



ALLISON LONG - MCT

Technology uses and tastes in interior design are transforming the coffee table.

## Coffee tables enter a 'golden age'

They're now a place for personal tech and artistry

By STACY DOWNS  
McClatchy Newspapers

Coffee tables with two levels have been popular for a while. Because people want places to set their laptops, tablet computers and smartphones, you're starting to see coffee tables designed with three levels.

So much is happening with this key piece of furniture that Cosmo Kramer needs to update his coffee table book on coffee tables.

During the 1990s "Seinfeld" era, the coffee table was mainly a place to set drinks and remote controls – and maybe rest your feet when mom wasn't looking. The ubiquitous clunky wooden table was a far cry from the 1950s cocktail table, limbo-low at 16 inches tall with a sculptural wooden or chrome base and a discreetly elegant round glass top.

Home furnishings design forecaster Michelle Lamb is seeing a return to artistry in coffee tables, and more function than ever.

"Not only is it a place to set your drinks and the remote, it's a place for laptops, tablet computers and smartphones," said Lamb, who regularly travels to trade shows to study how furniture makers are responding to changing lifestyles. "It's a place to play and work."

Wireless devices have influenced coffee table design. Some tables have built-in charging

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### 3 tablescaping tips

We asked N&O Design Team pro Lisa Stewart to help us create a pretty tablescape. Here's her advice:

- Make sure you are comfortable using your coffee table no matter what you put on it. My coffee table has to fit my lifestyle and that means leaving enough free space for putting drinks down and feet up!
- Spark conversation by displaying things that are meaningful. On the lowest tier of my table, I've placed a framed ancient manuscript: the newspaper published the day I was born.
- Reduce stress, be practical and protect valuables from dust, spills, little fingers and paws by using shadow boxes, frames, trays and glass apothecary jars in differing heights. If you're comfortable with your coffee table, chances are, your guests will feel right at home and comfortable too.

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# Be a lawn breaker

4 ALTERNATIVES TO YOUR OH-SO-THIRSTY, HIGH-MAINTENANCE GRASS



COURTESY OF LAURA BRANDT

### In the meadow

**1** A meadow-style garden is more natural and does not need regular mowing. It is not, however, maintenance-free, said landscape designer Jan Little. Choose plants of contrasting colors, heights and seasons. Large meadow beds defined by tidy lawn pathways give a sense of intention and should pass muster with homeowners associations.

Some plants to consider are any number of sedges, blue stem grass, prairie drop seed grass, black-eyed Susans, blazing star (*liatris*), purple coneflower, Siberian iris and hoary puccoon. Trout lily, ferns and native perennials grow in shady spots.

Ornamental grasses provide interest throughout the seasons and look great even in areas with winter snow.

### Cover it up

**2** Flowering plants such as verbena or ajuga make a pretty groundcover for areas with no foot traffic. Lane has planted ajuga, a very low-growing leafy plant that grows 2 to 3 inches tall and has small, purple flowers in the spring. Ajuga spreads, creating a carpetlike area, and though you can walk on it, the plant grows best if you keep off.

A small verbena, planted in spring, will cover a fairly large area by summer's end. You might have to cut it back a time or two. The plant dies back in winter, but if you leave it alone you'll see new growth when spring returns – just cut away the dead parts.

Also consider the evergreen juniper, rock soapwort (*Saponaria ocyroides*) and Heuchera.

### More inside

- Rock gardens and ornamental grasses
- Triangle-area water conservation efforts and restrictions

3D



RICHARD M. BROOKS

Homestead verbena spreads well.

By DEBRA BOYETTE  
Correspondent

**H**omeowners' dreams turn green this time of year. Green as in wide, lush, inviting expanses of lawn. The turf grass that makes up our beautiful lawns requires lots of water. But as drought conditions persist in much of North Carolina and with water-conservation measures in effect, some alternatives might be in order.

"Turf grass uses about 3 to 6 times as much water per square foot as a typical landscaped bed," said Bryce Lane, a horticultural science lecturer at N.C. State University. "It's a plant that has a greater need for water."

Lane, who is also host of "In the Garden" on UNC-TV, does not suggest we completely forgo turf grass. After all, it helps suck up carbon dioxide and controls erosion. But perhaps some different thinking is in order. "In the U.S. we use turf grass as something to cover the ground with. Europeans use it as a groundcover," the way we would use ivy or verbena, Lane noted.

