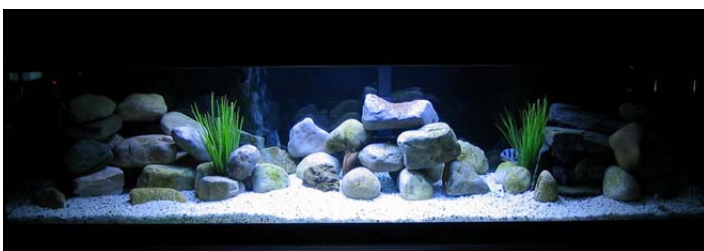


Rockscaping Your Tank

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For many of us when we think tankscaping or aquascaping our aquariums we think of growing plants. Some of us have learned that this is not always easy, but using rocks...well that just has to be easiest way out. Or is it? There is a lot more to setting up a rock only tank than you might think!

Regardless of the size of the tank we're setting up, most of have at one time or another used some rock to accent the décor and perhaps provide a much needed hiding or resting place for some fish. Maybe you just piled a few rocks in a corner or some other random place or maybe you formed a complex terrace or bridge that looked totally natural. For most of us, we would probably fall somewhere in between the two extremes.



By nature, I think aquarists for the most part are never quite satisfied. I've met some folk that say they haven't changed things forever. To me that's just plain boring. Now I'm not saying we need to be in our tanks every month moving this and moving that (some fish just don't take to that very well) but once every year or two seems to work well for many aquarists.

You'll want to start with a good layout from the beginning. This will allow you to build on that initial foundation. We use rocks to achieve numerous objectives, aesthetics, protection, nursing and resting areas all come to mind. Rocks just like plants can provide a much needed place for any harassed fish to get out of the foray and get a much needed break. This is so true when it comes to an aquarium full of African Cichlids.

There are a few important things to remember when delving into the world of rocks. Always choose rock whose composition is hard. Granite, marble, slate and natural river rock. These are known as metamorphic rock. They are very heavy by mass compared to a lot of

other rock. Be careful when using sedimentary rock such as limestone, sandstone and lava rock. Limestone in particular can dramatically increase the pH of tank water. This is fine for Rift Lake Cichlids but for some of our South American species it would spell disaster. Lava rock can give a tank a very unique look but you have to be careful as this rock has many jagged edges that can easily damage a fishes body. Purchased rock from a LFS can typically be rinsed and then placed in a tank but if you're a collector of all things rock like me then you absolutely must be careful.

We have no idea what kind of nasty substances are residing in those great looking nooks and crevices. Not only do I make a habit of scrubbing all of my rock, then bleaching it but I will then boil them for 30 minutes to make certain they are as clean as they can be before going in any tank. Planning the placement of your rock is something you need to take your time with as well. You want all of our larger pieces on the bottom and then begin to build from there. This gives stability which is something you don't dare cut corners with. If your rock is not flat on the bottom then the use of egg crate light diffusers is a wise thing to do. This will stop any chance of a sharp edge of rock cracking the bottom of your tank.

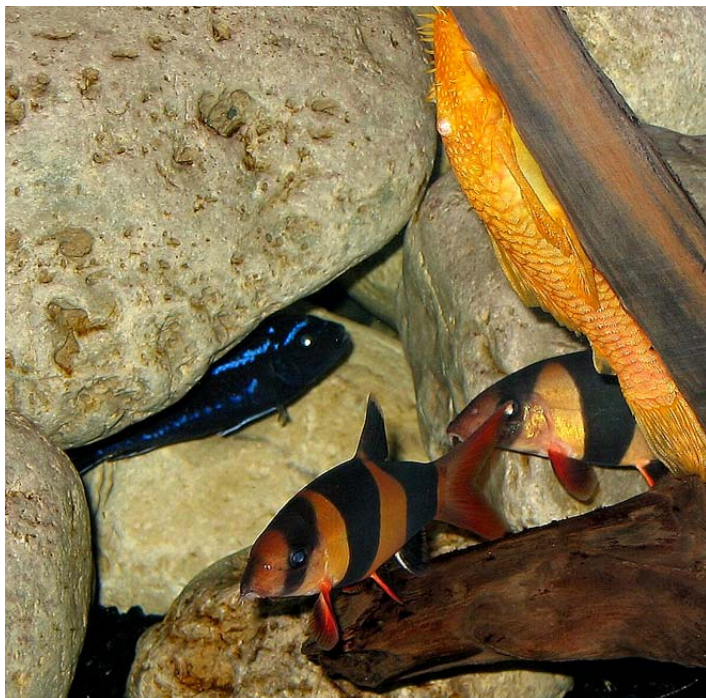


Some people even silicone rock together to help with stability. While this sounds like a safe practice I don't like it because if you have to get into that rock pile to get a sick or dead fish out or even just some cleaning you've got a real battle on your hands if the rock is stuck together. Choosing your rock carefully, there is

very little if any need to use silicone. Careful distribution of weight is another factor to remember. Most tanks built today can withstand enormous amounts of weight even in small areas.



I like to place all the rock in the tank then add the substrate and grade it accordingly. Once you've added the rock, driftwood etc keep a close eye on the pH and especially the behavior of your fish. Your fishes behaviour can be likened to the proverbial canary in the coal mine. Building an attractive yet functional rockscape in



your aquarium is not difficult. It is one however that will require some planning and bit of research. Some will say a rock only tank is like a cake without icing, I beg to differ with them. In the end a properly aquascaped tank using just rock is well worth it ▣

*All photos by **Phil Masnyk***