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Five tips for choosing a contractor

(NC)—Whether it's the need for a change, an upgrade, or an emergency home repair, most homeowners will at some point need to hire a contractor. Renovations and repairs vary widely in both the scope and the resources needed to get the job done right.

"Even a homeowner experienced in repairs will need to hire a contractor eventually due to the size or level of difficulty with a project," says Yvonne Ratigan, an executive with Royal LePage Canada.

Ratigan offers these guidelines to finding and choosing a contractor:

1. Ask for referrals and consult local resources. Start by asking friends and family for referrals. Other sources include your local homebuilder and renovator associations and local building supply stores.
2. Ask questions. What kind of work do you specialize in?
Do you offer a warranty? How do you handle clean up?
How do you schedule the work? Do you provide a contract?
The answers to questions like these will help you to narrow down your choices.

3. Consider more than just price. In addition to price, consider the level of trust and the quality of work you see from the contractors you have short-listed. Make your decision on a variety of pre-determined factors, asking the same question to all bidders. Be sure to get references and ask to see the work the contractor has done for past customers.

4. Proper insurance. Both the homeowner and the contractor need to have the right insurance. If the contractor's crew is injured on the job or damages your property or a neighbour's property, your homeowner's insurance policy might not cover you and you could be liable.

5. Get it in writing. The final agreement between you and your contractor should always be in writing. Don't be tempted to accept cash only jobs. A cash deal may leave you with no legal recourse if something goes wrong.

More information about renovations and increasing the value of your home is available online at www.royallepage.ca.

www.newscanada.com

Design trends that matter in 2012

(NC)—“New design trends for 2012 are easy to incorporate into your existing décor and they don't have to cost the moon,” says decorating expert Karl Lohnes. He also contends that today's design mantra is all about mixing and matching styles together. “It gives a room personality,” advises Lohnes.

This expert also has a rule for adding alternate styles to your favorite décor—the 70/30 rule. Seventy percent of your furnishings and accessories should be of your favourite style, and the remaining 30 percent should be alternate or different.

Whether you are going for the 70 or 30 percent, Lohnes collaborated with Hunter Douglas and other experts to produce the hottest trends for this year:

Restored and Reclaimed: No one seems to dispute that the retro, industrial chic look with repurposed wood and materials reigns. Wood with special textures and finishes and patinated metals are pervasive.

Grey Matters: Everyone also agrees that grey is the new neutral. The grey of today is warmer than the steel-blue grey of the 1980s. The new grey is warmer, like flannel grey suiting, putty or smoke, says Lohnes. It's everywhere—in furniture with driftwood colours, textiles and decorative accessories.

Pattern is Back: Design today is not just about colours. Pattern is back too. Industry veteran Warren Shoulberg notes there is a renaissance of the 60s and prints are taking over from woven fabrics.

Colour Pops: Bursts of bright colour are back, with many predicting that purple will become a staple.

Modern Times—It's all in Mix: “Despite what some may think, contemporary is still here and more prevalent than five years ago,” says Shoulberg. You don't have to make an entire space contemporary. Pair a square 1960s-inspired table beside a traditional sofa with a modern painting above it.



Photo Caption: At the window, Hunter Douglas Duette Architella shades, which feature a highly insulating honeycomb-within-a-honeycomb design, are featured in the new neutral: grey.

Ikats: Ikat designs with a tie-dyed effect and other Eastern accents on textiles and in upholstery are on the rise. They're part and parcel with the globalization of design.

Sweet Dreams: Mattresses are becoming true luxury items observes Shoulberg. You can't seem to pay enough for a good one.

Green is Here to Stay: In the words of acclaimed interior designer Scott Salvator: “Green is never going away. It has redefined how we design.” Glass tile, natural materials and appliances and other products that conserve energy and resources are increasingly sought after. At the window, Duette Architella honeycomb shades (from Hunter Douglas) are not only highly energy-efficient, they also come in fabrics that contain recycled materials.

More information is available online at www.hunterdouglas.ca or toll-free at 1-800-265-8000. www.newscanada.com

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Little tricks keep your home always looking clean

(NC)—We've all seen it: the home of a friend, relative, or neighbour that looks like the pages of a design magazine. Nothing is out of place, and then, often green with envy you return to your home to find dust bunnies, food crumbs, and splatters of toothpaste on the bathroom mirror. How do some people work all week and still find time to clean? Surely, they must be scrubbing all weekend.

The truth is, homeowners can keep their homes tidy during the busy work week with just a few simple tips. That way, you can relax on the weekend. Soon enough, you'll be showing envious guests around your own spotless home. Here's how:

Tips for the kitchen

- Wipe up cooking messes from the stove top or counters immediately after they happen, before they dry and become difficult to clean.
- Use a damp sponge and a cup of water boiled in the microwave to wipe away crusted food stains.
- Consider using a robotic vacuum to keep floors free of dirt, dust, food particles, and hair while you finish other chores or watch TV.

Tips for the bathroom

- Keep a squeegee handy to wipe windows, mirrors, and counter surfaces after a shower to keep them sparkling.
- The touchless faucet is both practical and chic. Ideas are available



online at deltafaucet.ca. Take a look at Delta's Lahara or Addison with what they call, Touch 2O.xt Technology. Faucets with the option for hands-free activation can ensure that sticky or greasy toiletries are not transferred to the faucet handle, minimizing weekly cleaning tasks.

- Use an automatic toilet bowl cleaner that you can set and forget while still keeping toilet bowls fresh all week long.

Around the House

- Fifteen minute power cleaning or de-cluttering sessions, done a few times a week, can help to cut down on out-of-control messes. Pick one small space to attack each time, and you'll be surprised how it helps keep household clutter under control.

