



Seascape viewing

Soothing sounds, colorful tanks can offer escape

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Similar to brilliant pieces of stained glass, tropical fish gracefully glide through anemone that sway like wheat on a windswept plain.

This type of setting is hooking more and more people on the desire to install an aquarium — or two — in their homes, so they can view another world that is a microcosm of beautiful, symbiotic relationships under water.

Why a home aquarium?

Dr. Frank Burns, 42, an ophthalmologist, fell in love with aquariums when he was 10 years old. He still enjoys the beauty and tranquility these water-worlds offer so much that he has three saltwater reef tanks in his St. Matthews home.

Two are recessed into walls, and the third and most recent addition is perched on a custom-designed stand and serves as the focal point of a redecorated living room.

He had the first aquarium installed 10 years ago in the family room, then followed that with a 180-gallon aquarium in his home office five years ago. Finally, the aquarium in the newly redecorated contemporary-style living room was installed about six months ago.

It sits on a specially designed stainless-steel stand that ties the living room together with the kitchen and its stainless steel appliances.

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UNDERWATER: Aquariums hook hobbyists, reel in new prominence in home decor

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Each of the 120-gallon aquariums in the family room and living room cost about \$10,000, while the larger aquarium cost \$15,000. About half of the expense on each was for the aquarium and equipment, the rest went for fish and coral.

Among the varieties of fish in his tanks are Sailfish Tangs from the Red Sea, Naso Tangs, Foxface Tangs, Pacific Blue Tangs, Hawkfish and several varieties of Clownfish.

Bringing the idea home from work

Angela Dishion, controller for Woodhaven Country Club, helped to select the location for a saltwater aquarium at the club and also helped pick the fish. That hooked her on the hobby.

In 2004, Dishion paid \$5,000 for a 180-gallon freshwater tank, fish and decorations from Sandy's Pet Shop on Hess Lane, and she incorporated the tank into a bookshelf unit when building a new house in Fern Creek.

The aquarium contains her quartz rock collection, live plants, driftwood, a miniature shipwreck scene and a wide variety of fish, including Clown Loaches, Tiger Barbs, Angelfish, Rainbow Fish and Silver Dollars.

"The aquarium is beautiful. The water from the filter sounds like a waterfall," she said. The tank is in Dishion's living room, but she can hear the soothing sounds in the great room, too. "Someday I'll try a saltwater tank," she said.

Dishion, who maintains her freshwater aquarium, estimates she spends \$250 to \$300 a year for test strips, replacement fish, food, charcoal for the filters and decorations.

Why they are popular

Homeowners buy aquariums to develop a hobby, to interact with fish, to watch the interaction between fish, anemone and microorganisms, and to hear the soothing, tranquil sounds associated with the aquarium, said Tim Armstrong, who owns Aquatic Designs, an aquarium consulting, installation and maintenance company.



\$4,000 on this project.

"Like most people," Mathison said, he started the hobby with a freshwater tank, four years ago, but he became bored with that 46-gallon tank. Comparing freshwater to saltwater, Mathison said, "there is no comparison. Everything is alive — the rock, the coral, the shrimp and the fish. The view is something you wouldn't normally see unless you scuba dive."

After scuba diving, Burns began changing from freshwater to saltwater for his aquariums.

Mike Greer, owner of Kentuckiana Aquarium Service LLC, installed Burns' aquariums and does

in the aquarium, the more an owner can enjoy the aquarium," Davidson said.

'Fishing for' varieties

Balanced, self-sufficient ecosystems are the trend. Small hardy starter fish such as Livebearer Fish and bacteria cultures can filter the water in the tank naturally.

Seahorses and refugiums are gaining in popularity, according to Todd Shaw, owner of Aquatica Reef Supply. Refugiums are

small tanks beside or below the main tank that contain small organisms such as arthropods and small plants. Nutrients are extracted and filtered out of the refugium then transferred



ments, a floor or more below large tanks.

Shaw is incorporating a 300-gallon L-shaped fish tank in a new home in the Highlands.

The aquarium will be suspended from the ceiling and serve as a triple room divider and defining design element in the home.

Tips for success

Aquarium hobbyists can expect to spend about an hour a month on maintenance, once they are accustomed to it. At first, it will take longer, according to Armstrong. "If you let it go, it'll turn into an eyesore."

Armstrong recommends that homeowners start with a 55-gallon freshwater tank and get advice from knowledgeable people. "Larger tanks do better than smaller ones," he said. The more volume, the less likely fish will be affected if a problem occurs."

Dr. Frank Burns, 42, finds his 180-gallon aquarium is a soothing addition to his home office. His third saltwater aquarium, shown on the opposite page, rests on a custom-designed stainless-steel stand that serves to tie the contemporary-style living room into the kitchen, which has stainless-steel appliances.

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"Aquariums help relieve anxiety. That's why you see them in doctor's offices," he said.

An increase nationally in the number of large public aquariums is one reason for increased interest in aquariums at home, said Bruce Davidson, vice president of Sandy's Pet Shop, which specializes in aquariums, fish and supplies. Vacationers see the marine environments and come home, ready to try their hand at the hobby.

Homeowners also learn about aquariums during home shows and come into Sandy's ready to dive into installing one.

Saltwater or fresh?

Homeowner Jamie Mathison purchased a 120-gallon acrylic saltwater tank with live reef from Aquatica Reef Supply, a saltwater aquarium supply shop. Several types of coral, invertebrates and 13 fish, including Blue Cronis, Cardinals and Long-nosed Hawkfish, share the aquatic space. He spent

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Mike Greer, owner of Kentuckiana Aquarium Service LLC, installed Burns' aquariums and does maintenance work on the tanks monthly, changing the water every other visit. Burns checks the chemicals weekly, uses a magnetic scraper to clean algae off the glass and feeds the fish daily.

Trends in aquariums

Greer usually steers hobbyists away from acrylic tanks because the material scratches and can discolor. For larger tanks, however, acrylic is more cost effective, he said.

Saltwater tanks with living reef have become more popular in the past decade, according to Armstrong and Greer. Improvements in filtration systems and lighting advances for saltwater environments in the past 15 years have driven the trend, Greer said.

Automated feeders and lighting help homeowners spend less time maintaining the tank. "The more automation is incorporated



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Zooanthid coral, which looks similar to dandelion, also is popular. "Some people treat them like a collection, collecting different colors," Shaw said. But be warned: whatever is trendy at the time garners the highest price.

Part of the home decor

Homeowners can use aquariums as room dividers but most often enjoy them in a family or living room. Aquariums can be built into walls or curved into corners. And it is possible to hide filtration systems by putting them in a closet or a basement.

Among the more unusual installations Greer has done is a 260-gallon tank used as a dividing wall between an entertainment room and an outdoor swimming pool. He also has installed filtration systems in base-

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When hobbyists start with a saltwater living reef system without any experience, they tend to drop out of the hobby because saltwater aquariums are more challenging and difficult to maintain.

However, for those who stick with it, an aquarium can offer hours of enjoyment.

A family interest

Burns' 11-year-old son is looking forward to learning how to take care of the fish, and his 15-year-old daughter also enjoys the tanks. "My wife thinks they're too much trouble sometimes, but she loves to look at the fish and coral."

Meanwhile, Burns said, he particularly enjoys the hobby when the aquarium lights come on at night, the fish come out and the coral opens up.

"It's beautiful."