



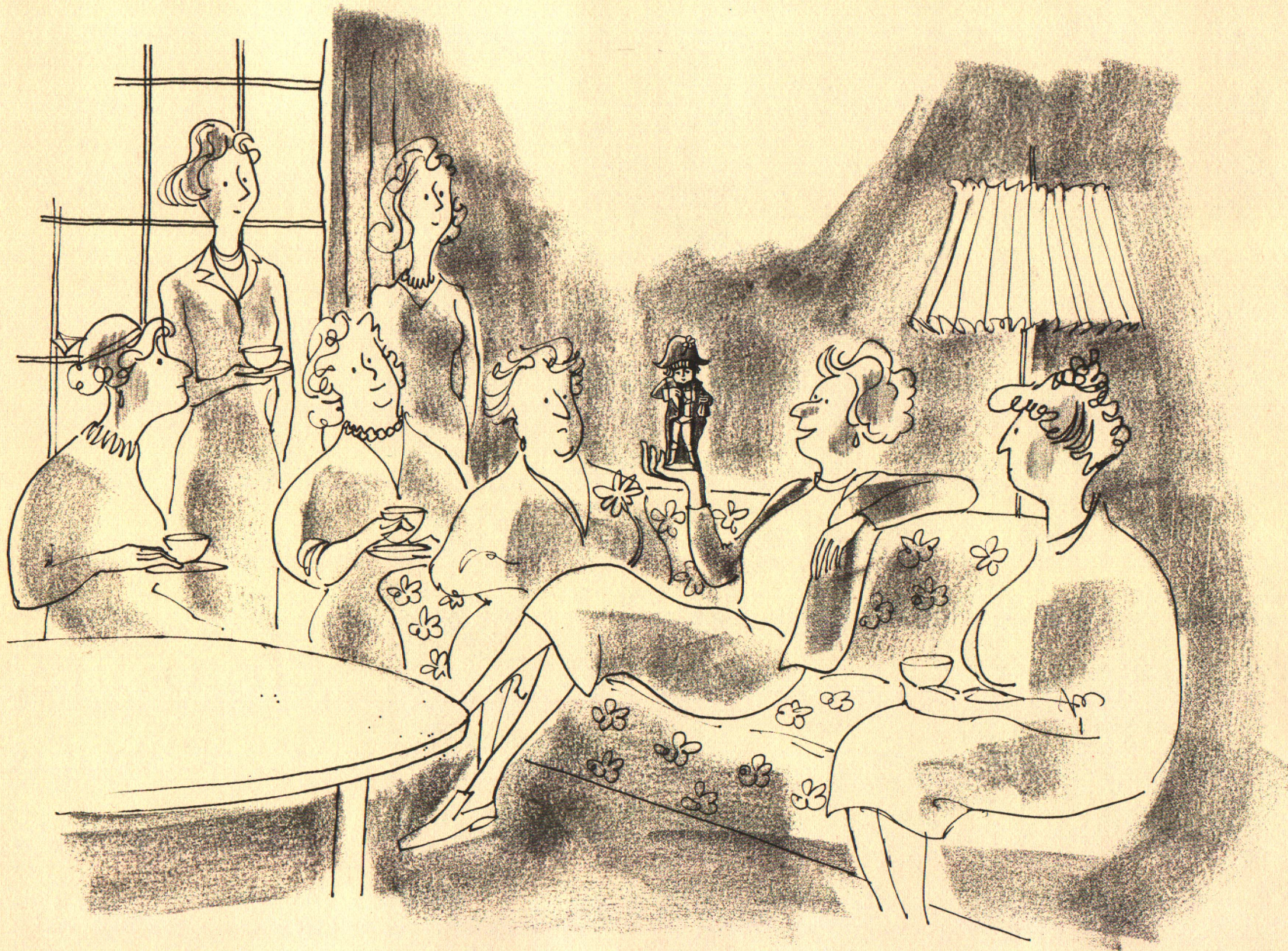
EXTENSION BULLETIN E-635

HOME AND FAMILY SERIES

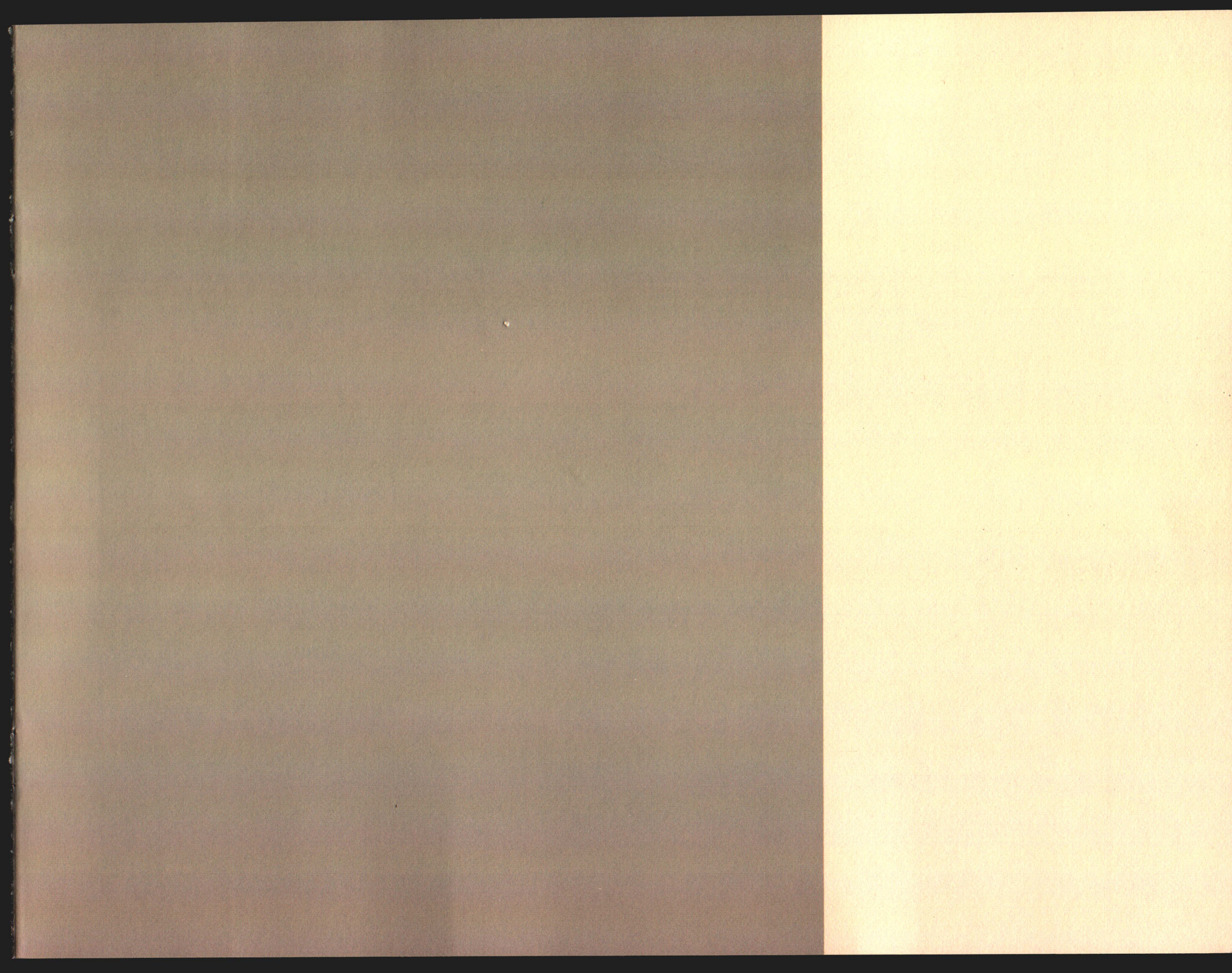
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choosing accessories for the home

*The Cooperative Extension Service
Michigan State University*



It was on sale.