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Designing your bathroom with an exceptional shower in mind

Create the perfect place to unwind

(NC)—For some of us, the shower is a personal sanctuary—the only place and time each day to unwind and not be bothered by anything from the outside world. So why not make an exceptional shower the centre-piece of your next bathroom remodel? Utilize the latest in style - and even technology - to create the ultimate retreat.

Spa-Tacular Shower

The minds at Moen have created a digital shower system that offers the ability to set water temperature and flow with electronic precision. The ioDIGITAL vertical spa features an innovative interface that lets you avoid guessing if the shower is at the right temperature; four programmable pre-sets create the perfect shower every time. There's even a remote control that allows you to turn on the system while still in bed! It's never been so simple to create a spa-tacular shower experience in your own home.

Take a Seat

Now that you have more room in your new vertical spa, add a place to relax with a built-in seat. It not only provides the luxury of increased comfort, but it's also an eye-catching upgrade to any shower. Depending on the size of your shower, there are different options for you to choose from. Some to consider include:

- **Fold-down teak**—Best for smaller bathrooms as they take up the least amount of space and fold conveniently against the wall when not in use.
- **Pre-fabricated expanded polystyrene**— If you're looking for a corner or bench seat, this is the best choice since it's created from a very solid material.
- **Fibreglass and acrylic built into bases**—This shower system is the highest-quality construction, but can be limiting as it's only offered in a few sizes.

Your Space, Your Style

Your luxury bathroom is just about complete, but what better way to tie things together than with your own added effects? Consider adding art to your bathroom walls or photographs that complement your décor. Updating towels and rugs to match the new colour scheme will also offer a refreshed and rejuvenating look.

When you're ready to transform your modest bathroom into an elegant haven of bathing, incorporate a few luxurious additions to design a space—and shower—that's all your own. For more information about the ioDIGITAL vertical spa from Moen, visit www.moen.ca.

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Bathroom systems advance for building efficiency

(NC) — Here's the latest news to make bathroom installations much easier.

Leading manufacturer, Saniflo Canada, has introduced a new system that requires less time on the job site for contractors and minimal stress for the do-it-yourselfers. The new Saniaccess 3 is an easy-to-open double-panel macerating unit that provides quick access to the internal components so that periodic maintenance can be seamlessly accomplished in any home or building.

This model incorporates two easy-to-open service panels located atop the unit on either side. One panel allows access to the electrical components as well as the level sensor mechanism of the macerator while the other accesses the basket area around the macerating blades to allow easy removal of any large objects that may have been accidentally flushed.

"Each internal component can be serviced and replaced without disconnecting the entire system, allowing for huge savings in time and money," says Daniel Cayer, the company's national sales manager. "This unique product is perfect for any contemporary bathroom and can also be concealed behind the wall, if the owner prefers."

Industry analysts agree that this newest innovation is a powerful unit since its rotating blade is able to reduce wastewater significantly at a fast rate. In addition, the unit can accommodate a complete bathroom (including a sink, a shower and/or bathtub) and discharges waste up to 15 feet vertically and nearly 150 feet horizontally, while operating quietly with sound-absorbing technology. The unit is a perfect solution for owners of either a residential or commercial building. The product can be utilized in rental properties such as basements, apartment units, offices, restaurants and more.

More information is available online at www.saniflo.ca or toll-free at 1-800-363-5874.

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Are you renovation-ready?

(NC)—Now that the snow has melted and the ground is beginning to thaw, it may be time to get started on those home renovations you've been thinking about all winter. Whether you're freshening up a room with a new coat of paint, or completely gutting your home, did you know that you could be leaving yourself open to serious risk if you start a major project without notifying your insurance provider?

Henry Blumenthal, Vice President, TD Insurance offers his top tips to homeowners on how to protect their biggest investment during renovation season this year:

- Check your insurance policy—While it's exciting to get the wheels in motion for the kitchen or basement of your dreams, the first call you should make is to your insurance provider to ensure you have adequate coverage during the renovations. For example, some home-owners may not be covered if they vacate their home for a certain amount of time. Don't forget to let your insurer know of any upgrades, too.
- Consider your renovations—A marble countertop in your kitchen may be high on your list, but consider renovations that will not only increase the value of your home, but also save you money on your home insurance. For example, installing a home security system can reduce your premiums, and upgrading your basement to ensure it's watertight can save you from expensive headaches down the road.
- Do your homework on your contractor—Your contractor should have general liability insurance, which will protect your home from damage or negligence from the contractor or anyone they hire to work on your property.

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Quick tips to easily pass the home inspection

(NC)—An offer on your home most often means the buyer-in-waiting will hire a professional home inspector to examine it before the offer is finalized. While this wait can be stressful for the seller, do remember that conducting regular checks and maintenance on your home will avoid the last-minute scramble when an offer is pending.

"If you are the homeowner, it's advisable to be aware of the types of thing an inspector will be looking for," says Royal LePage broker Carlo Racioppo. "In that way, you are prepared, and ideally the work will be completed in advance so the sale of your home can breeze through without incident."

During a home inspection, the main systems will be examined, including electrical, plumbing, heating, roofing, foundation and the exterior of the house. Here are Racioppo's suggestions of areas to address to help you sail through the home inspection:

1. Chimney. Have a certified chimney sweep routinely clean and inspect your fireplace and chimney.
2. Electrical outlets. In rooms with running water, replace electrical outlets with Ground Fault Circuit Interrupters (GFCIs) to protect against shock.
3. Stairways. Ensure all handrails are secure on staircases, decks and landings and passages have proper lighting. Install a three-way switch so lights can be turned on and off at both the top and bottom of the stairs.
4. Attic. Insufficient insulation in the attic can cause heat loss in winter and heat gain in summer. Bolster the insulation in thin areas to protect against higher energy costs.
5. Exterior landscaping. Landscaping graded toward the home can cause water seepage into the basement and other rooms. Remedy any such grading to ensure rainwater can flow away from the home.

