

STARTING OFF THE NEW YEAR with natural materials



EVE recently begun our journey into another Bengali New Year, the year 1412. It was only last week that we ushered in this new beginning with colourful *melas*, and a whole lot of fanfare and merry-making.

As a designer, I believe that the spirit of Boishakh should be reflected in our homes through the décor of our dwelling-places. Hence, this week, we feature a host of natural, indigenous materials, which we can use to furnish our homes with.

Bamboo: Widely available in many tropical countries, this is a popular choice of material for making baskets, fish traps, decorative toys, or even furniture, and more people are waking up to the potential of bamboo furniture in city dwellings.

Cane: Several hundred species of the *Calamidae* family, better known as rattan or cane, are found in the tropical regions of Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, China, as well as Africa and Australia. Cane furniture adds a classy touch to any household.

Rush: Rush is the name for tall, grass-like plants of various families, many of which have hollow stems. The true rushes belong to the family *Juncaceae*, one of the oldest families of plants, closely related to the family *Liliaceae* (Lily family). Most rushes grow in swamps. Among them are the common or bog rush (*Juncus effusus*), widely distributed in swamps and moist places of the Northern Hemisphere, and the slender rush (*J. tenuis*), found in drier surroundings. Rushes are used

for basketwork, mats, chair seats, and other articles.

Willow: Over 300 species of willow are found in temperate regions of the northern hemisphere, thriving in damp conditions. The many characteristics of willow make them suitable for basket making, and seat-weaving.

Now that you know a bit about the materials used, let's take a look at what we can do with these.

Willow stool: A surprisingly strong article of furniture made from a natural material. The method used here for seating the stool can be used to restore any seat that has suitable corners to hold the weave in place. It looks best on plain, country style furniture.

Willow and rush stool: This is a very unusual weave for a stool, and has a satisfying

combination of materials and textures, although the design is very simple. The soft rush makes for a comfortable seat, and the willow gives it added strength.

Elm bark seat: Comfortable and functional, this is a relaxing chair for anyone, and looks great with many kinds of furniture. The chair's seat is covered by bark strips. The weave will run in both directions. The bark seating is relatively cheap and attractive.

Coffee table: You can place a small round cane-woven coffee table in any corner of your family room to make it look more attractive.

Hurdle Screen: No matter how modern we get, we still require a certain amount of privacy, hence screens still enjoy a certain amount of popularity. The cane hurdle screen featured here is perfect for a casual feel. A

temporary and portable unit, it can be moved around to suit your needs.

Sentinel lantern: Inspiration for this lantern came from a Chinese bunko candle holder for the garden or restaurant. The light shines through the zigzag openwork weave of the shade creating a flickering pattern. This lantern is best used outside.

White Willow lantern: Using fine white willow, you can create this delicate bottomless lantern. Place it on a table, over a candle, or highlight in a glass jar. Don't leave the lantern unattended if you are using it with a candle or night light.

Garden and Pottery plants: A simple structure to support clinging plants in the garden. Table plants always make the place attractive. Use dip-dyed or plain colored cane

to make a support framework for clinging plants. Brightly coloured beads cover the two ends of the cane.

For centuries, cane, rush and willow have been harvested and crafted into beautiful and useful objects. With these wonderfully warm and versatile materials, you can make really practical projects for use in your home.

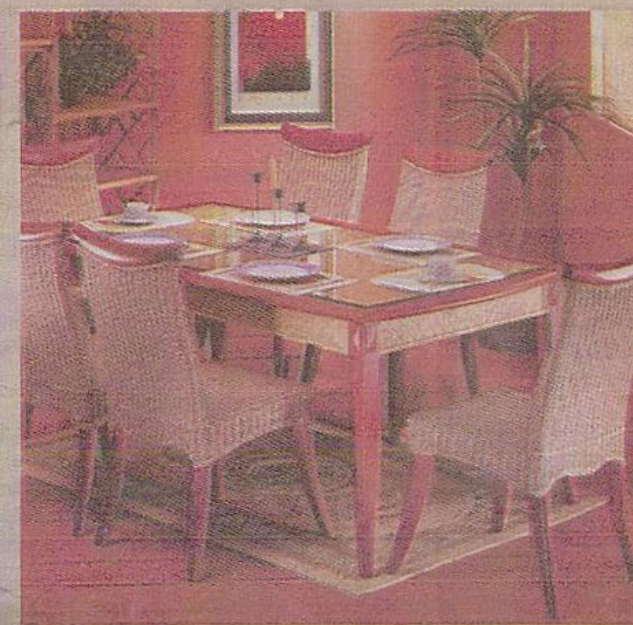
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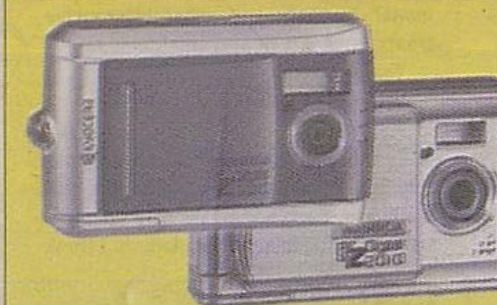
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