

Building the Skill of Styling Shelves

Are you struggling with what to buy and how decorate your bookshelves like you see in magazines? This is to help give you the why behind the beauty of styled bookshelves so you can do it too.

You can easily hone your skill if you know the why behind why a styled bookcase looks beautiful.

Styling shelves are similar to following a recipe. If you put in all the ingredients. We study each of these ingredients in depth in the Love Your Layout Workshop Weekend.

The Styling Ingredients

1. Color

Limit to 3 colors including shades of those colors. You don't need to find the exact shade of that color to repeat but if you choose blue then it would be o....

2. Line

What I mean by line is whether your items are straight like books or organic like flowers or curved like a vase. Your lines can also be vertical

or horizontal. Take special care to repeat and balance the line elements as well.

3. Pattern & Texture

Everything has a texture. It is smooth with matte finish, smooth with a shiny finish, heavy texture like a basket or very organic like a bird's nest.

The Styling Methods

Balance/Repeat

Be sure to repeat the same colors, lines and textures on your shelves in different places to draw the eye around to all the shelves. By varying the placement, this helps the shelves feel cohesive and curated. It will feel balanced. Balance includes negative space or

Symmetry

Symmetry is often employed when there are 2 bookshelves that are side by side or on the same wall. This can be employed strictly by placing identical pieces on each of the two bookcases on the same shelf but on the opposite side as if it appears as a reflection.

A variation of the strict application of symmetry is to fill the second shelf with the same repeating movement but with a variation of the items in size or shape.

Rest

It is important to build in moments of rest for the eye. One way to do this is by using singular pieces centered on a shelf which creates a sense of rest. This can also be achieved with two or more items of about equal height.

Groupings

An important method to create a cohesive group from many small elements is to bring them all together in a container.

Scale/Vary Object Height

Vary the heights of your groupings to add interest. You often see this in a grouping of 3 candles with 3 different heights. If you have 3 of the same item, you can create a variety of heights by using items for risers:

- stacking plates,
- a wooden block,
- a book or multiple books
- a box
- a pedestal
- be creative!*

Layer/Vary the depth and overlap

By overlapping items as you look directly at them, they create a greater connection with one another than if the items stood separately. An effective way to do this is to place 3 items in a triangle on your shelf with the middle and tallest item the furthest back.

Visual Weight

Visual weight is not actual weight. It is more about how the object appears. Larger objects can appear heavier. These objects are best to be located on the lower shelves. Dark objects can also appear heavier, especially if larger in size. Be mindful of the visual weight and spread them out throughout the bookcase to create balance.

The Rule of 3

You may have heard of the rule of 3. This is not a rule but more of a guideline or principle that works. This rule of 3 is based on the golden ratio...A group of 1 can be created with 3 individual elements gathered together in such a way that they feel connected and create a sense of movement between the elements. This is achieved by varying the depth and height of the 3 objects. One way to achieve this is by putting 3 upright objects in a triangle formation with the tallest object in the back.

By overlapping your 3 items as you look directly at them, they create a greater connection with one another than if you had the 3 items

standing separately. An easy way to do this is to place them in a triangle on your shelf with the middle item the furthest back.

Groupings of 3 or use odd number of items/groupings

Larger items on the bottom and graduate to smaller as you go up.

When you have multiple items that aren't similar in color or texture but you want the because of their color and texture, you can create a grouping of dissimilar items by placing them on a box or tray or book.

This creates a grouping of 1 instead of individually dissimilar items that are spread out. You will see this technique used over and over again.

This also creates a nice horizontal line to vary against the predominant verticals by most objects.

Using these ingredients, we will be mixing and matching until it "tastes" good. How will we know? You have to "taste" along the way. It is a process of trial and error. Your eye will know if you train your eye first.

We did that in the workshop but you can continue to learn and train your eye by just going to Pinterest or Instagram and pulling pictures of styling you like.

Study the Styling You Like

Let's Identify the Ingredients and the Methods Used

You are going to start seeing a pattern.



woodbanklane.com

Ask yourself these questions-----

Let's start with the ingredients:

Color

1. What colors are used?
2. How many colors are used throughout?
3. Is one color used as mostly an accent which means not much of it?
4. Are the colors contrasting with the back of the bookcase?
5. If an accent color is used, how is it used?

Texture

6. What textures do you see?

Line

7. What lines do you see?

Now Let's explore the methods used:

Visual Weight

8. What items seem to have the most visual weight?
9. Are those on the bottom shelf?

Scale/Vary Height

10. Did they use items to rise up smaller items?
11. How big are the items in relationship to each other?
12. How big are the items in relationship to the cubby they are in?

Balance/Repeat

13. Are the colors being repeated throughout the entire shelf?
14. Are the textures being repeated throughout the entire shelf?
15. Are there moments of rest?
16. Is the negative space balanced throughout?

Groupings

17. Do you see groupings of 3?
18. Is there a tray or large book that is acting to group multiple pieces together?

(My Answers p.12)

It is helpful to ask yourself these same questions as you come upon styled shelves that you like. You will recognize the ingredients and the methods that are used and have the confidence to do the same.