More information on preparing your home for sale can be found online at www.royallepage.ca.
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Design your yard to suit your lifestyle

(NC)—A properly landscaped yard can make all the difference in how you enjoy your property. Home Hardware's gardening expert Mark Cullen says that taking the time to plan your outdoor space carefully will ensure that it is functional and meets your needs.

"Your yard should be pleasing to the eye and be a place where you want to spend your free time," says Cullen. He recommends that homeowners should take several things into consideration when planning their landscaping projects.

"The most important thing is to look at the entire property and know what you want to accomplish. If you enjoy entertaining, make sure to reserve a space where you can host friends and neighbours," Cullen says.

A backyard deck or patio provides a great space to enjoy all of the hard work you put into your lawn and garden. Pressure treated wood, cedar, and even interlocking stone can give your entertaining space a beautiful foundation, but also consider some unique lighting and decoration options to improve function.

Are you looking to set the mood for your summer evenings? Consider installing solar lighting, a garden fountain, or a designer fire pit to create the perfect setting for your evening barbecue.

If you enjoy large, robust gardens, Cullen says you should minimize the space used for deck or patio and consider what garden features will enhance the enjoyment of your space, such as specialty gardens for cut flowers, herbs, or vegetables. If you have children, a large lawn or play area may be a priority. No matter the final design, consider including a few focal points such as a water feature, trellis, bird house, or planters to add character. You may not be able to include everything, but a wish list is a vital first step in garden planning.

If you have little time to spend gardening, choose low maintenance, slower-growing plants. If you love to garden and intend to spend your leisure



hours tending your landscape, you have a wider variety in terms of design and landscape plants from which to choose.

Cullen says the most important thing is to have fun. "Your yard is where you want to go to relax, so taking a little time to plan out your design will make the job go smoother and be an enjoyable experience."

More expert gardening advice and product information is available online at www.homehardware.ca.

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How to brighten a room without overpowering the space

Design Challenges:

(NC)—As we emerge from an economic downturn, bright colours are truly hot. They express a new and optimistic view of the future. So if the foundation décor of your room is beige, taupe, grey, cream or another neutral, splash it with a bit of colour to inject energy and joyfulness into the space. You can do it without digging deep into your pockets to redecorate or disrupting the cohesiveness of your neutral theme.

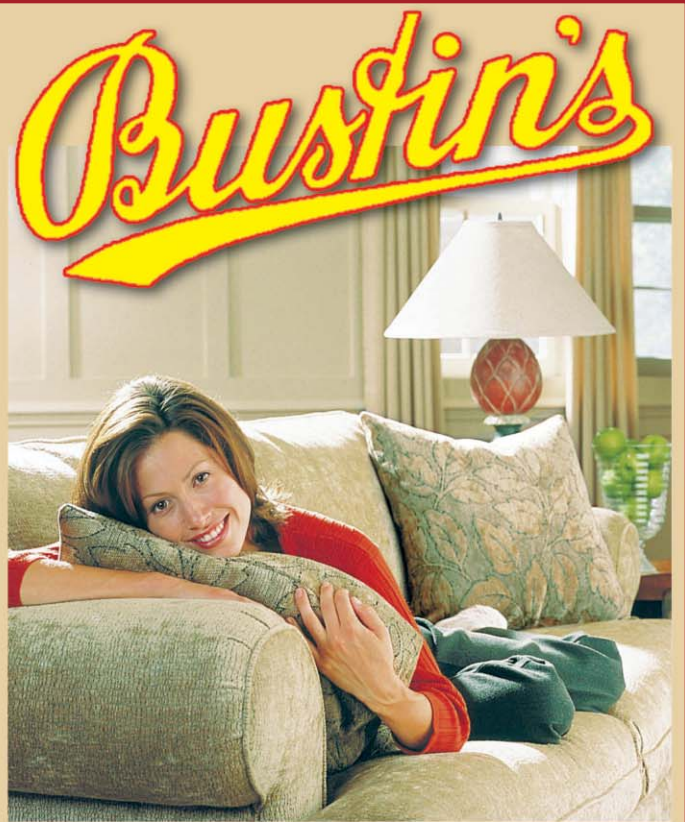
How is it done?

"By confining your hot colours to relatively inexpensive items like basic window drapery, cushions, a throw, art on the wall and perhaps an ottoman," says Cheryl Grant, an interior design and consumer trend consultant. "Start with a piece you already have, one that has bold colours you love, then key off that colour palette when selecting additional accessories."

Surround your soft neutrals with splashes of colour that complement the main décor theme, but don't shout too loudly. Take a look at the photo from industry leader, Torlys, displayed with this article. The brights are balanced nicely by soft neutral leather chairs and upholstery, as well as the taupe shade of the handsome laminate floor, whose rustic look and surface mirrors the wood grain pattern of natural hardwood. As a result, this softly grained laminate floor with its distinctive grey hue is central to the neutral decor of the room offset by colour accents.

Torlys, a Canadian leader in laminate smart floors, tells us that a new line in trendsetting styles, wood species, colours and textures has recently been introduced at leading flooring retailers across the country. More information is available online at www.torlys.com.