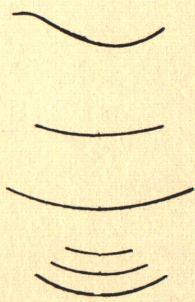
pitcher 1

The graceful line is used for both sides and for the handle.



pitcher 2

Line in this pitcher is varied but repeated in sides and handle.



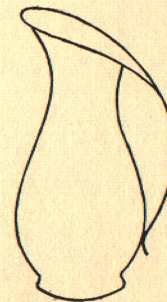
pitcher 3

Roundness of the pitcher is emphasized with a repeat of curved lines from base to top.



pitcher 3

Flowing S curve handle line suggests roundness, but gives a pleasing length and height to the pitcher.



pitcher 1

Start at any point on the outline of each pitcher and notice that a continuous line carries your eye completely around it.

1

2

3



Well-designed pitchers make good use of line.

ACCESSORY DESCRIPTIONS often start with a defending “well anyway” even when the words are unspoken. What is being defended—an unwise choice? Accessories which deserve space need no defense. They can be recognized as good designs, and become lasting and important parts of the furnishings in a home. You, your family, and friends should find in them a common object to appreciate and enjoy.

Most families have many objects that were intended to beautify a room. How these objects made their way into the home partly explains why they are there. The attic, weekend guest, specialty shop, antique shop, department store, and tourist souvenir counter contribute to a family’s accessory accumulation. This starts when a couple adds its own loved possessions to the wedding presents. Among the collection are objects of excellent, poor, or very poor design.

Today’s market is flooded with accessory items. Poor selections mean money wasted, for after a short time they may end up in a back closet or at a white elephant sale.

Understanding what makes an object good design may help a family avoid poor choices. Styles, periods, materials, and cost of accessories change, but the easy-to-understand good design guides remain the same. They may be used to check any style, period, or material.

Five guides for recognizing good design are: line, shape, texture, color, and added decoration. Each guide is merely a building block. How carefully or carelessly these blocks are built into an object decides its design quality.

Unrelated lines confuse the eye.