Consider using turf as a groundcover in areas where foot traffic is desired or where the kids play. Jan Little, director of education and public programs for Duke Gardens, suggests using turf as a connector. Grassy pathways – wide or narrow – can lead the way to a secret garden space or shady spot to rest and reflect.

After you have decided to change the way you use turf grass, consider ornamental grasses, groundcovers, rock gardens or clover. Alternatives can be kind to the eyes as well as the water table.

## This craftsman's gone to the birdhouses

By DIANE DANIEL  
Correspondent

After Hurricane Fran blew through the Triangle in 1996, Bob Shuping heard from a friend in Alamance County.

"He told me he'd lost a bunch of walnut trees in the storm and wondered where he could sell the wood," recalled Shuping, a longtime general contractor in Chapel Hill. "Suddenly, I owned all this premium walnut."

### Who & Ware

LOCAL ARTISANS  
AND THEIR WORK

While "woodworking" was new for Shuping, working with wood was not.

"When I started doing construction in the 1970s, I learned from all the old-timers, using hammers and nails. We did a little bit of everything, including cabinets and decks. Fancy decks are like woodworking."

Shuping took the four large trees to a sawmill to be cut.

"I was able to work with the guy there and found out how they cut boards to the grain. That was just fascinating."

From there, his passion grew. Since then Shuping, 53, has created dozens of items from not only walnut, but holly, dogwood, cherry, and other local and American hardwoods.

Shuping constructs beautifully patterned bowls and platters, but birdhouses have become his niche, partly because of his ongoing involvement in the annual Birdhouses on Parade at the Carolina Inn. This year's show, which ends Sunday, features about 80 houses from 10 regional artisans.

"It's a really neat show," Shuping said. "They



COREY LOWENSTEIN - clowenstein@newsobserver.com

Robert Shuping turns his birdhouses on a lathe using about 10 different woods at his Chapel Hill home. They're on display at the Carolina Inn's Birdhouses on Parade, which ends Sunday.

put all the birdhouses up in the lobby and you pick up a brochure and browse around."

Shuping's are the only houses in the show made on a lathe through the process of wood turning, which allows for intricate shapes and designs. His hang from a tree or overhang, and are crested and anchored with spires and spindles.

Shuping built his first dozen birdhouses a decade ago to give as Christmas gifts to his immediate family.

SEE BIRDHOUSE, PAGE 4D

### Don't forget

A little birdie reminded us that April 13 is the date that entries will be accepted for the 12th Annual Birdhouse Competition at the JC Raulston Arboretum in Raleigh. This year's theme is Imaginations Run Wild – Birds Take Flight. Whether you're an adult or a child, or you prefer functional or fanciful birdie abodes, you'd better get busy. Get all the details and a schedule of events at <http://tinyurl.com/7uwrxes> or call 919-513-7005.

## Gardening books are up for grabs

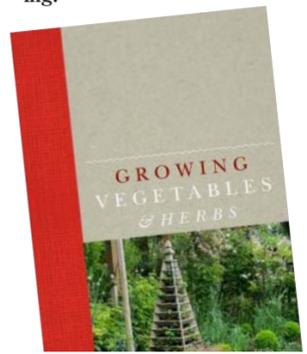
It's prime time for planting, and we have some great books to help you in the garden.

Send your name and street address to [forhomeandgarden@newsobserver.com](mailto:forhomeandgarden@newsobserver.com) by 5 p.m. April 9 and be entered into a drawing for one of two three-book collections. Put "Giveaway" in the subject line.

Titles include "Garden Problem Solver," "Growing Vegetables & Herbs" and "Pruning & Training."

We'll choose two winners at random Monday evening.

Good luck and good gardening!



# 5 minutes, and a lifetime, spent with Martha

I digress today from my normal weekly rant about my household foibles and fiascos to bring you some actual breaking news: I met Martha Stewart.

Now, we reporters are supposed to be blasé about celebrities. We're supposed to be critical, balanced and never fawning, which I would be if I met some famous person I didn't care about, like, say, Kim Kardashian.

But I cannot be impartial about Martha Stewart. Come on. It's *Martha Stewart*. In the eight years I have been writing this home design column, and even before, I have followed Stewart as she decorated, crafted, gardened, cooked and raised the bar in each of those areas.

