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Homefront: News for your life

By Joyce Rosencrans
Post home editor

Accessories set mood for summer

T.J. Maxx stores may not have identical merchandise, but all locations currently have a seasonal theme: beach-house style. It's the nautical/natural look that's so easy to add during hot weather to bedrooms, bathrooms and casual seating areas, indoors or outdoors.

Even the land-locked can enjoy that breezy, summer feeling when sheer window treatments or woven shades are used in combination with polished bare floors, cotton or sisal rugs, wicker or rattan chairs and sea-water blues and greens for towels, sheets, candles, vases and accent pillows. But don't pile on. The natural, breezy look should be clean and uncluttered. Replace tired silk flowers with fresh or bare tree branches from the yard. Replace formal candlesticks with pillar candles set upon glass plates with clear marbles or pebbles.

Some T.J. Maxx items on a small tray table pictured above are the very summery blue-striped vase, \$14.99, a small sailboat, \$12.99, assorted books, a blue shell candle, \$7.99, and a framed shell print, \$19.99.

Water colors (blue, aqua or green) are a natural for any bathroom. Go with new towels, such as the "seafoam blue" hand towels at T.J. Maxx for \$4.99 each. Or go coastal with coral towels of pristine white. Those pictured are with a gingham/blue ticking pillow, \$12.99, and various bath accessories, including liquid soap, \$5.99, in a glowing coral color.

Dreary decks

Hate the drudgery of cleaning and/or staining a deck? The prep work is so crucial and time-consuming. Then, when it's finished, you find out that some products are not even designed to last 18 months.

The July issue of Consumer Reports contains a rating of deck stain and water-repellent products. The article is entitled "Best Across the Board." The CR testing facility in Yonkers, N.Y., includes a deck of 500 pieces of pressure-treated lumber coated with various products and left in the sun and snow for three years.

And Consumer Reports' conclusions are that Cabot Decking Stain 1480, \$29, and Cabot Solid Color 1880 for \$30 (both are opaque) are best for most decks. The first is an alkyd that cleans up with solvent; the second is a latex that cleans up with water. Rating third: Wolman DuraStain 18146 for \$23, "the best semitransparent stain for wood worth showing off. It's an alkyd but cleans up with water."

More online: www.ConsumerReports.org.

Pianomation

My grandparents' house included a player piano, an ancient upright with some of its ivory "teeth" missing. But it came with a big supply of piano rolls. As soon as I could reach the pedals, I was allowed to hook up any roll I wanted, then pump like crazy. I recall favoring a rousing rendition of the "Muskrat Ramble."

Online, QRS Music Technologies ("since 1900") offers a piano Roll Library ("Zorba" theme to "Zip-A-Dee Doo Dah," \$11 each), as well as "pianomation" products. Go to www.qrsmusic.com.

The latest offering from QRS is the PNObar: four stools and a bar shelf designed to wrap around and attach easily to any 5-foot Story & Clark grand piano. If Manilow's not available for family sing-alongs, consider the Pianomation MIDI system that transforms a regular acoustic piano into a self-playing instrument. Look, Ma, no hands.

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