

# Here comes the SUN

By Wallace Shaw and Nick Pezzo

From the Inca Sun Temple at Machu Picchu to Louis XIV's orangerie at Versailles or the Duke of Devonshire's Hyde Park Crystal Palace, the tradition of creating indoor retreats where people can connect with nature has a long history.

During the 18th century, aristocrats and adventuresome merchants built sun-dappled conservatories onto their estates to house rare varietals they had collected from their trading journeys to Africa, Asia and the West Indies. By the early 19th century, these verdant spaces were being used to host elegant gatherings, rather than merely being a show-place for plants. It was considered highly fashionable if dinner guests could gently pluck an exotic fruit from one of the trees growing in the conservatory.

## An exotic mix

One of our favourite examples of the Victorian-era sunroom is the winter garden at the Vanderbilt's Biltmore



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estate. It was decorated with an exotic mix of jungle plants and rattan and bamboo furniture, but the defining piece was a marble and bronze fountain sculpture, *Boy Stealing Geese*.

Today, sunrooms are often places for quiet contemplation or relaxed entertaining. Nothing captures the magic of a summer evening more than dining *al fresco*-style in a room softly lit by hurricane lanterns and gently perfumed with noted summer fragrances.

But it is during the day when a sunroom exudes its most enticing charms. Merely imagining this warm, golden haven makes one smile. You

can almost feel a refreshing and cleansing breeze bringing summer into your home. The desire to recline in a chaise lounge with a good book and a cool drink while basking in this sun-washed room is, for most of us, an ideal escape.

Throughout history, many fell sway to the sun's beguiling charm. Louis XIV, the Sun King, not only built his elaborate orangerie but also designed his gardens so that they followed the sun's path. Inside, he decorated the Versailles palace with images and attributes, such as lyres, laurels and tripods, that were associated with Apollo, the Greek god of the sun. *continued on page 22*

## Sun-inspired pieces

Like France's famous king, we too look to sun-inspired decor pieces when designing modern conservatories. Whether you are decorating a large sunroom or a sun porch, strive to create a space that evokes warmth and tranquility. To achieve an easygoing elegance that reflects summer's soft laid-back mood, aim for a gracious mix of comfort and style.

Inspired by the sun's rays, look to palettes of cheerful yellows, oranges and reds to bring life and energy to the room. The walls can be painted a sunny Provençal yellow or covered with patterned wallpapers, like the French scenic print toile de Jouy.

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For furniture we recommend a touch of formality without the fuss. Rattan furniture covered in crisp and casual linens works well. For a more traditional look yet with an added twist, cover a Louis XIV-inspired sofa with a whimsical fabric, anything from playful ladybugs to cheerful floras. The silhouette is formal, but the covering is fanciful. There is pedigree with personality—the ideal balance for a playful design. Add a few French-iron garden chairs and some Chinese-porcelain garden seats to bring character and style to the room.

## Functional, stylish additions

Forged iron tables with marble tops, or stone bases with glass tops, will strike the right mood for this hybrid indoor-outdoor space. Hand-painted pieces in English or continental styles or porcelain tray tables are functional and stylish additions. A Venetian commode or sideboard is ideal for storing seasonal china and stemware and for serving summer drinks such as mint juleps, mimosas, iced tea and lemonade.

While you may be surrounded by natural beauty, garden-themed art



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or citrus trees, up lighting will cast lovely shadows and bring added dimension to the room. Oriental fish bowl planters, yellow-glazed confit pots and metal jardinières are ideal containers for palms and other ferns. Fill the room with cut flowers—anything from birds of paradise to gladiolus to lilacs—to create flashes of colour.

## A magical oasis

Subtle nuance, a nod to the past and a sprinkling of intrigue will create a sunroom that lures you in and captivates your heart. Bathed in light and living things, this room is unlike any other room in your home. It sparkles in the morning and glows at night.

This magical oasis is ideal for dreaming, reminiscing and contemplating. It surely must have been the inspired setting for writer Henry James when he wrote, "Summer afternoon—summer afternoon; to me those have always been the two most beautiful words in the English language." ■

will add to the visual splendour. Etchings of scenes from the French or British countryside, eglomise-style paintings of palms and flowers, or vintage botanical prints are ideal. Victorian decoupage screens can create a sense of privacy and old-world charm. Mirrored lattice or trumeau mirrors will reflect the gorgeous outdoor views inside. For a dramatic artistic statement, look to marble and bronze statues or freestanding or wall-mounted fountains decorated with playful putties.

Whimsical elements, such as stone and ceramic frogs, turtles and dolphins, can add subtle design layers that will reinforce the room's summertime mood. Fill a Victorian birdcage with plants and candles or position traditional ceramic Chinese Foo dogs at the entranceway to the room.

During the day, lighting is typically not an issue, but it is easy to create a magical mood at night with Moroccan or chinoiserie hurricane hanging lanterns. For a luxurious touch, use elaborate candelabras. For more modest tastes, use iron chandeliers and wall scones decorated with branches and leaves. If the room has large palms



Photographed in the Shaw-Pezzo showroom

Wallace Shaw, ARIDO, IDC, and Nick Pezzo are the principals of Shaw-Pezzo and Associates, resource of exquisitely crafted home furnishings, artwork, lighting, and accessories. Shaw and Pezzo also offer world-class interior design services. [www.shaw-pezzo.com](http://www.shaw-pezzo.com)