To raise my own game, I've surfed her website, read her magazine, watched her TV show, made her crafts and baked her cookies. And, like many women who aspire to domestic domination, I have pondered how Stewart can cook like a French chef, sew like a Belgian lace maker, paint with perfection, decorate multiple houses gorgeously, run a magazine, create lines of housewares, host a TV show, grow organic vegetables, and still bring fresh homemade peanut brittle to that evening's dinner party. (The brittle alone would take me all

At Home  
**Marni Jameson**



weekend.)

How does she do all that and still keep her hair and skin looking so good? I'll tell you how: Because she's Martha Stewart. Besides brains, creativity, ideas, curiosity, passion and energy, she has a secret ingredient – a staff.

I'd like a staff. Whenever I do my own home improvement projects, I feel as if I'm under her watchful eye, trying to meet her standards, which, of course, being mortal, I never do. When I take a domestic shortcut – and glue gun a drape, or skip painting inside a closet, or use fake florals in a centerpiece, or cook with canned rather than home-brewed chicken stock – I imagine Stewart shaking her head. Hear her *tsk, tsk*. Nonetheless, I know that me and the world are better for her standards.

Stewart came to Orlando in late March to attend the 45th annual Pillsbury Bake-Off, which she taped for her TV show. She also swung by a local Macy's to judge the firemen's chili cook-off, which I attended, and to introduce her new



COURTESY OF PHELAN EBENHACK FOR MACY'S

Marni Jameson, right, interviewed Martha Stewart in March.

line of cast-iron cookware. Between judging the chili and signing recipes, she granted one, and only one, media interview during her visit. I scored it – five minutes with Martha.

Wearing a white blouse over tan tapered slacks, an apple-green summer scarf and tan sling-back heels, Stewart appeared as one would expect, at ease, at home, in control.

"No condiments," she said, waving off a fireman's offer to top her chili sample with cheddar cheese, sour cream and onions. "They

would be delicious, but the chili has to stand on its own first."

After the chili winner was announced (Congratulations Station 11!) and as the line for her signing began to form, I had my shot. Because the clock was ticking, I dispensed with the small talk, and jumped in with my questions, which I've included here along with a couple queries she fielded earlier from the audience.

**Q:** So many people look to you for inspiration, but where do you get your inspiration?

**A:** From the artisans, craftsmen, experts in their fields. I watch the best painter as he works, so I can learn, and then teach others.

**Q:** What's your favorite room in the house?

**A:** Easy. The kitchen.

**Q:** What's your favorite holiday?

**A:** I love holidays. My favorite is always the one coming up.

**Q:** What's your favorite recipe of all time?

**A:** Ever? I have to pick one? Probably the best apple pie or the best lemon tart. Oh, that's two.

**Q:** Finish this comparison: If chili has to taste good without the condiments, a room has to look good without the ...

**A:** Furniture.

**Q:** So the backgrounds, the wall color, flooring, moldings and lines all have to be great first?

**A:** Right.

**Q:** What's your best advice for people who want to live well?

**A:** You have to be interested, be curious and be passionate. You have to work at it. You can't slough.

In other words, folks: Step it up. Martha says.

Syndicated columnist Marni Jameson is the author of "The House Always Wins" (Da Capo), available through Amazon and Barnes & Noble. You may contact her through [www.marnijameson.com](http://www.marnijameson.com).

## BIRDHOUSE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1D

diate and extended family.

"We like feeding birds, so it seemed like something everyone would appreciate," he recalled. Shuping and his wife, Connie, a longtime area real estate agent, were thrilled when the birdhouse he'd made for her soon attracted boarders.

"We got chickadees, and we were so excited. We'd just sit and watch them go back

and forth. I still have pictures from then that I use. The birdhouse is a little embarrassing, but it's nice to see the birds using it."

Over the years, Shuping has changed the dimensions of the dwelling to create the perfect home for songbirds, including sparrows, wrens and finches, though chickadees have remained the most common.

Chapel Hill resident Lili Engelhardt can vouch for their effectiveness. She got

to know Shuping when he built a screened porch and finished an attic for her and her family. As a photographer and an admirer of his birdhouses, she volunteered to take photographs for his website.

