TRIA GIOVAN

Art is where you find it: Shadowboxes are wrapped in burlap to show off a collection of white coral.

Q: Our shore house was creamed by Hurricane Sandy. Heartbreaking! We are trying to recoup but have to do it on a shoestring this time. Thrift shop furniture is OK, but we can't afford to replace the good art we lost anytime soon. Any suggestions for art that's cheap and quick?

A: Condolences. A lost art collection is a loss indeed. No doubt you spent long, happy hours searching out pieces that spoke to you personally. And no doubt, you will resume the hunt as soon as you've healed the larger gaps Sandy left in your life.

Meanwhile, take heart: the beauty of any artwork is in the eye of the beholder, not necessarily in his/her pocketbook. There are myriad sources for interesting pieces that will also pamper your battered budget. Check out art student sales at local high schools and colleges. Frame appealing pages from outdated wall calendars.

Frame a beautiful silk scarf or mount a yard of scenic fabric on artists' canvas stretchers. Or -- my personal favorite - commission a five-year-old to paint a story scene. You'll be delighted at how close children's art can come to the aesthetic of masters like Matisse or Picasso. In addition to painted art, create your own wall happenings.

Rescue a small oriental rug from Good Will and hang it like a tapestry. Mount a

decommissioned window, the good old kind with real divided panes, on a wall like sculpture. Ditto for other architectural artifacts.

Inexpensive baskets can be arranged like modern art, interesting in themselves or more interesting as frames for collectibles. On the beach house porch we show here, top New York designer Amanda Nisbet has wrapped a variety of shallow cardboard boxes in burlap and mounted them like shadowboxes to show off a collection of coral. The same idea could work for more ordinary beach shells, driftwood, or whatever you collect.

As Amanda writes in her new book, "Dazzling Design" (Stewart, Tabori and Chang), "Burlap enabled me to put art on the walls without making the porch feel overly civilized or, worse, precious." For a beach house, it makes such a lovely, logical statement that chances are you'll soon forget that this art originated as a budget idea.

Q: Quick! My in-laws are coming for the holidays and the guest bath is a disaster. Its wallpaper is peeling. Can I just paint over it? Or do you have a better idea for a quick pick-up?

A: It's supposed to be bad form to paint over wallpaper, a no-no I personally have ignored a number of times. The only trick is gluing the paper flat against the walls -- no torn parts or curling edges. Be warned: you'll spend about as much time preparing the surface as you will be painting it.

A quicker -- and quirkier -- idea: paper over the paper with sheets of paper. I'm thinking about interesting photos clipped from magazines -- ads involving bathtubs, showers, water ... you get the idea. I've also seen walls papered in old sheet music, New Yorker cartoons and pages cut from outcast books in foreign languages. Your imagination and a staple gun are the only tools you'll need. And I'll bet your in-laws will be dazzled by your ingenuity.

Rose Bennett Gilbert is the coauthor of "Manhattan Style" and six other books on interior design.