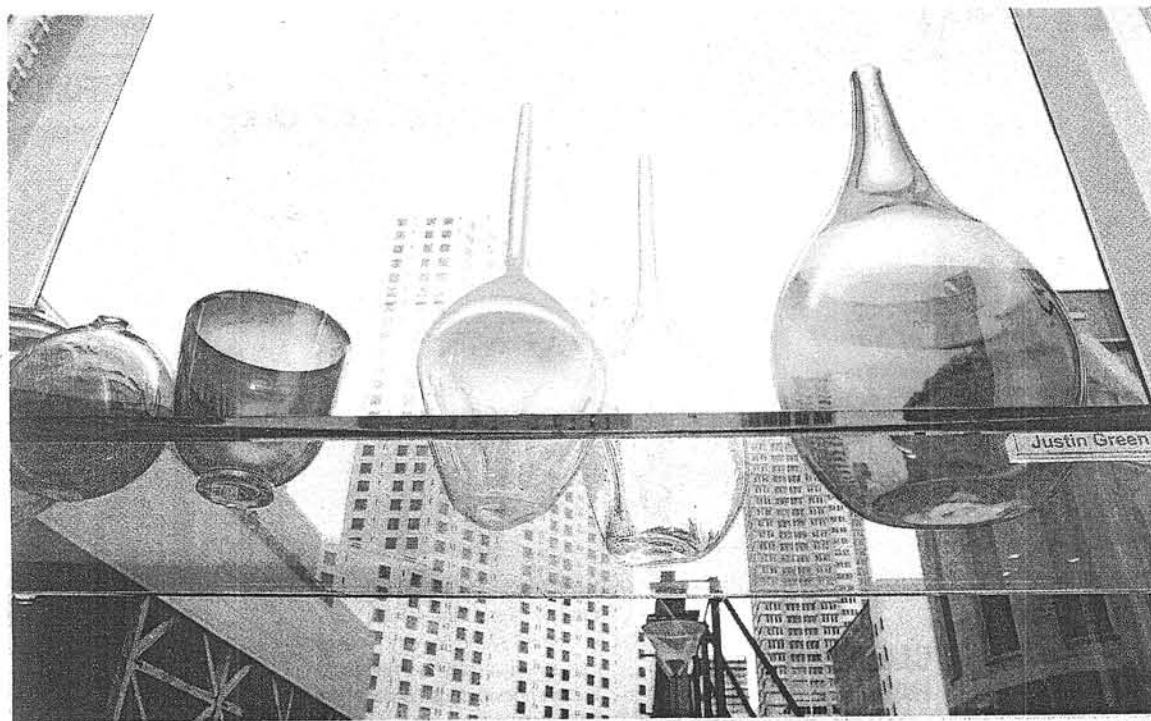


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HOME & Garden



At the Museum of Craft and Folk Art gift shop glassware sits shelved with nary a care, thanks to small pieces of dental wax affixed to the bottoms.

Dangerous decor

How to keep your treasures from breaking — and injuring someone in the process

By Jerome Cagnon
SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

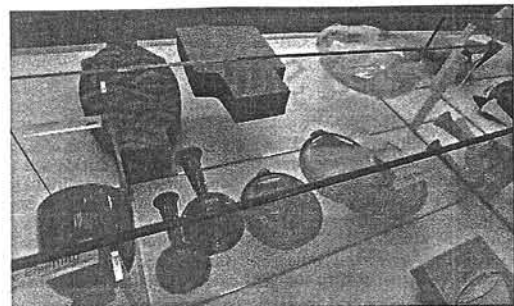
A recent issue of a country-oriented shelter magazine pictures a cozy bedroom in a Texas cottage with a narrow ledge above the headboard supporting a row of antique-framed photographs. Charming, for sure. But a similar treatment in the earthquake-prone Bay Area could be hazardous, say safety experts.

