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Designers Amy Lau and Wayne Nathan with a Gustavian-style bookcase by Charles Pollock Reproductions from William Switzer. See Resources.

Ten Terrific Bookcases

Wayne Nathan and Amy Lau make the case for stylish shelving units whose beauty and practicality turn organizing into a pleasure

Text by Mitchell Owens • Photography by Joshua McHugh

Produced by Alison Hall

Whether your reading material is organized by jacket color or Dewey decimals, remember to think before you shelve.

Deep compartments and lofty proportions are crucial, says interior designer Amy Lau, though she is no fan of adjustable shelves ("I can't stand to see the holes for the supports"). And shelves set heiter-skelter to accommodate book heights can look untidy.

Another element to consider is weight, both visual and actual. A fully loaded bookcase sometimes looks monolithic—and shelves can bow

if not thick enough. Openwork sides and backs, Lau points out, "add a sense of lightness to a room."

Most important, according to interior decorator Wayne Nathan, "figure out what will go in the bookcase before you decide on the style." If you are mixing objects and photos with books in artful stacks rather than assembling a straightforward library, a more flexible shelving design or etagere is better. "Different approaches demand different solutions," Nathan says.



1 LARGE STELLA SHELF BY OLY

"This piece reminds me so much of 1940s France," says Wayne Nathan, admiring its elegant proportions and antique finish. "I love the inset brown shelves and the golden metal frame. For the price and style, this one really is the best to me. It looks as if it is much more expensive than it actually is." Height: 84"; width: 40"; depth: 13"; material: antiqued-gold-metal frame (also available in smaller size and antiqued silver) with mahogany shelves; delivery: immediate; price: \$2,475



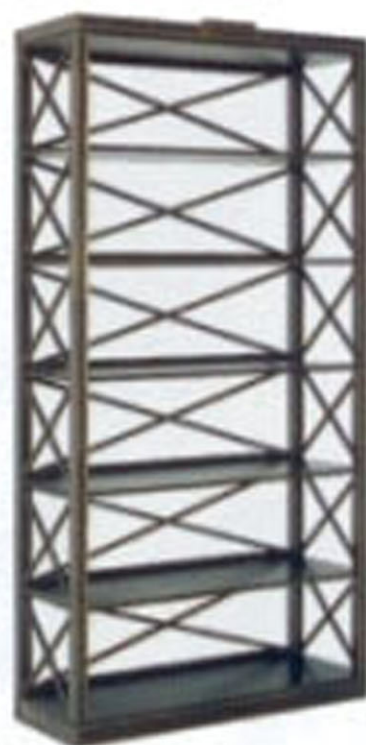
2 PERFORATED STEEL BOOKCASE BY JASON COLLECTION FROM INTÉRIEURS

"The style is wonderful, and they managed to get that gray metal finish just right," Amy Lau enthuses about this candidate, whose perforations recall the work of French architect Jean Prouvé. "It has light, pattern, and interest, and the design has real versatility—mix it with modern furniture or antiques. Plus it's incredibly sturdy." Height: 78"; width: 30"; depth: 14"; material: natural steel in matte finish; delivery: immediate to 10 weeks; price: \$2,450



3 CANE ÉTAGÈRE BY BIELECKY BROTHERS

"Very Waspy—which means it's alien to me," Nathan jokes. "Seriously, it is an American classic, very 1960s, 1970s. The wrapped corners are meticulously done." Nathan suggests placing a plasma-screen TV or perhaps a small bar on the center shelf. Height: 90"; width: 48"; depth: 16"; material: hand-wrapped cane on solid-wood frame in natural with clear-lacquer finish, plastic laminate shelf insets, and optional brass sabots (other sizes, finishes, and inset materials available); delivery: 12 weeks; price: \$9,750



4 GUSTAVIAN SHELIVING UNIT BY CHARLES POLLOCK REPRODUCTIONS FROM WILLIAM SWITZER

"The X motif is not only handsome, it keeps the books from sliding off," Lau explains. "The gold has a nice tone—it's a little patinated. It reminds me of an antique bookcase you might find in a Paris apartment with great moldings." Height: 89.5"; width: 45"; depth: 17"; material: solid maple in Coromandel crackle finish with gold accents (custom sizes and other finishes available); delivery: 12–16 weeks; price: \$13,853



5 BOOKSHELF BY HARRIS RUBIN FROM DENNIS MILLER ASSOC.

"Tony Duquette meets Chinese Chippendale!" Nathan declares. "I love the color of this bookcase, and the metal strips give it some flash. The visible hardware is a nice touch too. But it's not for a typical library. It is really designed more to be a dramatic collage of stacked books, vases, and objects." Height: 88"; width: 36"; depth: 14"; material: lacquered wood and steel in gunmetal finish (custom sizes, colors, and other finishes available); delivery: 14–16 weeks; price: \$7,000



6 VINTAGE BOOKSHELF BY ROOM

"It's surprising," Lau reports. "The more you look at it, the more you notice the curved reveals and other softening details." The base reminds the designer of a Chinese chest. "The width is generous, and the thick proportions are comforting; it's so closed-up and solid looking. And the price is fantastic—this is a very good deal." Height: 79"; width: 62"; depth: 16"; material: mahogany in #705 finish (custom sizes, materials, and finishes available); delivery: 10 weeks; price: \$4,820



7 TUVAN BOOKCASE BY ALL IN WOOD FROM WHITE ON WHITE

"This is terrific for a beach house or a child's room," Nathan comments. "It's sweet." He advises painting the bead-board interior for contrast and using it in a playroom for toys and books, in a bathroom for towels, or in a pantry. Nathan also points out the bookcase's practical adjustable shelves. Height: 79"; width: 37.5"; depth: 13.5"; material: wood in dove-white finish (custom colors and finishes available); delivery: 10–12 weeks; price: \$2,550



8 SUFFOLK SHELF HI BY DESIRON

"Definitely more of an étagère," Lau states. "You would have to place books in stacks or use bookends to hold the volumes in place." She admires the combination of industrial metal with hefty slabs of wood and imagines its narrow profile and open design would work well in a small apartment or as a room divider. Height: 84"; width: 36"; depth: 14"; material: natural walnut and stainless steel (other sizes and finishes available); delivery: 8–10 weeks; price: \$2,760



9 ÉTAGÈRE BY SWAIM FROM ROBERT ALLEN/BEACON HILL

"The shelves are so overscale that this is also an étagère," Nathan says. "It would make a great statement with a huge round platter displayed on the center shelf, books piled below, and decorative objects arranged above." He adds that he'd like to pit its tailored simplicity against a sumptuously upholstered wall. Height: 84"; width: 42"; depth: 17"; material: leather-covered wood with nail-head trim and glass-top shelves (other sizes, colors, and trims available); delivery: 8–16 weeks; price: \$6,940



10 EXPEDIT BY IKEA

"How can anybody make anything for this price?" Lau wonders. "It inspires a lot of creativity. You could buy a couple of these pieces to use as a room divider or line several along one wall of an office or dorm room." The size is "terrific," she says, and the 16 compartments "can hold just about anything"—from books and art objects to sweaters and handbags. Height: 58.5"; width: 58.5"; depth: 15.5"; material: particleboard and melamine foil (other sizes and colors available); delivery: immediate to 3 weeks; price: \$149