

Find a piece of green and make it your secret garden. Nothing is quite as soulful as being alone with nature. Take along fruit to snack on, a rush mat to relax on, soft cotton to wrap up in if it gets too chilly. *Clockwise from left:* African table, Royal Hut. Antique linen pillow (in front), \$475, and vetiver-scented pillow, \$110, John Robshaw Textiles. Mat, \$95, Lisbeth & Co. Banana-leaf tray, \$45, Extraordinary. Indian cotton sheet, \$248 for a queen-size set, John Robshaw Textiles. Indian cotton quilt, \$525, ABC Carpet & Home. Journal, \$45, Il Papiro. Pen, \$23, Papivore. Handmade mug, \$45, Stella.

# Shhhhh...

Wouldn't it be lovely to have a place with no phone, no pressure, no people? No problem. Simply stake out a corner of your home or garden, and make it a zone of your own.

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THE UNEXAMINED LIFE MAY NOT BE worth living, but who, outside of an ashram or a cloister, has the time—and space—for contemplation? You do, despite daily e-mail invasions and phone-message

pileups, despite kids under 2 or loquacious friends or an in-your-face boss or a husband who wants to see you once in a while.

First point: You don't need an entire room of your own, Virginia Woolf-style; ▶



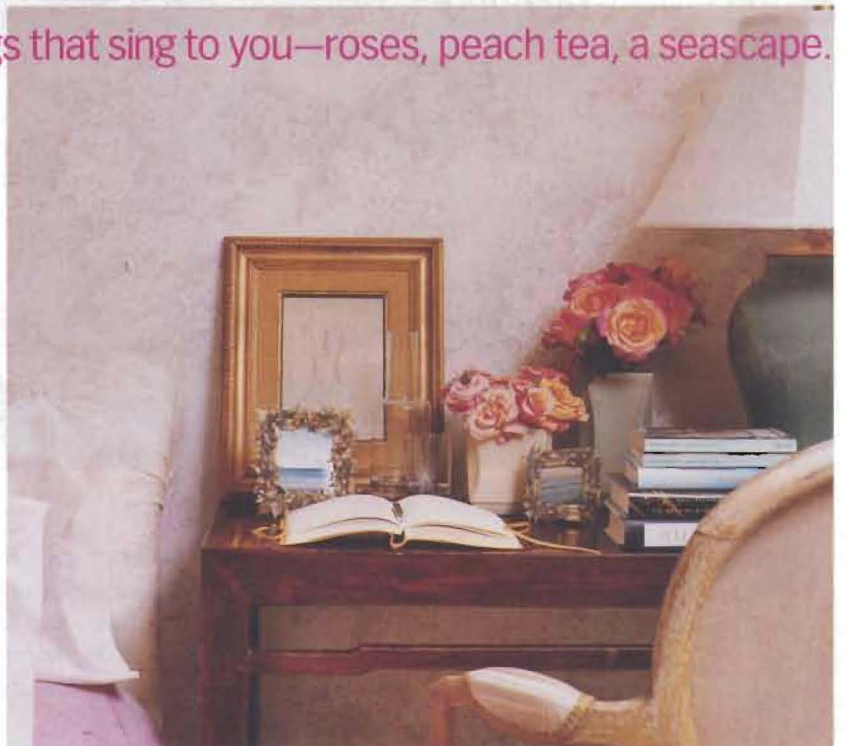
a sanctuary can be found anywhere—in a corner, on a bed, even outdoors. Carve out a space with a screen or curtain. Consider an unused corner of your kitchen or a small nook in the bedroom. It need only be private, still, and filled with things (textures, scents, objects) that quiet and delight your mind. Second point: You are not simply posting a DO NOT DISTURB sign for other people when you create such a place. You're also giving *yourself* a reminder that you need a break from the frantic, noisy, overpopulated world. And permission to write, read, rest, draw, paint, do yoga, listen to music, sit and stare—anything that evokes the deepest, most peaceful part of you.

An absence of clutter, as well as the presence of beauty, is helpful in easing the transition from stressed-out to serene. So start by storing or giving away anything in your chosen area that strikes you as extraneous or simply not right. Then comes the fun part: picking delicious stuff to surround you. Resist getting hung up on practicality or someone else's idea of good taste. One woman dresses her bed in a champagne satin comforter she used to think was "too silly." Another stacks up books from childhood: "They make me feel cozy." Velvet slippers, stuffed animals, a million pillows—the sky's the limit. ▶

## Harmony is key. Pick things that sing to you—roses, peach tea, a seascape.

*Above:* Curvy furniture and flowery fabrics make this nook by the window an enviable spot. Warm up with peach tea and an appliquéd quilt; put on a CD and really listen, instead of letting it become background noise. *On chaise:* Large paisley pillow (right front), \$175, Stella. Hand-crocheted giraffe, \$48, Bu and the Duck. Journal, \$45, Il Papiro. Flowered quilt, \$525, ABC Carpet & Home. *On chair:* Oak tray, \$100, Calvin Klein Home. Ceramic teapot, \$150, and teacup with saucer, \$40, Nicole Farhi. Silk-covered rice paper blank book, \$6, Leekan Designs. Green glass vase, \$30, ABC Carpet & Home.

*Right:* Think of this writing table not as a desk but as an extension of your bed (convenient if the urge to nap strikes). For inspiration try framed pictures of beloved places—seascapes are especially evocative. *From left:* Egyptian cotton pillowcases, \$113 each, Ralph Lauren Home. Silk blanket, \$350, Nicole Farhi. Antique Asian desk, Royal Hut. Metal frames, \$90 each, Distant Origin. Carafe, \$42, and glass, \$26, Nicole Farhi. Leather-bound journal, \$60, Il Papiro. Ceramic small vase, \$85, and medium vase, \$100, Gordon Foster. Ginger-jar lamp, \$900, Ralph Lauren Home.



Peace is a **state of mind**, but it can also be a secluded garden, a room with a view, a fantasy bed you share with no one.



Gauzy sheers, a shearling throw, and lots of big, richly dressed pillows turn a humble box spring into a fantasy bed built for one. A tray is handy to write on, to stave off clutter, to make life safe for breakable objects. *From far left:* Alabaster bowl, \$250, Jacques Carcanagues. Slippers, \$150, C&C for Stella. Alabaster Buddha, Jacques Carcanagues. *On bed:* Silk pillow (in front), \$430, Royal Hut. Two velvet Fortuny pillows, \$375 each, Distant Origin. Shearling throw, Nicole Farhi. Rattan tray, \$275, Gordon Foster. *On tray:* Glass pitcher, \$97, and glass, \$27, Distant Origin. Blue pottery bowl, \$65, Stella. Yellow blank book, \$28, Papivore. Glass bowl (with roses), \$95, Nicole Farhi. *For details see Shop Guide.*

You do need something cushy to sink into: an easy chair or chaise. Choose soothing colors. Neutrals, yes, but mauve and blue are peaceful, too. A structure within a room lets you shut out the outside world. Sheers or Indian fabric draped over a four-poster or a mosquito net hung from the ceiling can lend the right cocoon effect. Nature feeds the soul—flowers, a favorite river

stone, a bird's nest. Spoil yourself with sensuous little things: a perfect celadon bowl, a print you love, an alabaster Buddha. Be inspired by a book on Japanese gardens or photographs by Cartier-Bresson. A warm throw or an enveloping quilt is a must.

A few last reminders: Turn off the computer. Unplug the phone. Let down your hair, put up your feet. You're in good company. ●