"It's best not to hang anything heavy over your bed that can hit you on the head if it falls," says Doug Sandy, an emergency planner with San Francisco's Office of Emergency Services and Homeland Security. "Stay away from things with sharp edges like floor lamps or sconces, glass-encased pictures and hanging plants."

After the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake, many homeowners undertook major seismic upgrades as well as safety precautions.



Dean Reese inspects security straps that hold furniture to the wall in the home of Mary Jo Townzian, who hired his company, QuakeHold, to make her Campbell home quake-safe.



At the Museum of Craft and Folk Art, dental wax is the safeguard of choice for glassware, preferred to what art supply stores stock.

Staying safe doesn't mean blank walls

ACCESSORIES
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such as strapping down water heaters. Some people haven't paid much attention to how their living spaces are outfitted, however, and that can be a costly — and dangerous — mistake.

"In newer homes, the major dollar loss from most earthquakes is from loss of contents, not from structural damage," Sandy says. "If you pay attention to the non-structural components, you can cut down significantly on loss and protect yourself from injury." Sandy recommends first checking bedrooms for hazardous "what-if" scenarios.

Fortunately, safety-conscious doesn't mean living with blank walls. There are many ways to add interest over the head of your bed, an area that designer Annie Bowman of Sunrise Home in San Rafael refers to as "a personal statement spot."

"Wreaths are popular and so are stretched fabric panels," Bowman says. "You can also use unframed paintings and posters, or a beautiful quilt or tapestry. To suggest serenity in a bedroom, we've used painted Styrofoam letters in different styles and sizes to spell out words like 'sleep' and 'peace,' but you could also spell out children's names."

Stuffed animals on a shelf above a child's bed aren't likely to be a problem, but the shelf itself could cause injury. Ditto a mobile over a crib. Safer decorating choices include a whimsical wall-paper border, a hand-painted scene or mural, or colorful decals on the walls. Keep modular storage units in children's rooms low so they won't topple during roughhousing or an earthquake.

Going nowhere: A little wax can safeguard an heirloom against tremors.



CHRISTINA KOCI HERNANDEZ/The Chronicle

and make sure bunk beds are firmly anchored together.

Minimizing risk
Over-sized framed mirrors, leaning casually against walls, are a trendy way to open up small spaces and add sparkle. You see them in decorator showcase houses and in the pages of glossy design magazines. But, unsecured, they pose a danger.

"You want to make sure that heavy objects such as mirrors and pictures are hung with closed hooks on hardware that's mounted into a wall stud," Sandy says. "Broken glass on the floor can be a hazard and can take valuable time away from dealing with other issues that may come up during an emergency situation." Sandy adds that undraped windows can also be a problem during a natural disaster.

"Flying glass from broken windows can be mitigated by installing a Mylar type of film," he says, referring to the sheeting used primarily to cut down on UV light damage.

In a home office, you can minimize loss by securing computers and printers with flexible nylon straps and buckles (available at home improvement stores); use adhesive strips for lighter-weight items such as scanners.

One advantage of built-in cabinetry, besides providing an uncluttered look, is that cabinet doors can help keep equipment contained during a tremor — as long as doors are closed, that is. An office armoire, with doors and latches, would serve the same purpose. Make sure the armoire is strapped with flexible-mount fasteners that "allow furniture independent movement from the wall, reducing strain on studs," advises

a 31-page brochure, "Putting Down Roots in Earthquake Country." The pamphlet is free from the Office of Emergency Services and Homeland Security (www.sfgov.org/oes; (415) 558-2700).

Top-heavy furniture such as tall bookcases and entertainment centers need to be secured with flexible-mount fasteners, too, because, "even if they don't fall on someone, they can block your exit," Sandy says.

Check wood-burning stoves and fireplace surrounds, and consider strapping your piano, if you have one, as the force of an earthquake has been known to send a piano flying from one end of the room to the other.



Susanne Rundberg uses QuakeHold putty to keep her porcelain figurines safe at her San Francisco condo.

Heavy lighting fixtures should be professionally installed.

