

# tranquil waters

BY JANET PURCELL

Aquariums create a soothing ambience and interesting design element in any room



PHOTO BY PAUL ROCHELEAU



COURTESY OF OKEANOS AQUASCAPING

## Fountains, ponds, and waterfalls surged as key elements in landscape design

in the 1990s. Now, with the green movement well under way, the trend is to bring the natural aspect of water indoors. One result is the installation of aquariums in many interior design plans, ranging from 2½-gallon tabletop models to custom systems holding as much as 1,000 gallons of water.

**Above left:** A fish tank is incorporated into an entertainment unit in this Bergen County home. "It gives a nice punch to an otherwise mellow room, where the furniture is sage and earthy tones and the wood is dark," says Robin Schultz, who designed the unit. Her architectural detailing includes woven-wood insets in the cabinet doors as well as inlaid trim and columns that conceal pullout drawers. Columns separate the flat-screen television from the fish tank, which vents to the basement. The fireplace mantel and surround were aged, distressed, and finished to complement the wall unit. Aquarium installation and maintenance, Aquatic Scenes in Putnam Valley, New York; entertainment unit, Robin Schultz Interior Design.

"Aquarium décor can transform any location to an atmosphere of complete tranquility," says Martin Schapira of Okeanos Aquascaping in New York City.

To achieve that tranquility, however, experts caution that you should do your homework first. As the trend grows, so has the number of choices for the do-it-yourself hobbyist

**Above right:** More than \$15,000 worth of exotic fish, live coral, and invertebrates from various coral reefs thrive in this aquarium by Okeanos Aquascaping. Fulfilling a special request of the homeowner, the filtration system includes a refugium — an isolated compartment — to house a sea horse, the children's favorite sea creature. The main aquarium holds 200 gallons and can be viewed from front and back. The cabinet, designed by Ezra Berger of Ezcadi Design in Lakewood, complements the rest of the woodwork in the room.

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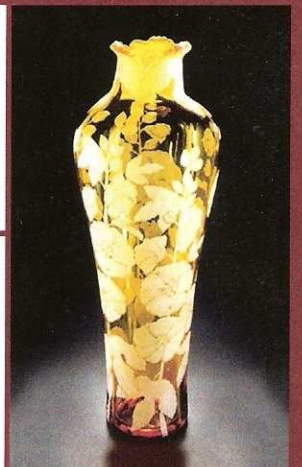
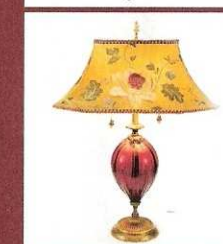
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For the hobbyist, the traditional tabletop tank has been surpassed by globes and towers, picture-frame aquariums (slim tanks that hang on a wall like a picture), and aqua tables (an aquarium that's designed to be used also as a coffee table or end table). Tanks, both glass and acrylic, come in many geometric shapes and can be installed in ready-made cabinetry. Maintenance components and fully automated systems are available in every price range.

However, Jeff Kudrick, product manager for J&M Lifestyles in Randolph, says he cannot stress enough the need for research when choosing an aquarium. "Don't try to piece a system together yourself. Talk to people who have them and ask about pitfalls. Go to smaller private stores and look at the type of system you want. Ask to see a portfolio. Don't just look at the fish tank; look at the system — the whole package. This is not something you do halfway. It's a living thing."

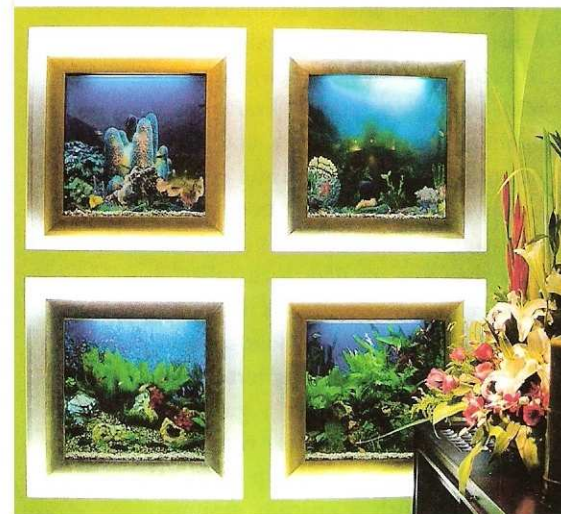
The other option is to connect with a custom designer who will work with you to determine size, style, and personal preference. In this case, experts take care of everything from designing a suitable filtration system to installing, stocking, and maintaining the aquarium.

### Decision Time

First, make some preliminary decisions:

#### • Where do you want the aquarium?

A small unit bubbling away in a bedroom can be soothing, but if you want a dramatic splash you might consider your foyer, living room, or dining room, where everyone can appreciate your investment in this living and growing work of art. Some homeowners take a part-of-the-family approach and enjoy hav-



ing the sea life with them in the kitchen or family room, where they spend most of their time. "[An aquarium] is beautiful because of its lighting," says Robin Schultz, an allied member of the American Society of Interior Designers and owner of Robin Schultz Interior Design in Norwood. "And it has a meditative, calming effect. It's a nice counter-effect to the electronics that may be in the room."

• Saltwater or freshwater? It's a matter of taste, says Schapira of Okeanos.

**Left:** The Aqua Table from Midwest Tropical Inc. is art in motion thanks to the ever-changing aquatic habitat. Available as an end table and several versions of coffee tables, it has an acrylic base and sides and a 3/8-inch tempered-glass top. The 15-gallon, 24-square-inch end table is \$499.95; a 25-gallon, 36-square-inch coffee table is \$619.95; a 28-gallon, 38-by-20-15 1/2 octagon coffee table is \$649.95. **Left below:** The AquaVista 500 from AVI Corp. combines elegant design and proprietary technologies in a virtually hassle-free aquarium that is only 4 1/2 inches thick. The aquarium's technology and equipment are managed by an embedded interface that allows you to monitor and maintain the aquarium.



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"Some people prefer the tropical atmosphere of a live planted aquarium or an African cichlid habitat [The Cichlidae family includes the angelfish, oscars, and discus species that are highly valued for aquariums]. Then there are individuals who prefer a more exotic aquarium, such as a reef or shark aquarium," he says. "A saltwater aquarium, especially a reef tank, is usually more expensive than a fresh-water aquarium."

- **Glass or acrylic?** "Glass, hands down," Schapira explains, even though acrylic costs less, weighs less, and is more adaptable to odd-shaped aquariums. "Acrylic has a tendency to scratch. We have seen tanks that were difficult to see through after a certain time."

- **Aquascaping, livestock, maintenance.** If yours is a do-it-yourself project, read and ask questions. Learn about lighting, filtration, heating, and maintenance before you take the plunge. Learn about stocking evenly and about the various fish species and how they interact with each other. A comprehensive website for beginners is [www.freshaquarium.about.com/od/aquariumstartup/u/gettingstarted.htm](http://www.freshaquarium.about.com/od/aquariumstartup/u/gettingstarted.htm). The website also offers a guide for beginners on how to deal with critical periods in the startup cycle. If you work with a custom designer, you will be guided through every step and will learn about special needs for your selected system.

Interior aquascaping may involve a lot of work, but the rewards are great. An established and growing tank or intricate system can bring tranquility and a sense of sparkling peacefulness to any room in your home. **DNJ**

*Janet Purcell, a regular contributor to Design NJ, writes from her home in Hopewell.*

For contact information, page 154

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