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With Bouclé and Sherpa

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# A TACTILE TOUCH

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BOUCLÉ AND SHERPA  
ADD THAT WARM AND  
COZY FEEL TO ANY ROOM

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This space designed  
by Jaqui Seerman  
features a chair made  
of Opuzen bouclé.

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Artfully upholstered pieces with materials like sherpa and bouclé instantly make a space feel warm and cozy. Because these fabrics, in all of their fleecy glory, are meant to be touched. “Bouclé and sherpa add infinite textural interest to anything they are used to upholster,” says Paul de Andrade of Studio Kestrel in New York. “They create a more dynamic feel to furnishings because they evolve under varying lighting conditions,” he says.

Bouclé, the French word for “loop” or “curl” is just that—a fabric named for the rings in its yarn. The nubby, textural material was born in Europe and gained widespread popularity in the U.S. when in 1948 designer Eero Saarinen crafted his iconic Womb Chair in the fabric. The material soon spread to the fashion world via Coco Chanel, who used it to iterate her couture jackets. While traditionally crafted from wool, today bouclé is made from blends of silk and rayon, alpaca, linen, and cotton. “At least two strands of yarn are combined—with the tension on one strand being less than the other to create this looped, pile effect,” says Elisa Baran of Elisa Baran LLC in New York.

Not as tightly woven as bouclé, sherpa fabric is named for the woolly lined clothing worn by the Sherpa people of Nepal. Though it echoes the texture of wool, it’s generally made from fabrics such as cotton, polyester, or a blend of cotton and synthetic fibers. Fluffier and more highly piled than bouclé, the dense faux-sheepskin fabric is used for blankets, boot and coat liners, slippers, and mittens. “It’s bouclé’s more durable cousin, made with the same curved piles of cozy material but typically with a synthetic composite making it very user friendly,” says Los Angeles-based designer Jaqui Seerman.

Both materials are having a moment in the home—popping up in interior spaces across the board from modern to traditional, says Melanie Hay of Melanie Hay Design Studio in Toronto. “Bouclé and sherpa lend a slight retro nod to the past, imparting a textural effect that pairs well with a plethora of finishes,” Hay says. “Both are as at home in a traditional setting paired with wainscoting and traditional prints as they are in a minimalist, pared-back Scandinavian home with rustic wood and concrete.” They are also great alternatives to linens or velvets, Seerman says. “When used in a room with other traditional woven fabrics, bouclé and sherpa add a playful texture and catch the light to add visual diversity,” Seerman says.

## FOCUS ON FURNISHINGS

Since these fabrics evoke an immediate sense of relaxation, utilizing them as seating upholstery is a natural fit. “Sofas and accent chairs are usually the best items to upholster in bouclé or sherpa. This is because when they are pulled taut during the upholstery process, it gives the seating clean, smooth lines but with endless texture,” de Andrade says.

Both materials work well on tightly upholstered and slightly rounded, sculptural furniture. “It gives a ’70s Italian modern feel,” Hay says. The materials can span different furniture styles, complementing a modern piece or updating a classic piece. “A lot of clients are using bouclé to update a classic chair or sofa. You can keep legs exposed or upholster them,” says textile artist Rosemary Hallgarten, whose Norwalk, Conn.-based business specializes in alpaca bouclé rugs and fabrics.

“I would pick one or two key pieces in a room to use bouclé or sherpa, and make sure there are a variety of textures to balance out the impact of this particular fabric,” Hay suggests.

Keep in mind, more durable bouclé fabrics sacrifice sherpa’s softness. “For a family room sofa, you will want a practical wool blend, but for accent pieces and headboards you can use more luxurious textures,” Hallgarten says.

Start small with accents and build from there. “It’s also possible to inject smaller elements of bouclé or sherpa by adding a few toss cushions here and there, or by upholstering a small ottoman or bench,” Hay says.

## CONSIDER THE COLOR

Generally, lighter color bouclés and sherpas are more popular, “because the texture is more noticeable in whites and creams, since it catches the light in a space and evolves throughout the day,” de Andrade says. And because these fabrics are so trendy, natural colors will help them stand the test of time.

However, Hallgarten believes colors work particularly well with bouclé. “You can go brighter with a bouclé because you are getting texture, but you aren’t having to use a lot of patterns.” She sells multicolor confetti and siren-yellow bouclé fabrics, which she says work well on more classic shapes.

Hay suggests using the materials in a soft blush, which looks elegant paired with raw brass fixtures in a library, for example. “But they also look wonderful in camel, cream, or dark charcoal in a more neutral environment,” she says.

## CREATE CONTRAST

Working with such highly textured fabrics, de Andrade believes it’s important

to mix and match materials throughout a room to create interest. “I always try to integrate plenty of clean lines so that you get a modern feel. Things like wood grain, lustrous antique brass, and textured wallpapers all pair really well with bouclé and sherpa.”

Balancing these very tactile textures with smoother surfaces as well as more tightly woven fabrics helps create a layered look. For instance, Hallgarten tends to add fabrics like mohair, velvet, or a soft linen to the mix. She also combines textures on singular pieces, such as “our chalk-stripe alpaca bouclé on the back of a chair and our very practical indoor/outdoor fabric on the inside,” she says.

When working with sherpa and bouclé, Hallgarten wouldn’t use both materials in the same room and often balances the rest of a home with less textured fabrics like linen or cotton.

“You don’t want to overwhelm your home, just like you wouldn’t want to overwhelm your outfit—imagine wearing sherpa and bouclé head to toe,” Baran says. “Incorporating these fabrics creates a cozy and inviting atmosphere that balances nontextural pieces in the home. Once you add them to your space, you’ll see an immediate difference in the way it feels—and it will become the area you go to most often for comfort,” she says. ▣

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Rosemary Hallgarten designed this living room with a cozy-yet-chic bouclé seating area.

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