"He brought over five or six and literally within five minutes, birds were circling. At one, two pairs of birds were fighting for the house. It was like they were apartment hunting in Manhattan."

Because Shuping's houses are so refined and can cost up to \$225, some buyers opt to display them indoors.

"I encourage people to put them outside," Shuping said. "If they're under eaves or even branches, they'll keep better."

Although wood-turned birdhouses aren't as commonplace as others, "I can tell you there's nothing new in wood turning in hundreds of years," he said with a laugh. The artistry is in highlighting the beauty of the wood, said Shuping, who taught himself through books, videos and plenty of practice.

"It was extremely frustrating at first," he said. "But once I figured out how to position and sharpen the gouges and get the tools at the right angle, it's like turning



COREY LOWENSTEIN - clowenstein@newsobserver.com

Wood turning allows for intricate shapes and designs, such as in this birdhouse at Robert Shuping's shop.

pottery. When you see the grain appear on a rough board, it's just great. That goes hand in hand with getting a pretty log and seeing

where the grain will be and whittling it down to get those parts."

He makes the house by gluing segments together, like a

**Who:** Bob Shuping  
**Ware:** Turned wood birdhouses, kitchen and gift items  
**Location:** Chapel Hill  
**Contact:** 919-929-3685, [www.rsswoodworks.com](http://www.rsswoodworks.com)  
**Price:** Birdhouses \$120 to \$225, platters and bowls \$15 to \$165, toys and ornaments \$20  
**Where to buy:** Through Sunday, April 8, at Carolina Inn, Chapel Hill, [carolinainn.com](http://carolinainn.com). Through the artist, at [rsswoodworks.com](http://rsswoodworks.com).

barrel, and then he custom-fits the tops and bottoms.

"I figured out how to make the grain run all the way around the board horizontally so it lines up around the whole house and looks like one piece," he said. Shuping and his wife are moving this summer from their traditional home to a mid-century modern house, where he hopes to add a showroom.

"One of the things that sold us was the big patio with 12-foot sliding glass doors and tons and tons of birds. We saw bluebirds, chickadees and nuthatches going back and forth to this huge holly."

Sounds like Shuping soon will have a lot more guests to put up.

Send suggestions to [diane@bydianedaniel.com](mailto:diane@bydianedaniel.com).

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## TABLES

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stations and, because we're working more from home, file cabinets.

Technology also is playing a role in the number of coffee tables we're using. Furniture makers are introducing the concept of grouping three small tables. Global Views, a Dallas-based furniture maker, offers a trio of varying height marble-top tables with gold-finished iron bases. An iPad could be placed on one, a drink on another and reading materials on the third.

"It's combining sculptural

## Source book

These manufacturers sell products through local and national retailers, but their coffee tables and other furnishings can be viewed in their online catalogs.

- Currey & Co., Atlanta: [curreycodealers.com](http://curreycodealers.com)
- Four Hands, Austin, Texas: [fourhands.com](http://fourhands.com)
- Global Views, Dallas: [globalviews.com](http://globalviews.com)
- Hickory Chair, Hickory: [hickorychair.com](http://hickorychair.com)
- Lexington Home Brands, Thomasville: [lexington.com](http://lexington.com)

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fortably get up and walk is 24 inches. In her living room, Kalkofen uses a side table for drinks because her coffee table is cube-shaped. The space underneath a legged table gives feet clearance, so it's a more practical choice if you want to use it for drinks.

Kalkofen is a fan of small ottomans with flip tops: One side is a tray, the other upholstered. They function as tables, storage and extra seating.

Lamb is seeing furniture makers such as Norwalk make an ottoman/coffee table hybrid. The top is similar to an upholstered bench, but a lower wooden shelf serves as storage.

Because more of us are downsizing, smaller coffee tables are growing more popular, said Cameron Cook of Four Hands, a Texas-based manufacturer.

As an increasing number of homes contain hardwood floors instead of carpet, customers have turned away from brown wooden tables and toward pieces with metal, glass and stone. For wood, gray-washed surfaces are in style, Cook said.

Coffee tables evolved from taller sofa tables during the 20th century, to help anchor conversation and the room. Janecek considers the 1960s the heyday of the coffee/cocktail table. Shapes became organic. Materials included plastics, metals and glass.

But a surge of design innovation is recurring now.

"We just might be entering a new golden age," he said.

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