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How to control air leakage and energy loss in your home

(NC)—Keeping your home at a comfortable temperature becomes an increasingly expensive proposition with steadily rising energy costs. With the full force of winter upon us, you can keep air leakage and energy loss in check with a mini energy audit of your home that includes these three quick stops:

#1—Check for drafts

Air leakage (especially in the basement, on the main floor or through a windward-facing wall) can make your home drafty, uncomfortable and difficult to heat, no matter how much you turn up the thermostat. Address air leakage by plugging the biggest leaks first, such as in the attic and around electrical holes, plumbing vents, basement rim joists (where the foundation meets the wood framing), recessed lighting, windows and doors.

#2—Check your insulation

If you have conventional fibreglass or cellulose insulation, settling and sagging can compromise its performance and lead to a big hit on your energy bills. Look for gaps and signs of moisture problems in your insulation, especially in the attic, in the basement and in the room over the



garage. If you're planning home improvements or an addition, consider installing an insulation/air barrier (like innovative Icynene) for complete air sealing and energy savings of up to 50 per cent over conventional insulation. More information about your insulation options is available online at www.icynene.com.

#3—Check your furnace

How old is your furnace? If it pre-dates 1992 it might only operate at about 55 to 78 per cent efficiency. A new Energy Star-qualified furnace can operate above 90 per cent efficiency as a result of more efficient heat exchangers and electronic ignition. If you upgrade right now you might still be able to take advantage of ecoEnergy retrofit grants through federal government programs.

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Ask for the benefits of homebuilding decisions

(NC)—Designing a dream home today must be more than just esthetically pleasing. Homeowners say it needs to provide tangible benefits.

"Perhaps this is why concrete homes are steadily growing in popularity," says Todd Blyth at Nudura, a leader in the advancement of insulated concrete forms (ICFs). "For the occupants, so many lifestyle benefits are immediate in regards to comfort, energy efficiency, safety, and interior air quality— and for your investment, all those benefits assure top resale value one day."

Building the walls with concrete is an option that needs to be decided early in the planning. Indeed, while the ICF system has been on offer for more than a decade now, not all builders are ahead on this curve. The method discards wood framing in favour of pre-assembled, interlocking concrete forms filled with concrete, for quick and easy use at the building site.

Nudura points out a few more of the tangible benefits of concrete:

Energy Efficiency: Premium insulation is essential with energy costs on the rise. Solid concrete walls vastly reduce air infiltration (compared to wood walls) optimizing energy performance and reducing carbon footprints. The R-value (insulation effectiveness) comes in at R-50 and can

save you to 70 per cent on energy bills.

Home Comfort: Outside cold easily travels through wood-framed walls causing thermal bridging and creating uncomfortable chilly spots inside your home. Walls with a solid concrete core address and prevent thermal bridging delivering even temperatures throughout the house. Drafts and cold spots are reduced and that optimizes energy performance.

Sound Resistance: Solid concrete is an effective sound barrier. It dampens sound vibrations from outside noise, such as traffic, trains, and neighbourhood parties. Sound-proofing is an addition to home comfort. **Safety:** The fire protection rating is up to four hours. Walls are built with steel reinforced concrete plus non-toxic, fire retardant insulation foam. If high wind in your community is a concern, data shows that Nudura homes (nudura.com) demonstrate impact resistance up to 402 kph, or 250 mph.

Investment Value: It is generally expected that a stronger, safer, greener home, and one that is more durable, more cost efficient, and needs less maintenance and repair, will build and hold its value.

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Duncan, who frequently lectures on gardening, has co-authored two Lone Pine gardening books, and is the Gardening Columnist for the Telegraph Journal. His Garden Center on the Model Farm Road in Quispamsis has one of the largest displays of plant

material in the area, and is a popular family destination. There are a dozen kinds of farm animals in the "CORRAL" for kids to feed, and a nature trail right behind it. Duncan gives several free lectures each spring and fall, and has family events with tractor rides, scavenger hunts, and barbecues. Look for details on those events on the website www.brunswicknurseries.com.



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Energy efficiency —what's in a label?

(NC)—Due to an increased interest in green building and energy efficiency, a number of "green" labels have been developed.

But how do you know if the green label can also determine the energy efficiency of your home?

Natural Resources Canada's (NRCAN) Office of Energy Efficiency (OEM), offers three energy efficiency labels that help you, the homeowner, go green and cut down on energy costs.

The EnerGuide rating label is NRCAN's established rating system for the energy rating and labelling of products—mostly appliances—but also homes. An EnerGuide rating shows you (and future buyers) exactly how energy efficient your new home was at the time of construction.



The R-2000 label certifies a home as one of the most energy efficient on the market. Over the past 30 years, thousands of Canadians have chosen these energy efficient homes that have helped them save money, enjoy healthier indoor air and take positive steps for the environment. Experts agree that choosing an R-2000 home is a great way to minimize your ecological footprint by reducing your share of greenhouse gas emissions.

An ENERGY STAR qualified home label on a new house indicates lower energy demand and better overall performance of the home. The initiative promotes guidelines that builders use to construct energy efficient new homes and is available in various regions across Canada. ENERGY STAR has become a well-recognized and respected brand.



If energy efficiency is something you want to incorporate into your new home, you can go to the NRCAN website at www.newhomes.nrcan.gc.ca or call 1 800 O-Canada (1 800 622-6232) for more information on the various energy efficiency programs that are available in Canada.

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Spas and hot tubs create an affordable stay-cation

Automating the backyard pool and spa

(NC)—With today's spiraling cost of gasoline and stricter security procedures when traveling, relaxing in a backyard spa or hot tub is looking better than ever.