Open shelving, popular in kitchens today, "can pose a serious threat to the occupants of the home," says Cindy Bayon, a certified kitchen and bath designer for Muratore Corp., a contractor specializing in high-end residential remodeling. For display purposes — as well as variety — she sometimes uses cabinetry with divided tempered glass doors. Other options are doors with metal grills, wire mesh, wooden lattice and plastic or resin panels. Interior or exterior-mounted door latches designed for child-proofing or earthquake safety (available in hardware stores) are especially recommended for overhead cabinets and wherever glassware and china is stored.

Personal safety involves eliminating fall hazards as well as fire hazards," says Sandy, who recommends that refrigerators and microwaves be secured to wall studs using earthquake appliance straps, and that flexible, stainless steel gas connectors be installed on gas appliances (a local code requirement). Decor such as herbal wreaths and dried flower arrangements should be exchanged for noncombustible items such as tiles, vintage copper pots or stainless-steel utensils.

Securing art and accessories
To keep collectibles, lamps and other loose objects from becoming dangerous projectiles, experts advise securing them with removable earthquake putty, museum wax or quake gel. Kathleen Han-



Brian Lowe/The Chronicle

Earthquake preparedness specialist Brian Lowe

demonstrates how to properly strap down a 19th-century antique clock for the Rundbergs.

manager of the store in the Museum of Craft and Folk Art in San Francisco, swears by museum wax (available at art supply stores) and dental wax (available through dental supply companies) as fasteners for stabilizing art objects on display in a home or museum.

"We find dental wax is ideal for certain pieces because it preserves

epoxy to prevent possible tipping."

Large palm and ficus trees, perennial favorites for their height and luxuriant foliage, should be planted "in appropriately sized, heavy pots that won't fall over," says Davis Dalbok, owner of Living Green, located in the San Francisco Design Center. "Tall, cylindrical pots aren't as tip-resistant as those with wide bases. ..."

"If you're staging a room, or just don't want to plant directly into a ceramic pot, we recommend packing the area around the inner, plastic container with a foam collar. That will help to keep the plant stable and can absorb some of the shock in case of an earthquake," he says.

As a string of recent natural disasters from the Southern Asian tsunami to Hurricane Katrina tragically underscores, life offers few guarantees. And while there's probably no such thing as a completely disaster-free zone, minimizing your risk may be the most important home-improvement project you'll attempt this year — or ever.

For more information, visit www.earthquake.org; and www.earthquake.org/gov/hazards/prepare.html.

"For very fragile pieces in an exhibit, we'll sometimes use an acrylic box over the object, and for extra protection, you can screw the box into the pedestal," she says.

Kerri Stephens, co-owner of Verush, a trendy South of Market art gallery and wine bar that features heavy bronze plaques and sculptures, says unsecured artwork on pedestals is particularly vulnerable during a quake.

"If you look on the underside of bronze or metal sculptures, you'll usually find fittings that are welded in for bolts so you can attach your sculpture directly into the top of the pedestal," she says. "The bottom of the pedestal can also be screwed to the floor or affixed with

E-mail comments to home@sfchronicle.com.

A business built on shaky ground

In 1991, an entrepreneurial woman named Dean Reese had her collection of Swarovski crystal animals broken by a group of rambunctious kids. Upon these shards was a company born.

Reese began a search for a way to protect breakables, which led to QuakeHold and its first product putty. The company is now the largest manufacturer of earthquake safety fasteners — from putty to straps — in the United States and Japan.

Brian Lowe, 48, marketing director, is the firm's interior mitigation specialist, which means minimizing and preventing injury and loss inside the home. He says the 100th anniversary of the 1906 fire and earthquake is the perfect time to get the message out on just how easy it is to mitigate risk.

"Any run-of-the-mill healthy



Dean Reese, president of QuakeHold, checks the stability of a large piece of art in Mary Jo Townzian's house.

person can do it — it's just peeling and pressing straps into place," says Lowe, who co-authored the "What Should I Do?"

section in the "Putting Down Roots in Earthquake Country" booklet.

— Bernadette Fay