



A five-metre-long panel of onyx forms a back-lit feature wall that lights up gorgeously in the evenings.

(Opposite) This wall, made of hard-to-find granite, costs on average three times as much as your average granite wall.



With the lights switched on in the evenings, this Bukit Timah home comes alive with detail, exuding a cosy warmth.

PURSUIT

More experimental is Berlin Lee of Formwerkz, who keeps an eye open for new ideas on his travels. His latest creation: lacing an otherwise drab plaster wall with rusted iron filings, giving it an intense, rich hue. It's a trick he picked up from Japan. It also costs almost nothing to buy from steel factories, helping those on a tighter budget fulfill their desire to be different.

RECYCLE AND REGALE

Speaking of recycling, timber lends itself well to re-use. It's not so much for eco-reasons: the distances some of these woods travel to their new homes erases any carbon savings that could be had. Instead, the allure of the idea lies in the stories they tell. After all, which proud home-owner could resist spinning a romantic tale come housewarming time?

Take, for example, one residence in Sentosa Cove, built entirely with wood taken from an old village in Thailand, dismantled and transported wholesale over to Singapore. Or another bungalow at Stevens Road, where the pathway into the house is lined with cracked timber, retired from its original job as sleepers in a pan-Australian railway.

These details, from macro to micro, add quirk to any house; the fact that the effect softens the raw edge of a brand-new property is an added bonus. And with projects like these, repurposed wood is set to finally shed its poor-cousin stigma.

BEJEWEL YOUR HOME

If subtlety isn't your thing, right at the other end of the bling scale is the use of semi-precious stones.

One particular stunner we encountered was a back-lit feature wall, made entirely of onyx. We're not talking about the cloudy yellow stone frequently used in small strips for light panels, but gorgeously striated sheets of jade-hued onyx shot through with bands of cream and gold – all 15 sq m of it.

Fitting four stone panels of such size together so that the striations matched up exactly was enough of a challenge. The real show-stopping effect of this wall, however, comes through in the evening when the




Corten steel, in the lower portion of the patio doors above, is used as an accent material – its deliberately rusted appearance makes for a striking, industrial look.

lights are on. The variable opacity of the onyx allows the light through selectively, and the room becomes a grotto aglow with soft luminescence.

Actual slabs of semi-precious stone such as jasper, agate or tiger's eye, can also be incorporated into interiors, for a truly bejewelled house.

Luxe living can even be accomplished with good old Italian slate tiles, but only when they are etched with gold leaf, usually in elegant baroque patterns.

DOWN TO THE DETAILS

For those whom details matter, the quest for individuality doesn't end with the four walls. Furniture is also going bespoke.

It could be because nothing off the shelf fits the bill. For example, one Korean couple who often play host to lavish parties, needed a dining table that sits 22 in style.

The solution? A 5.2-metre piece of walnut had to be flown (unfortunately in two pieces as no single piece of lumber that long could be found) from California.

Another reason is for bragging rights: another homeowner sent his architect to Java, to select a tree from deep in the rainforest, fell it and cart it all the way back to Singapore where he sliced out a single cross section to make a one-of-a-kind coffee table. The rest of the tree is sitting unused in a warehouse.

The truth is, there are no longer any real restrictions or conventions about what you can use in your house anymore. If it exists, chances are someone somewhere has built a home with it. All it comes down to is your imagination. 