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## How to Go Tiki

01/08/12 **Kastle Waserman** | specs+spaces Reporter, Dunn-Edwards Corporation

Why limit an exotic island getaway to just to vacation time? For lovers of Tiki culture, it's an everyday possibility, turning a corner, a room, the backyard or even their entire house into their own personal paradise guarded by menacing Tiki statues and quenched with fruity cocktails in vintage mugs.



We talk to a well-known author who wrote the definitive "[Book of Tiki](#)," a Tiki designer, and take some home tours to meet those who have transformed their living spaces into their own tropical oasis, as our Tiki Design series wraps up with how to go Tiki!

According to the "Book of Tiki," the Tiki first emerged in Polynesian mythology as a carving of man, and later came to be thought of as a God of the Artists. While the origins of Tiki in interior design are not set in stone, it is said to have started with the opening of Don the Beachcomber and Trader Vic's restaurants in California in the late 1930s. But the concept really took off after World War II, when soldiers brought back souvenirs of their journeys to the Pacific region. The notion of using primitive art to augment the smooth lines of modern design of the early 20th century became a trending look that began to appear in string of bars that popped up in the 1950s, providing American dreamers with a place to counter the moral restrictions of the time and escape to where they could let their primitive selves cut loose.

In the 1960s, Tiki was in its heyday but the trend faded in the '70s, with only a glimmer kept alive in kitschy b-movies and a few bars that survived on the novelty factor.



Enter vintage enthusiasts of '90s, who demonstrated a renewed interest as they scoured thrift stores and garage sales for any piece of nostalgia from the bars and restaurants they missed out on. Mugs, lamps, signs, matchbooks, postcards and menus were highly sought after items and a community began to build of collectors bent on recreating this colorful culture.

Today the scene is robust. Though still considered a subculture, it has a massive audience who use today's technology – eBay, Craigslist and social media to meet like-minded enthusiasts and look for collectibles. Annual events such as the [Tiki Oasis](#) bring people together in person to

enjoy what is the lifestyle of Tiki that encompasses all aspects from furniture, drinkware, fashion, drinks and entertainment.

So what is the Tiki look and how can you get started with it? We spoke with Sven Kirsten, author of "The Book of Tiki," the text everyone in the scene states as "required reading," who told us there are a couple of directions Tiki lovers take with their design. Many pull their references from "mi-mo" or mid-century modern with clean spaces juxtaposed with a pop of the primitive, while others take the more island-influenced route known as "Polynesian Pop" that builds layer upon layer, floor to ceiling textures. "Bamboo poles provide the framework," say Kirsten. "Walls and ceilings are covered with tropical textures like rattan or Tapas cloths. Masks and shields are hung on the wall space along with shelves to hold Tiki mug collections and statues. On the ceiling hang beachcomber lamps and fishnet floats. Then add some tropical plants and maybe a waterfall."

And don't forget the kitsch factor. Tiki is meant to be fun and extreme, Kirsten confirms, "It's never middle-of-

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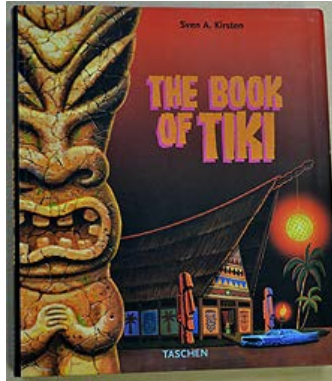
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the-road, you either love it or hate it. It is an antidote to today's generic-ness."

Kirsten encourages anyone interested in stepping into Tiki to inform themselves on the genre. There are some who stick to a strict list of purist do's and don'ts, while others say it's whatever you like to look at. Just be warned, you may get a few scowls if you mention Jimmy Buffett's MargaritaVille, Tommy Bahama or party store décor in this crowd. Most lean more toward the authentic vintage esthetic over the more gentrified version and the look does not include references to other geographies outside the Pacific islands. "Stay within the style," Kirsten advises. "Don't use parrots or monkeys or pirate stuff. Nautical, yes. Asian, some. Mexican, never! Remember first and foremost, the culture is about the Polynesian triangle, the South Seas or South Pacific."



