



MATERIALISM

# Bamboo

by Alexa Stevenson

AN ANCIENT GRASS PROVES WORTHY IN THE MODERN DESIGN WORLD



Known as “friend of the people” in China, “brother” in Vietnam and the symbol of good health and luck to those who practice the principles of feng shui, bamboo is fast permeating the Western design world. A staple in Asian cultures, the sturdy grass has long been a very versatile material for a village households: beds to sleep on are typically made of bamboo poles; fish are harvested with bamboo traps; bamboo shoot are enjoyed fresh, dried or pickled. For cities in Asia, like Hong Kong and Tokyo, that embrace modern design and technology, bamboo is even the material of choice for scaffolding used in the construction of some of the tallest skyscrapers. ¶ Modern technologies are expanding the potential for bamboo in construction. Plyboo is a new board product made of crushed bamboo. Here in Connecticut, it’s an increasingly popular option in home design. “I’ve been seeing a surge in the past two years for bamboo,” says Scott Hobbs, president of Hobbs, Inc., a high-end construction and renovation company. “It’s different and non-traditional for the Northeast. Because of its interesting color and texture, I like to use it for cabinets and flooring. It’s also durable, less expensive than wood and environmentally friendly.” Design sources and eco-activists alike tout the use of bamboo because, unlike most trees, bamboo can be harvested in three to five years, compared to the average 60 years for a tree, and needs only minimal pesticides. ¶ It’s not just for those who want to inject a romanticized notion of exotic islands or rainy afternoons inside a palm tree-papered Florida beach house, either. “A bit of bamboo is a casual touch in any room,” muses James Petersen of Wadia Associates, an architecture firm known for its broad range of expertise in all aspects of traditional design. “I’ve always loved and appreciated it. It speaks to an informal lifestyle. Even if the house is very formal, bamboo establishes an easy, friendly tone especially if used with lots of color and potted plants. ¶ He adds, “the lines of bamboo are sleek and fine without being fussy. A Louis XVI leg can be stiff and too proper in a room, but bamboo is graceful without trying too hard. I love it in pool houses and also in unexpected places like dining rooms—coupled with lots of green it reflects a casual feel with a timeless look.” ¶ Versatile, appealing and affordable, its surprising that Western cultures haven’t been quicker to catch on to its appeal. Whether a simple bamboo tray or wall-to-wall flooring, this fast-growing grass adds an element of surprise in any room. *See Resources.*

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