



Rosanna Bossom's octagonal storage ottoman © Astrid Templier

Luke Edward Hall APRIL 21 2023

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Maybe it's just me, but ottomans seem to be everywhere at the moment, often used as coffee tables. Where can you source the best ones?

When we first moved to the country back in 2019, there were many completely new experiences that I was excited about embarking upon: growing flowers and vegetables, early morning walks in the fields . . . And yet, I was particularly excited about commissioning an ottoman. My first ottoman! Having only lived with hard, pointy coffee tables, I really couldn't wait to introduce one to our new country sitting room.

An ottoman can be the heart of a sitting or drawing room, with an audience of sofas and chairs placed around it. We use ours in a similar way to how we use our mantelpieces: as a vehicle for knick-knacks. These I am constantly rearranging. There are always towering piles of books both old and new, plus candlesticks and a vase or jug of flowers. There is a rotating cast of assorted oddities: a Murano glass dish filled with Murano glass sweets, say, or whatever new thing I've picked up from the junk shop.

I take pleasure in putting objects together, from contrasting colours and shapes, but I don't arrange and rearrange solely for aesthetic reasons. The books get pulled out and read and the flowers get admired constantly, for they are floating in the centre of our sitting room, not stuffed away on some corner table. When we have guests over, more often than not they'll make a beeline for the ottoman and stick their nose in a new addition (book or flower or both).

If we're hosting drinks or a dinner, the ottoman is where we lay down trays laden with champagne coupes and devilled eggs. Over the past few years, ours has seen its fair share of weekend guests and parties, of spilled drinks and dripping candle wax. I love the sight of friends and neighbours piling into our tiny cottage, and at the end of a night, I can guarantee we'll all be gathered around the ottoman, chatting through the admittedly very tiny gaps between books and blooms.



Max Rollitt's faux bamboo model © Dave Gibbons

While there is something very cosy about an ottoman, it is a practical piece of furniture too. It is true that there only ever seems to be a slither of free space atop ours, but naturally a pile of books can be cleared, and feet can be rested. Some ottomans include storage space, and who doesn't need more storage space?

So, where to look for one? We had ours made by a local upholsterer because I wanted a particular size for our room — it needed to be quite narrow. We based the shape on an old version, and had it upholstered in navy blue linen and finished off with a long and luxurious emerald-green bullion fringe. I took a drawing to an embroidery company and had the top panel embroidered with wonky golden arrows, although unfortunately nobody ever seems to notice these (because books).

There are many options, and I'm quite sure that there is an ottoman for everyone. [Max Rollitt's bamboo ottoman](#) is a dazzling number. In my book one can never have enough faux bamboo around and this piece, with its painted legs, is full of charm. Fabric and dimensions can be altered according to requirements.



A late 19th or early 20th-century ottoman available at Sibyl Colefax and John Fowler

It is worth keeping in mind that ottomans don't have to be rectangular or square. Case in point: a late 19th or early 20th-century ottoman, currently available via [Sibyl Colefax and John Fowler](#). Trefoil in shape and newly reupholstered in a smart olive green velvet, this is a refined and traditional yet playful piece. Or look to the interior designer Rosanna Bosson: her [octagonal storage ottoman](#) is a fun shape but has the added bonus of having a generously sized interior — perfect for storage.

At the other end of the spectrum, style-wise, is [Rose Uniacke's offering](#), of simple box form upon four bun feet. This ottoman is upholstered but comes with a breezy loose cover. It's an extremely elegant thing.

I was no doubt introduced to the world of ottomans when I began working for the architectural and interior designer [Ben Pentreath](#) back in 2013. I recall now a wonderful ottoman Ben had made for a project we worked on in Wiltshire: Ben designed highly colourful needlepoint panels — a riot of geometric shapes — for the top and sides of the ottoman. The result was a completely unique and beautiful piece of furniture.



Rose Uniacke's simple box form upon four bun feet

The options for upholstery are, naturally, endless. Right now I'm very much enjoying the idea of an ottoman upholstered using old tapestry fragments, cut and sewn together to create a patchwork.

Coffee tables have their place, but ottomans tick all my boxes. Plus, crucially, putting your feet up on an ottoman is miles nicer than putting them up on a coffee table.

If you have a question for Luke about design and stylish living, email him at lukeedward.hall@ft.com. Follow him on Instagram [@lukeedwardhall](https://www.instagram.com/lukeedwardhall)

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