Owning a spa is no longer considered a luxury in today's frustrating, fast-paced world—it has almost become a necessity as an estimated 455,000 spa owners in Canada can attest.

Maintaining a spa is not expensive either—with spa owners often saying that they pay less for chemicals, water and electricity than they anticipated. By using a well-fitted, insulated rigid safety cover, you can substantially reduce evaporation from a spa, which means reduced heating costs and less chemical usage, helping to keep costs down.

If you have already purchased a spa and are looking for the best place to install it, look for an area in the backyard with a scenic view. A location with an unobstructed view of a flower garden, water feature or nearby wooded area will provide a focal point for bathers in the spa and for those gazing at the hot tub from inside the house.

Make sure the location is easy to get to—the general rule of thumb is the closer to the house the better. Ask yourself the following questions - is the location private? Will you have to screen out the view of surrounding homes or nearby traffic? Where will bathers change?

For added privacy, convenience and aesthetic appeal, wooden/fabric gazebos and cabanas can be used as change rooms. Some permanent enclosed structures are even large enough to enclose an entire spa, with room to spare for dining and food preparation areas and equipment storage rooms.

Distinctive lighting is another way to create a special mood outdoors in and around a hot tub. LED lights, both underwater and around the hot tub cabinet, can produce an array of colours in a gentle colour transition or in a dynamic pulsating colour display for entertaining.

Many spas also come equipped with illuminated waterfalls or 'geyser'-type fountains—giving you your own sound and light show. With a spa or hot tub, the possibilities are endless.

More information is available online at www.poolcouncil.ca or toll-free at 1-800-879-7066.

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(NC)—New programmable control systems have made operating and maintaining pools and spas as easy as pushing a button. Capable of being operated from inside the home, a programmable control system eliminates the need to walk outside to turn the equipment on and off or to make adjustments to pool or spa operation.

These high-tech control devices feature a control panel that displays the operation status of pool and spa equipment, as well as permitting control over water and air temperature, sanitizer levels, salt chlorine operation, water features and lighting.

Some automatic control systems allow you to operate pool and spa equipment from inside the home or office using a desktop or laptop computer, while other systems use colour touch screen devices such as PDAs and hand-held tablets for remote monitoring and control of pool and spa functions.

Automatic pool and spa control systems also allow you to eliminate over- or under-dosing the sanitizer level in the water and can help you reduce energy costs by operating some functions at off-peak hours when energy is less expensive.

Depending on the model, automatic pool and spa control systems can also be interfaced with home automation systems that control the home's indoor and outdoor lights, heating, air conditioning and home alarm system for a totally integrated, centralized control system.

More ideas on how to automate your pool or spa are available online at www.poolcouncil.ca or toll-free at 1-800-879-7066.

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*How to make your
home look and feel
more spacious*

(NC)—After months of being cooped up, a lot of homeowners are beginning to feel their indoor living space is too small. Moving to a larger home is one answer, but for most Canadians, a change of that kind is simply not an option. There are, however, a number of solutions to make a room, or an entire home, look and feel more spacious, experts say.

"When renovating or building a home, or putting on an addition, a great way to create more physical space is to install radiant heat instead of a traditional forced air heating system," says John Goshulak, heating ambassador for Beautiful Heat. "Radiant heating uses a ductless design without the need for fans, blowers or vents in the floors. As a result, room layouts aren't limited by vents or registers, and in the basement, bulky ductwork can be completely eliminated."

For homeowners who are feeling cramped and confined, the following design tricks can help make a living space feel more spacious:

- Use light colour paint on the walls to make the room feel airy.
- Move large sized furniture against the walls and select pieces that can have several functions, such as a trunk that can serve as storage and a coffee table.
- Let the light flow in. Use sheer window coverings or better yet, pull them back completely to make the maximum use of natural light. If natural light isn't available use a lamp as a focus point.
- Learn how to eliminate bulky ductwork, vents and registers with radiant heating at www.beautifulheat.com.
- Tidy up and move unwanted clutter out to keep the floor space clear.

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Nostalgic look is in for hardwood floors

Home Decor trends

(NC)—More and more Canadians are going back to a simpler time with their home decor choices and it's all starting with their floors. They're ushering in the welcoming charm and warmth of antique and wire-brushed nostalgic hardwood floors to set the tone for their decors.

"As the home construction and renovation industry continues to grow, architects, builders, and realtors are seeing a boom in demand from discerning homeowners for the warmth and luxury of old-world wood floors," said Tom Gormley, President of Silhouette Hardwood Flooring, a leading Canadian-based manufacturer that also features a vintage floor "Nostalgic" collection to meet the growing consumer demand.

Gormley explained that the demand for older looking waxed or oiled floors has led to a number of companies offering synthetic oiled floors instead of urethane. Unfortunately, this option has resulted in many unhappy consumers due to the inherent maintenance issues associated with oiled floors. Stains from spills, and scratches occur all too easily with this type of finish, due to their lack of hardness and their negative reaction to even small drops of water requiring consumers to regularly sand and re-oil the affected areas.

In contrast, Silhouette's Nostalgic low gloss wood floor collection brings out the character in every board making it a design favourite for those looking to add that old-world charm and enhance the look of their living space. But, as a simulated oil floor, the appearance of these pre-finished hardwoods only simulate that of an oiled hardwood floor, so no need to worry about maintenance hassles. Its antique, wire-brushed appearance makes it a floor that is timeless and distinct.

The low gloss colour (an industry low of only five per cent light reflection) enhances the vivid grains and patterns in the wood, yet hides the dents and scratches. Easy to maintain, this type of floor is durable and ideal for high traffic areas and for owners with kids and large pets.