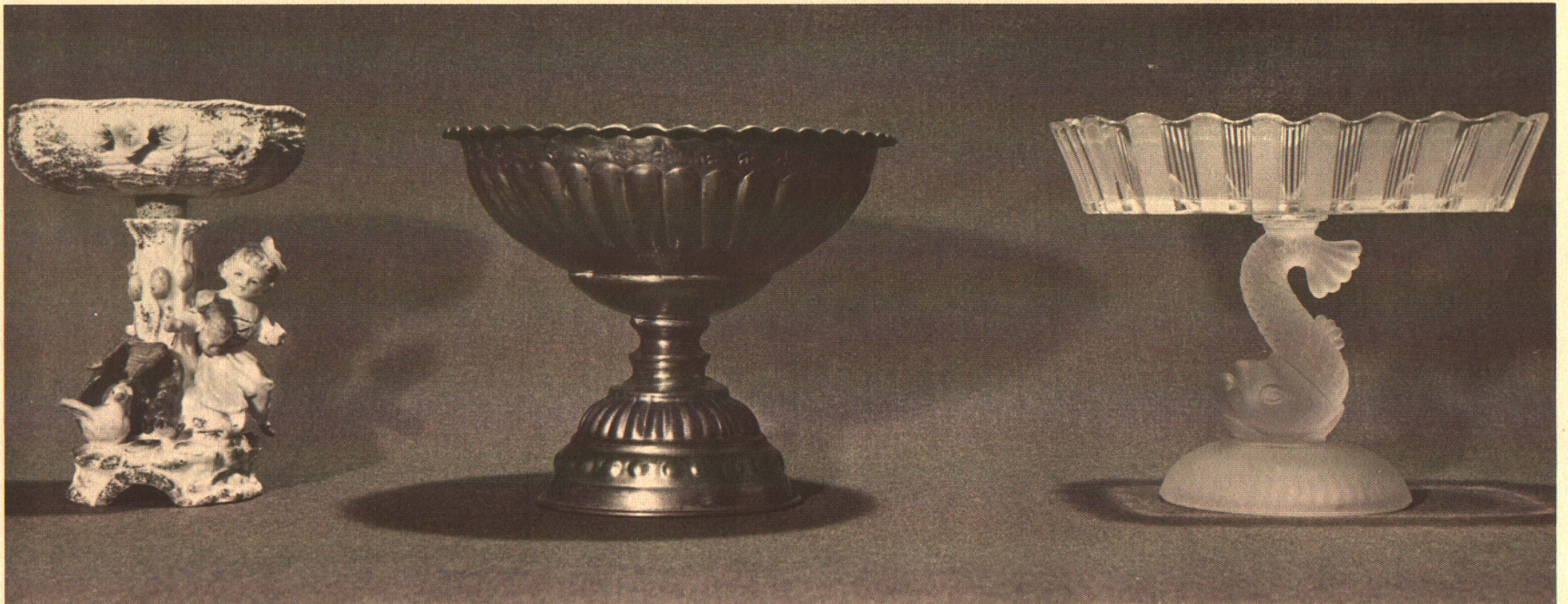


Which one of these compotes is well-designed?

1

2

3



Building Block 1 - Line

Lines are related to the overall shapes.

Variations of one or a few lines are repeated.

Lines add to the use or attractiveness of the object.

Continuity of line carries the eye easily from one point to another and around the object.

The pitcher on the left doesn't have good line design. It has many unrelated lines and little or no repetition of line as shown by the double handle with a circular shape above and an oval shape below. Some of the lines are pointless such as the ruffle below the spout. The eye becomes confused and annoyed if it must follow lines first in one direction, then another.

Building Block 2 - Shape

A base and a stem supporting a dish are the basic shapes of any compote design. One of the three compotes is well-designed. Can you spot it? You are correct if you choose compote 2. Good design principles it follows include: Shapes within the compote are in good proportion to each other. Recognizing good proportion is a matter of seeing sizes related to other sizes. The relationship of the upper and lower parts of compote 2 gives it good proportion. Compote 1 has poor proportions. Objects are out of scale—the bird is larger than the girl's head.

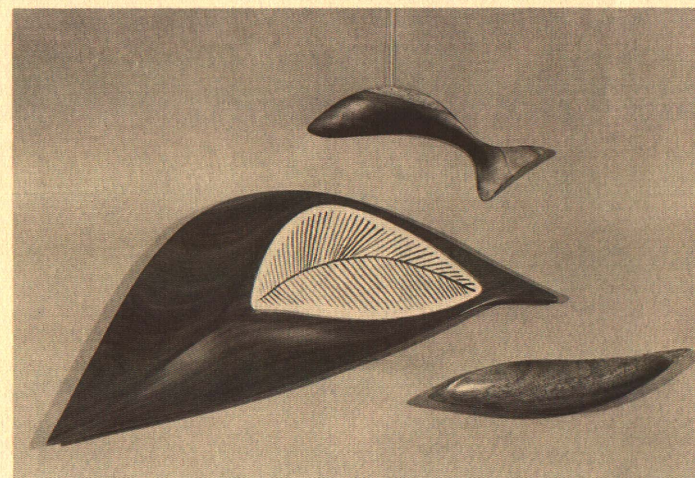
Notice the poor proportions of compote 3—the wide heavy dish and the more delicate stem. The dish would look more secure if it were cut off and used directly on the table.

Shapes in different parts of the object are related by repetition or variation. Compare compotes 2 and 3. The round shapes of compote 2 are followed



Shapes in compote and of fruit enhance each other for a pleasing arrangement.

Form follows function.



Modified natural shapes can be pleasing.



throughout. Compote 3 has three separate unrelated parts, each attractive in itself but less attractive when combined. A dolphin sculptured piece separates a softly rounded base and a straight-line dish. The fluted top is out of place with the otherwise straight lines of the dish.