In many of my discussions in the Tiki scene, another name that frequently popped up was Bamboo Ben, a Tiki interiors pro who began building bamboo Tiki-style furniture and décor as a business handed down from his grandfather Eli Headley, who many called, "the original beachcomber." Ben's bamboo talents can be seen in bars such as the [Kona Club](#) and [Frankie's Tiki Room](#), as well as homes across the US.



He says the key to Tiki is creating spaces where you can take a permanent vacation and just disappear – dark rooms with few lights and many cocktails." And it makes sense that a resurgence is coming into play now, with the recent recession dragging on, the uncertainty of our times is prompting people to look for a place to literally hide away.

In creating a vision for his spaces, Ben looks for ways to break up a large room into little nooks. His motto is "no white walls" and he uses Dunn-Edwards Paints to create depth behind his bamboo wall mounts. "You don't want white showing behind

the gaps of the bamboo and there are areas, such as around doors, where bamboo doesn't work. So I paint a dark color that drops into the background."

We asked Ben if there was a color palette that could be called Tiki and he said, "earthy tones, dark browns, olive greens, reds and oranges. Some people also add blue."

So we came up with our own Dunn-Edwards palette to get you started:



Bamboo Screen (DE6193) Cuban Cigar (DE6154) Red Revival (DEA154)



Clay Terrace (DE5229) Beach House (DE5430) Sprig of Mint (DE5675)

#### TIKI TOUR

For further inspiration, we visited a few home DIY incarnations of Tiki spaces including the Rumpus Room in Los Angeles, a backyard guesthouse transformed from laundry room to Tiki bar where regular Wednesday night socials are hosted by homeowners Kirby and Polly Fleming, along with [Tonga Hut](#) mixologist Kelly. This space is a real getaway that makes one feel a million miles from the big city.

See the slideshow

Our next stop was the home of Ron and Mickee Ferrell in Camarillo who have truly turned their place into an exotic oasis in the middle of non-descript suburbia. They mix their tastes, as Ron prefers authentic mid-century Tiki with Mickee's love for Hawaiian tropical to create a space they say, "makes us feel like we're always on vacation."

While the rattan furnishings and black velvet paintings are stunning inside, it is the outside Tiki bar and pond that is the true masterpiece, deep with layers of Polynesian Pop styling. Tiki torches light the way and tropical plants provide a pure hideaway feel.

See the slideshow

And finally, we virtually stepped into the home of Wendy and Dan Cevola in Sacramento whose Tiki décor began with Dan's want of a "jungle room" that led to his discovery of Tiki. As he and Wendy amassed a Tiki mug collection so big and so fast, their only regret was not taking time to paint the walls as they erected multiple bookshelves to display their extensive set of treasures. Bob's motto is "if you can't display it, there's no point in having a collection."

Their pieces even inspired Wendy to begin making ceramics as Dan would often say, "there should be a bowl to go with these mugs." She is now a well known creator of Tiki mugs, bowls and other art, which she sells online and at Tiki events. See her work [here](#).

See the slideshow

It's never too late to start a Tiki hideaway of your own. Study the look, start your collection, meet other enthusiasts and enjoy!

We'll see you on the island.  
Aloha!

Read the rest of our series on Tiki Design:

[Part I: Tiki Oasis](#)

[Part II: The Art of Shag](#)

*Photos by Kastle Waserman*

*Photos of the Cevola home courtesy of Wendy and Dan Cevola*

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**Marcus Lynn says:**

January 10, 2012 at 8:48 PM

Looks like the Cevolans need to buy some Dunn-Edwards paint and get rid of their white walls!