"This floor gives you the benefits of a regular pre-finished floor with the resurgently popular old antique look but without all the maintenance issues," Gormley added.

This oiled floor look is very popular in wide plank boards often sought in 4 1/4 and 5 inch widths which are unfortunately more apt to develop unsightly and unhealthy gaps over time if the relative humidity within a home is left uncontrolled.

Gormley explained this is no longer an issue with flooring that has the added protection of Silhouette's unique Contour Guard finishing process which envelopes each of its floorboards to eliminate any possible unsightly effects resulting from these gaps and ensures the beauty and resilience of the floor. More information on the latest in premium hardwood flooring is available at www.silhouetteflooring.com

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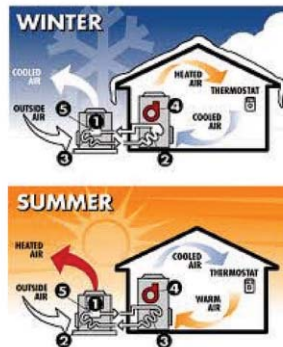


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A new twist on bathroom basics

(NC)—According to a recent study by Bath Fitter, 84 percent of consumers want to change something about their current bathroom, and less than 44 percent are satisfied with their current space. No need to fret; there are simple ways to add a creative twist to the bath just by switching or adding a few items.

Faucets, sinks, showerheads, towels and soap—these are just the basic necessities of your master bath. But not all products are created the same. Check out these new innovations from Moen to add an updated twist to bathroom basics.

Twist and Shout with a Handheld Shower

Are you sick of the same old shower experience? Now you can bring a revitalized change to your daily routine with the new Twist Handheld Shower. Twist allows you to easily switch amongst the four spray settings with one hand—all without having to touch the water flow - to create your very own showering experience. It offers a transitional style that coordinates with most bathroom décor and is easy to install. Twist is ideal for bathing children or pets, and for cleaning your bathtub or shower.

Creative Curved Shower Rod

Do you ever get into your shower and feel a bit...claustrophobic? Add more than five inches of elbow room in the shower with a new Double Curved Shower Rod. The double-bar design lets you utilize separate bars for the shower liner curtain and decorative shower curtain; or it can provide an extra bar for hanging towels or other daily essentials.



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No matter how organized your bathroom, it's always tough to find a place for the many daily necessities that we want at our finger tips. Now you can easily keep these items within arm's reach—yet off the vanity—with innovative Shower Rod Hooks. These ingenious, S-shaped hooks snap right onto your shower rod to offer convenient access for a variety of items, such as clothing, jewelry, towels, travel bags and more.

To add more character to your bathroom, add an unconventional twist. More information is available online at www.moen.ca.

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Hot New Colours for Home Exteriors

(NC)—With the warmth of spring comes a blast of much needed colour as plants and people come back to life after a long winter. Winter can be harsh, not just on us but on our houses. Now is the time to give your house a little TLC and take years off the face of your home.

Every season has a fresh new palette of hot colours. The same is true for home exteriors. "Rich grays, fresh blues and corals have been steadily growing in popularity inside the home," says Sharon Grech, the colour and style expert for Benjamin Moore. "These colours translate to your exterior in shades that are understated and organic to work with the natural elements. Paints and wood stains are always a smart investment because they not only enhance the beauty of your exterior surfaces, but also protect them from nature's effects."

Grech suggests limiting your exterior palette to three or four colours, including those of fixed elements like roof and cladding. Beautiful body and trim colours, such as Jute, Pashmina and Kendall Charcoal coordinate well with exterior stone and wood, and you can always accent with vibrant hues to showcase your personal flair.

"Since it is a relatively small area in contrast to the house, your front door is the one spot where you have the most versatility when it comes to colour," says Grech. "Colour is powerful in the message it sends. For example a red door is daring, while a black door says formal and stately, like the one at 10 Downing Street in London, the famous residence of the British Prime Minister."

Aside from choosing your paint and accent colours, she says, some of the most important factors to a successful exterior paint job include the quality of the products, proper surface preparation and a good application technique. The Benjamin Moore colours (featured in the photo) include Stonington Gray as the siding, Blue Nose on the shutters, Dune White as the trim and Concord Ivory on the door.

Online resources, such as BenjaminMoore.ca, offer tips, tool recommendations and colour matching to help you achieve the look you're after.

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Plan your renovations wisely using new consumer web portal

(NC)—Renovating your home can be a dream come true, but without careful planning and oversight, it can also become a nightmare. It is no wonder that home renovation problems are consistently among the top consumer complaints across Canada.

If home renovations are on your list of things to do this spring, make the most of the planning phase by researching your projects first. It will save you time, money and a lot of frustration in the end.

One place you might want to start is Industry Canada's newly revamped portal, www.consumerinformation.ca. The portal was developed in collaboration with federal, provincial and territorial governments, and non-government sources and helps Canadian consumers become better-informed so they can be more confident when they buy products and services.

The portal deals with a wide range of consumers issues, from cars to health and safety. The home renovations section includes links to useful and reliable consumer information that is worth checking out. Just click on "home renovations" in the "housing" section or type in "home renovations" in the search box on the home page. You will be able to obtain information specific to your province or territory so you only see results that are relevant for you. www.newscanada.com



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Warm up check up: don't forget your A/C!

(NC)—There's a lot to feel good about with the transition from winter to spring; nature in bloom, lighter jackets, and shutting off your home's heating source once and for all. Soon the sun's rays will be all you need to warm your home but they'll also heat your home to unbearable temperatures when summer gets into full swing.