Shapes in compote 2 are dignified and mature. Mature and dignified design ideas and shapes come from geometric forms, such as the circle, square, oval, and rectangle, and from good interpretations of nature's designs.

Shapes serve the purpose for which the object is intended. Consider the use of the object when you think of its design. A compote is a decorative container for such foods as fruit, nuts, and candy.

Compote 3 is a period piece. Glass collectors treasure it for its historic value, but as a compote design, its shapes lose their purpose. Compote 1 is a gaudy, poorly executed piece of pottery; its shapes are without purpose.

When compote 2 holds fruit, its shapes enhance its use. The circular shapes of fruit are repeated in the beading on the base and in the shapes of base and dish.

These excellent interpretations of the fish shape are the result of studying nature for inspiration. The ceramic inset of the snack tray suggests the backbone of the fish. The simple, pleasing shape will not compete with food served.

The decorative hanging fish is carved from walnut following the wood grain. It retains only the modified outline of a fish shape. The beauty of the wood gives the accessory its character.

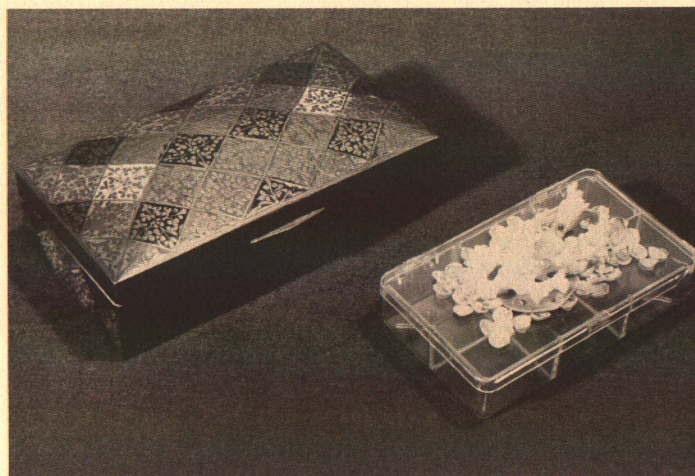
Obvious copying of nature forms, although poor design, often sells an object because it appeals to the childlike quality of recognizing and enjoying an animal or bird. After using a short time, mature reasoning will eliminate such objects as this frog plant container. That is why such items are labeled "white elephants."

When one considers shape and use, the suitability and simplicity of the white ceramic container make it a good design choice.

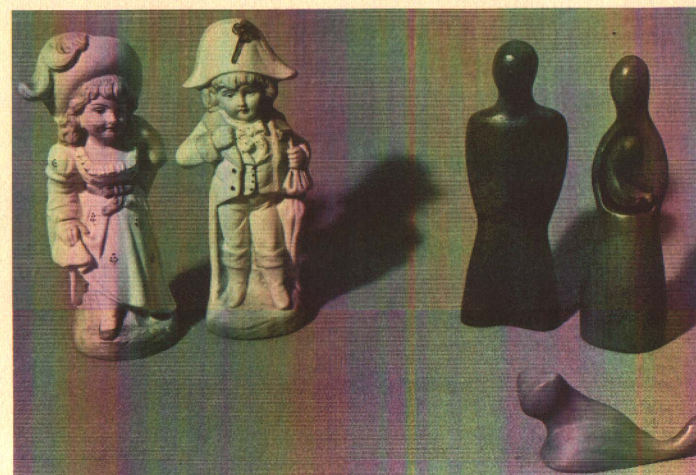


Texture is built into well-designed accessories through materials and tools used.

Which box has honesty of surface texture?



Colors may be applied or natural.



Building Block 3 - Texture

Texture is the surface look and feel of an object.

Well-designed accessories show by their surface how they are made—with what machine, or with what hand method.

Honesty is the key to texture. See if the properties of the basic material are used honestly. Pewter can be polished, copper can be stamped or hammered, reed can be woven, and wood can be smoothed, carved, or chipped.

Fake textures—something made to look like another material—are poor design.

Both boxes on the left are hand-decorated. Box 1 has a rich, textural effect created by the inlay of small bits of brass hammered into the softer metal of the box. Natural properties of both metals are used.

