colors of the year for evidence of this trend. Colors such as Evergreen Fog, October Mist, Guacamole, and Olive Sprig, 2022 is all about green – color's most literal expression of organic and natural.

Echoing Chung's perspective on post-pandemic style, descriptions of the shades in industry press focus on their familiarity, comfort, and calming vibes as well as their ability to inspire rejuvenation and renewal. Organic-inspired design palettes that feature green also include natural materials and textures like wood, leather, jute, rattan, and plenty of plants.

Cabinetry, often the most dominant component of any kitchen, provides a variety of opportunities to exhibit an organic aesthetic that goes far beyond ordinary stained wood. “Texture is one of the big things I’m looking for in natural design, and that can even be textured wood,” Chung notes. “Someone with an unlimited budget may use natural wood and have it hand planed. But nowadays you can achieve that same look far more affordably. There are some amazing products out there that have woodgrain not just printed but embossed. The texture really does give you the feeling of the outdoors.”

These texturally embossed panels broaden the range of wood looks available to include exotic and designer looks that would be too costly or environmentally prohibited to achieve naturally. Perfectly aligned fine linear grains, even aged, charred finishes reminiscent of the 18th century Japanese Shou Sugi Ban technique.

Beyond the ability to recreate natural patterns and textures, many engineered panels have the added advantage of a non-porous surface that is easy to clean and won’t retain moisture or harbor bacteria.

Woodgrain isn’t the only way Chung likes to bring a natural look and texture to cabinets. “I’m definitely looking toward more honed matte finishes. One of my favorites is Zenit metallics. Normally you see metallic and it’s bright and shiny, but this has this nice soft feel to it.” Matte finished panels in copper, gold and titanium give classic metallics a more organic twist, as do designs mimicking weathered stone and oxidized metals. Mixing metals in with woods adds a level of visual interest that is one of the hallmarks of Organic/Natural style.

In their more traditional iterations -sinks, hardware, and faucets – metals in the Organic/Natural style kitchen and bath trend away from flashy and polished and into more subtle expressions. Think brushed nickel instead of stainless steel, or unlacquered brass that will develop a patina over time.

One of the most appealing aspects of Organic/Natural style for a kitchen and bath is that it isn’t an all-or-nothing prospect.

“You can definitely weave organic elements into any design to create a more soothing environment,” Chung explains. “A live edge wood piece. A natural sheepskin rug. As long as you maintain balance and proportion, it will work.”

Given the phenomenal impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on so many aspects of everyday life, its role in accelerating the growth of a restorative, comfortable and lived-in style of kitchen and bath design is not surprising. And if the longevity of the style reflects the strength of that impact, Organic/Natural style is likely to remain high on designers’ and homeowners’ lists for the next three to five years at least.