Spring is just one step away from summer. Don't wait until then to find out your air conditioner isn't functioning properly and suffer the consequences of being overheated. Sears Home Services has a few tips you can do yourself to ensure your home's A/C is fully prepared for the warmer weather.

- Once the snow is gone for good, remove your outdoor unit cover and let the warm weather dry out any winter condensation.
- Be sure there is nothing blocking the flow of air around your unit. This means you may have to trim back any bushes or tall grasses so there is at least three to six inches of clearance around the unit.
- Give the unit a good spray with your garden hose to clean off dust and debris accumulated through the fall and winter.

If you're unsure about preparing you A/C yourself, contact Sears Home Services who can ensure that your system will be ready to run efficiently and will keep you cool all summer long.

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Top tips for an energy-efficient home

(NC)—As Canadians seek out new ways to reduce energy costs and help the environment, we are learning that our homes are often the first and best place to start.

"There are many ways to reduce energy costs within our homes," says Kelly McCain, an executive with Royal LePage Canada. "Thankfully, technological advancements over the past decade have helped to shrink the cost keeping our homes comfortable—while adding to their resale value."

To realize the biggest savings and return on your investment, McCain encourages homeowners to do their research and make their investments in four key areas:

Invest in newer technology central heating and cooling systems. With as much as 60 per cent of your annual energy costs going toward heating and cooling your home, it makes sense to invest here. Heating and cooling systems built more than 15 years ago were likely built to last, not to be energy-efficient. Today, furnaces are more than 90 per cent efficient, a 40 per cent increase in energy efficiency over those built several decades ago.

Insulate your attic. We know that heat rises and, yet, as homeowners, we often overlook the potential for energy savings in our attics. Improving or upgrading your attic insulation can save you up to 30 per cent on energy costs. Attic insulation is relatively inexpensive and easy to install, and you can often do it yourself.

Let the light in during winter and block it out during summer. You can reduce the amount of energy in rooms throughout the home simply by opening shades, blinds and valances to allow natural light to come in during the cooler months, then closing them during the warmer months to shield the sun's rays.

Draft-proof your home. Get an energy audit and an auditor will conduct a blower door test to identify all leaks. You can also do this yourself with



a stick of incense to find cracks and leaks as you watch the smoke move at drafty areas. Seal cracks with caulking and install weather-stripping as needed.

Additional home improvement ideas are available online at www.royalpage.ca.

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How to prevent lawn damage

Many homeowners aspire toward a pristine and lush lawn. For some a nice lawn gives them feelings of pride. Others believe a perfect lawn enables them to have the best-looking house in the neighborhood. Many homeowners spend hours outdoors perfecting their lawns or spend a good deal of money hiring professionals to make their lawn more appealing. But just because a lawn looks good now doesn't mean it will look good later. That's because delicate grass can be damaged by a number of different factors.

Grubs

Grubs are not very lawn-friendly. Grubs are actually the larval stage of different types of large beetles. These worm-like creatures feed on the roots of grass and are able to kill large sections of the lawn in a relatively short amount of time. It can sometimes be difficult to discern whether grubs, drought or another other pest has damaged a lawn. One way to check is to grab a portion of the damaged lawn and attempt to peel it back. If it comes back easily like a piece of carpet, it's likely grubs. Spotting grubs underneath is a sure sign these larvae are killing the lawn.

Using an insecticide for grub control in July can help kill off grubs that start hatching in August through September. Grub eggs do well in sunny patches of lawn that are well watered. More shade may deter them. There's also the option of letting the lawn go dormant and not watering it, but you will be left with a brown, unappealing lawn.

Pet Urine

Pets can also damage a lawn. Pet urine can create burnt patches and significant discoloration on the lawn, particularly if the dog or cat uses one area consistently as their potty zone.

The best way to prevent urine damage is to walk your dog so that he or she will not have free reign of the yard. However, sometimes dogs get out



or stray cats and dogs visit your yard and relieve themselves without your knowledge. So this method is not foolproof. Therefore, you should take added action to maintain a lush lawn.

First, make sure that soil and lawn is in good health by fertilizing and taking care of it properly. Second, water can dilute urine and neutralize its corrosive properties. Some have found that diluted urine can often act as a fertilizer to grass. You may have noticed that the outside ring of a urine-burned spot is often greener than the healthy lawn. Try to dilute the urine prior to 8 hours having elapsed for the best effect.

Burrowing animals

Moles and voles are among the more common lawn damage culprits. Voles are small rodents that resemble mice but have stouter bodies, shorter tails and rounder heads. They feast on everything from bulbs, succulent roots, ground cover, and even dead animals in their paths. Their burrows enable them to move around relatively undetected, typically until the damage has already been done.

Moles, although they have a similar-sounding name, are not related to voles and look very different. They have a cylindrical body shape with velvety fur, very small or invisible ears and large paws for digging. Moles often feed on earthworms and other small invertebrates found in the soil. The burrows they create are essentially traps for the worms, who fall into the burrows, where moles easily access them. Moles often stockpile worms for later consumption in underground larders.

Voles can be kept away with natural vole predators, such as cats, hawks, owls and snakes. Mouse traps can also capture voles when baited. You may also dig sharp materials or chicken wire into your soil around planting beds to make it uncomfortable for voles and moles to tunnel through.

Moles can also be controlled with traps. Finding active mole tunnels will help you place the traps effectively to either kill or simply contain the mole. The live animal can be relocated to a site where they won't cause trouble.

Lawn damage can occur through a number of different factors. Finding out the cause can help you find an effective treatment. GT124969

The advertisement for Weed Man features a green superhero character with a 'W' on his chest, standing on a lawn. To the left is a circular logo with '41 YEARS' and 'Weed Man'. To the right of the character is a green box with 'Weed Man' and 'TRUST THE PROFESSIONALS'. Below that is a grey box with 'Nature's Touch' and a globe. At the bottom is a green box with 'Ask about our organic-focused lawn care solutions'.