Box 2 is a misuse of texture. The smooth, clear, plastic surface loses its character when decorated with bits of coral, shells, and glitter. The decorations become dust catchers and may break off.

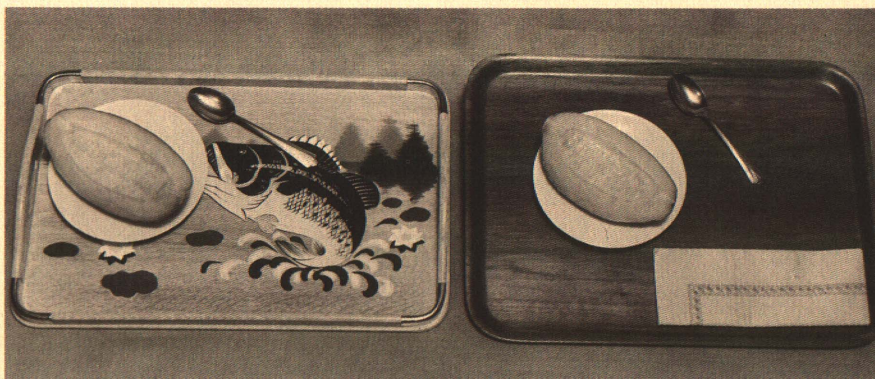
Building Block 4 - Color

Color is one of the eyecatching features of an accessory. Evaluate color as a part of the overall design with these guides:

The natural color of the material is often its best color.

Wooden figures on opposite page are designed to be children's playthings. They remain the smooth-grained brown color of the walnut they are made from. Added color may only lessen their beauty.

Colors added to the accessory in the process of making it are often found in good designs. Colored threads woven into placemats give a subtle effect that is hard to duplicate with paint. Color baked into the glaze is much different from painting over a form and then glazing it.



1

2

Accessories can lose design quality through the use of added decoration.

Added decoration should not detract from the accessory in use.

1

2

3



A simple vase brings out beauty of flowers.

Colors need to suit the mood of the accessory. Some contemporary designs suggest vivid, clear colors. Soft shapes and lines suggest more subdued colors.

Building Block 5 - Added decoration

Decoration should be used to enrich a surface and its texture. Added decoration may fail to do this. Vase 1 is poor use of added decoration; vases 2 and 3 are good use. Study the white elephant table at the next sale you attend. You'll find many items of fairly good design discarded because of added decoration. These questions may help you check added decoration:

Is it suitable to the surface material, its texture and pattern? Vase 1 is typical of added decoration poorly done. Ceramic flowers have no natural place on the side of the vase and it becomes unsuitable as a flower container. Vase 2 uses much pattern, but it is part of the texture of the metal—an elaborate, but very good design.

Does it follow lines and shapes of objects to enrich their appearance? Vases 2 and 3 keep the rhythm of the circular shape by carrying the decoration all the way around. Vase 1 fails to relate line or shape with decoration.

Does it add to the accessory in use? Attractive as it is, vase 2 is hard to imagine as anything but a decorative object. Vase 3 adapts easily to use and serves as a pleasant container to accent flowering branches.

Accessories without added decoration are adaptable to many uses as tray 2 illustrates. Both wooden trays are basically good shapes and sizes. Tray 1 is available undecorated, but in the hope of attracting a buyer a garish colored fish decal has been glued on and lacquered.

Food placed on both trays shows that tray 2 is the better design. Originally good, tray 1 has lost much of its design quality.

One accessory in use is part of a total effect so simplicity of decoration is a wise choice.



The five building blocks of good design—line, shape, texture, color, and added decoration—must all fit together to build a good accessory. When one falls out of place, the design is weakened. Even a good design, not suitable to the furnishings of a particular home, is a poor choice. When you find an accessory which you recognize to be good design and for which you have use, you have found a lifelong companion for your home, its furnishings, and your family. ■

More information on accessories for the home may be obtained from your County Extension Home Economist.

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