Let's study this shelf from jennakateathome.com

My answers to woodbanklane.com picture

1. Combination of Blue & white, green, white, warm gold
2. I see 5 colors if I separate blue and white
3. I see the green as the accent color with white and blue as the main colors. The gold is not prominent but more of a neutral that warm up the cool colors of blue and white.
4. White has been chosen as a high contrast color to the dark wood bookcase.
5. Green is used in book covers throughout creating a movement.
6. Shiny porcelain is predominant in the blue & white and solid white. Fabric book covers
7. I see a lot of vertical books creating a line of repeating vertical lines. There is a couple of organic shapes in the flowers and sculptured greenery bulb. I see repeating horizontal lines in the books laying down.
8. *I would say, if I was looking at each object individually, that the large vase on the top shelf has the most visual weight to me.*
9. No, they are placed on the top shelf. That's unusual. But how they compensated with putting those larger vases on the top shelf, they placed a large grouping of books on the bottom shelf which ends up giving more visual weight than the individual vase.
10. Yes, books are used several times to bring up the apple, white flowers, bowl and small gold box.
11. Items vary in height.
12. Even with the varying heights, the tallest items are about 75-80% of the height of each cubby.
13. Yes, if you drew a line, starting from the top shelf, from the blue and white vase down to the next blue and white item and on, a zig zag line would be created. Again, a zig zag line would be created if you connected the white items and again with the green. The repeating colors create a lot of eye movement which gives a cohesive look.
14. Yes, again the hard shiny porcelain surfaces are repeated.
15. No, not in this example. There is not a shelf with just one item or with items of equal height.
16. There are balanced negative space in the four corners.
17. I don't in this example. These shelves are styled more as one grouping on each shelf using overlapping and repetition.
18. No, this arrangement isn't using multiple small items that need to be grouped.

My answers to jennakateathome.com picture

1. She used a totally neutral color palette of white, and variations of beige with touches of green.
2. This is limited to 3 colors including white.
3. Green is the accent color which is only used twice.
4. The color is not a strong contrast to the white bookcase. This creates a more calming palette.
5. Green is used twice down the middle of the shelf.
6. I see the predominant textures of baskets and the mat finish of pottery.
- 7.
8. Individually, the largest vases have the most visual weight. The groupings of books have even more visual weight than the vases.
9. She did not put either the large vases or the largest groupings of books on the bottom shelf. How did she achieve balance without putting the most visual weight on the bottom shelf? Notice that majority of books are still placed on the bottom 3 rows of shelves. The repeat of books on the top 2 shelves are lying down horizontally.
10. Yes, they used books as risers for smaller items and repeatedly used this method.
11. She doesn't use strong variations in heights within each cubby. This adds to a calming and more slow movement of the eye.
12. The majority of the items are about 75% the height of the cubby or they are put on risers to higher than halfway up.
13. Most of the movement is created with the repetition of white all over and the darker shade of the beige is also equally balanced.
14. Again, the pottery texture is in almost every cubby shelf. I see the woven texture is also repeated.
15. Yes, she uses this method effectively. The cubbies on the bottom shelf have a single basket or items of equal height. Stepping up to the next lowest level, again, the heights of two of the three cubbies are all equal heights. The next level has two cubbies with items of equal height. When she does have a variation in height, she often uses only two items which is less dynamic than using a grouping of three.
16. About every cubby has an equal amount of negative space which creates a very balanced look.
17. She does use groupings of three but not in every cubby. She uses this method predominantly in the middle shelves all across.
18. No trays are used.

THE STYLING RECIPE

Step 1: Decide on 2-3 colors or textures that you want to use.

Color is key to the cohesive look of a styled bookcase. Limit the colors to 2-3 colors with or without a neutral.

Step 2: Gather More Décor Than You Need

When gathering the different décor objects, think about the ingredients: color, texture, line and visual weight. You may be surprised by the number of objects you will need. Look at the height of the shelves you are styling and choose the taller items to be no more than $\frac{3}{4}$ of the height of the space. Try not to have too many small items unless you plan to group them. Larger items have more impact individually and layered.

Décor doesn't have to be only decorative without a function. Paint brushes in a jar can be both decorative and functional. I store canning rings in a basket on a shelf that is part of my styled shelving.

Personal Items that have meaning

Books

Picture Frames & art

Organic items like plants bring life

Baskets give texture

Vases

Candles
Figurines
Sculpture
Boxes
Bowls
Small trays

Step 3: Examine your collection of Items

What # of items have the same color or shape or texture or line that equals the number of shelves you are styling? The most common item is books that are repeatedly placed vertically on each shelf in groupings.

The other easily repeating line is the horizontal line of books lying down or with boxes.

Caution use book covers if your books have distracting color or colors different than the color theme you have chosen.*

Step 4: Place 1 Ingredient: Dominant Color, Texture, Line Repeat

IN THE CASE OF 2 MATCHING BOOKSHELVES

If styling a matching bookshelf, place one each of these items on the matching bookshelf as well but in a mirrored fashion creating symmetry. Continue to work on the matching shelf just as you are working with the first shelf for the remaining steps.

Place one item each of the dominant ingredient on each shelf creating a dynamic movement of the eye back and forth to these items.

Step 5: Thoughtfully place and edit using elements to create dynamic movement

Continue placing other ingredients using the chosen methods in a balanced way to create movement within the shelves.

Step 6: Assess

Step Back to get a Full View of your shelves and assess

Step 7: Remove and replace

Adjust until it's Just Right 😊

Step 8: Celebrate and Enjoy!