



At Home: TV trend is to screen the screen

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Something's wrong with this picture: In the 1960s, a television was the coolest thing a living room could have, better than an original Warhol. In the 1970s, color television was hotter than denim. By the 1980s - the decade quantity trumped substance - having several, prominently displayed televisions equaled status. TV sets invaded kitchens, bedrooms, bathrooms and car headrests. In the '90s, televisions grew large enough to cover a wall. After 2000, screens shrank to Calista Flockhart-thin, and had so much definition you could see the nose hairs on a ladybug.

But no matter how televisions changed over the decades, this didn't: People shamelessly flaunted them. Now that's changing. Recently, an entire industry emerged to make televisions vanish appearing only when needed, like a well-trained butler.

This conspiracy to cover up has ushered in a new way to spend money to hide money you've spent. I'm no sociologist, but a trajectory of buy, buy better, buy bigger, now hide it can only mean one thing: As a culture, we're embarrassed and should be.

Frankly, I'm thankful we're over our need to show off our big screens. TV sets are ugly and not just when Barney or Camilla Parker-Bowles is on. Turned off, they look like scary slabs of one-way glass. As a girl, I believed that if I could see the people inside the television, they could see me, even when the set was off. I'm still not sure that isn't the case, though now I don't think it's the actors who can see me but the FBI and my mother.

Though the trend is toward screening the screen, not everyone agrees on the best way. The other day, my friend found a strange man in her bedroom showing her husband this screen-masking contraption, a framed painting you hang over your plasma. "You push

this button here," the salesman demonstrated, "and the screen comes down over the television. Et voila! Van Gogh!" Her gadget-loving husband was ecstatic. My art snob friend was horrified.

While she looked for a motion sickness bag, her husband looked for the checkbook. They needed to talk.

If you'd like to keep up with the times and fashionably hide your tube, here are some options:

- Storing it in an armoire is a lovely option, if you have space. If the armoire is old, be sure interior shelves will support the television. You may need to add reinforcement. Be prepared to cut a hole in back for cords.
- Build in custom cabinets for the television. If you can sink the television into the wall or cabinet, you've won half the aesthetic battle - hiding the sides (not an issue for plasmas). When designing a built-in, consider putting the television on a shelf that can pull out and swivel. Add doors to cover the screen when it's tucked away. Build it with access in mind for the day the repairman needs to come.
- Have a trunk show. A clever carpenter can build the television into a trunk, so it rises out with the touch of a remote. Great for the foot of the bed.
- Install shutters over the face of the television, but only if the unit sits flush on an exterior wall. (On an interior wall, this seems hokey.) When the television is on, fold open the shutters as if on a window.
- Mirror image. Some sets, including one made by Philips, turn into framed mirrors when off. Check that the reflective glass doesn't impair TV quality.
- Hang a tapestry on a rod in front of the set if the screen is flush with the wall. Have the rod swivel open, or add a cord to pull the tapestry up like a roman shade.
- Put a decorative folding screen in front of the television if it sits in a corner. Install the screen or pair of screens on hinges attached to the wall. For viewing, fold these open.
- Disguise it as a masterpiece. Several companies offer framed artwork to cover your screen. **VisionArt** paintings allow the canvas to roll up inside the top of the frame. When the canvas is up, you watch television through the frame. (Costs range from \$3,500 to \$18,000.) TV CoverUp systems lift the painting on hinges so it projects 90 degrees from the wall. (Costs range from \$300 for a manual lift to \$2,600 for an automatic lift.) You can select art from the company's collection or provide your own. Tip: Don't pick a painting everyone knows.
- Paint your own cover-up. Ultimately, that's what my friend did. On a large stretched canvas, she painted an abstract picture using colors in her room. To keep it lightweight,

she didn't add a frame. When not watching the television, she props the canvas on the mantel, over the television.

Cost: \$100, including paint and canvas. "I like that it's low-tech," she said. "It's one less thing that can break."

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