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Maps:

They'll take you — and your room — places

By Stacy Downs

THE KANSAS CITY STAR

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Whether you are fascinated by the Old World or prefer a modern look, there's a map for your home.

It's easy to find antique-inspired sepia maps of the world that are full of mountain ranges and place names and look as if they belong in your grandfather's study. But there are also more glamorous maps, streamlined of all topography and made of clear acrylic that seems to float when hung on the wall. Fully illuminated maps look like high-def televisions, techy enough to make a gadget geek swoon.

But all maps share this: They transport us back in time to the places we have traveled, as well as to the places we dream of going. Maps represent who we are, making them good conversation pieces in the home, says Larry Compeau, associate professor of marketing at Clarkson University in New York and executive officer of the Society for Consumer Psychology.

Maps also can signify who we wish we were. "Those who haven't really traveled, who have a map displayed, want to convey that they're knowledge-seeking, intelligent people," Compeau says. "In that case, maps are kind of like back in the 1950s, when having a set of encyclopedias in your living room sent a message that you were worldly."

But the top reason people buy maps, according to Compeau, is that they look cool. They're rich with details in the names of places and the colors of regions.

Debbie Dusenberry, owner of the Curious Sofa boutique in Prairie Village, Kan., is drawn to maps because of their graphic appeal.

"They're fascinating," Dusenberry says. "They remind you the world is so much bigger than you."

Dusenberry hung muted nautical maps like wallpaper in the powder room at her store's former location. She overlapped them haphazardly and tea-stained them, giving the small space a vintage look. She thinks there are other possibilities for using inexpensive maps in home decor using glue, scissors and a little imagination.

"Maps can really transform an object," she says. "They can hide flaws in furniture. They can be scanned onto printable fabric to make throw pillows. They could line the backs of medicine cabinets. They could be tacked onto the walls inside the garage to make it a more interesting place."

Maps also can be a meaningful gift. Besides the obvious popularity of world maps, U.S. maps and European maps, people buy maps that pertain to a narrow interest, says John Serpa, chief executive officer of Maps.com, an online catalog based in Santa Barbara, Calif. Sought-after thematic maps include bike trail, fishing and Shakespeare's England maps.

David Spivey, owner of Spivey's Old Maps, Fine Art, Prints & Rare Books in Kansas City, Mo., says wine-region maps are the hottest trend.

"It seems like everyone is a wine connoisseur these days," Spivey says.

Mary Lies, owner of Round Trip Imports in De Soto, Kan., says many of her customers buy maps to signify family heritage. Many of the maps she sells are of regions in Italy. One husband and wife displayed a 7-by-6-foot map of Europe in the dining room, tracking his father's tour of duty in World War II based on his journals.

Lies notices that men and women gravitate to maps. Such was the case with Art and Sharon Shoener of Leawood, Kan., who bought a European school map at the store.

"Usually, he doesn't take much of an interest in home decor stuff," Sharon Shoener says of her husband, who is president of Kansas City Southern Railway. "But the map was something he was enthusiastic about, something he could get behind."

Try gluing inexpensive maps on the following objects:

- Lampshade
- Magazine rack
- Child's chair
- Frame mat
- Table tops

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