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Transform your home with spring décor By Maja Begovic

(NC)—With the chilly winds of winter behind us, it's time to welcome sunny days, green grass and first flowers. This spring, infuse your home with vibrant colours, fresh floral touches and breezy fabrics. You don't have to spend a lot of money to transform your home — simply update pieces you already own to create a brand new look for spring.

Lighten up

Do you have velvet drapes or a sofa covered in heavy fabric? Start by removing the drapes and replace them with airy sheets. Slipcover the sofa and other furniture with paler tones. Remember that sheer curtains, bedskirts, tablecloths and pillows all say 'spring' louder than any other element. Look for designs that complement your lifestyle and interiors.

Rethink the rugs

Spring is a good time to have heavy rugs cleaned or repaired. Be sure to replace cozy area rugs with inexpensive cotton alternatives in vibrant, pastel colours.

De-clutter now

Look for organizing solutions for your home. Any spot that is overcrowded can drain your energies and fill your life with clutter. Donate clothes, books or toys to charity. You can also auction off any unwanted items online and donate a portion of the proceeds to a non-profit organization. The Christian Children's Fund of Canada, for example, (www.ccfcanda.ca) works to improve the lives of children living in poverty around the world.

Accessorize

Spring is all about rebirth, making it a wonderful time to reboot your home décor. Bring out your floral china, fresh plants, flowering pots or plant elegant orchids in your own backyard. These lively touches can breathe new life into your home, just in time for Spring.

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Low maintenance to curb appeal

(NC)—The exterior of your home is often more important than the interior when it comes to attracting home buyers. If you are selling your home, or looking to increase your own enjoyment of it, start by using a landscaping regimen to create curb appeal.

"Landscaping your property can provide more than just a pretty picture," says Carlo Racioppo at Royal LePage Realty Plus. "It also boosts the value of your home by creating visual interest and by providing potential time and cost savings."

Here are some low maintenance landscaping tips to add curb appeal:

1. Choose plants that are easy to maintain and add visual interest. Many perennial plants do well in shaded areas, are visually interesting and are low maintenance. Once mature, perennials grow tightly together, blocking out unwanted weeds and saving you time in the garden. Your neighbourhood garden centre can offer advice on which plants to choose, depending upon growing zone, soil type and sun exposure.

2. Apply a top layer of mulch to your gardens. Mulch is moisture absorbent and thus it reduces the need to water so frequently. As it comes in a variety of visually-appealing colours, mulch also adds that finishing touch to garden beds. In addition, as the natural ingredients that comprise mulch decompose, essential nourishment is provided to your soil and plants.

3. Use clover as an alternative to grass in problem areas. Clover is a great replacement for grass in areas that are heavily shaded or under evergreens. The appeal of clover is enhanced by its ability to withstand drought conditions, its low maintenance requirement, and its insect-resistant properties, all of which are time and money efficient.

If you are looking to maximize the value of your home while minimizing your investments in terms of both time and money, these tips can help to get you started. For large landscaping projects and for the best return on your investment, professional advice is recommended. More information about creating curb appeal is also available online at www.royallepage.ca.

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Tips when hiring a landscape architect

A well-maintained landscape is important to many homeowners. In addition to adding to a home's aesthetic appeal, a lush landscape can also help increase a home's resale value. Oftentimes, homeowners without much experience tending to lawns and gardens hire a landscape architect to do the job for them. First-time homeowners on the lookout for a landscape architect should consider the following tips to make the most of that process.

- * Find a professional who will work with you. Though you might not plan to do any of the landscaping or gardening, that doesn't mean you won't have a vision of what you want the property to look like. A landscape architect should be receptive to your ideas and willing to work with your vision while keeping the channels of communication open throughout the project.

- * Look for a professional with some experience. A landscape architect should be ready and willing to discuss his or her previous work experience. Ask to see photos of previous work or even local addresses where work was done so you can see the finished product in person. Landscape architects without extensive work histories aren't necessarily unqualified, but homeowners should weigh the projects such architects have completed considerably.

- * Discuss subcontractors. Some landscape architects will handle the project entirely on their own, while others might subcontract part of the project. Determine who will be performing the project and how the hiring of subcontractors might affect the cost of the project.




- * Discuss fees and get a fee schedule. How the project will be paid for is an important thing to discuss when interviewing landscape architects. Each contractor might have a different fee structure, so you will want the one that's best suited to you. If a series of payments will be made, get a fee schedule so there's no confusion down the road.

- * Get references. A professional landscape architect should have a list of references at the ready for potential customers. When contacting references, be sure to ask how satisfied they are with the finished product and how the project went with regards to scheduling and fees. When talking to a previous customer, also ask how amenable the landscape architect was to their ideas and how much he or she involved the homeowner in the project.

- * Make sure the contractor is licensed. In many communities, landscape architects must be licensed. This information is public, so always verify if a landscape architect is licensed prior to making any final decisions or signing a contract. GT124975

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"Kitchen Talk" BY Jim Lawrence

Is your old, out-dated kitchen too small?

Do you have the kind of kitchen that when it comes to meal time, you are banished to the kitchen by yourself to do all the preparation? Maybe there is company visiting and during cook time every one is crowded into your space trying to socialize. If you have the kind of kitchen that needs reworked, take a minute before you read on, and check this out. Is your layout such that the work area is about three feet, and when you are preparing you are doing so with your back toward those trying to socialize?

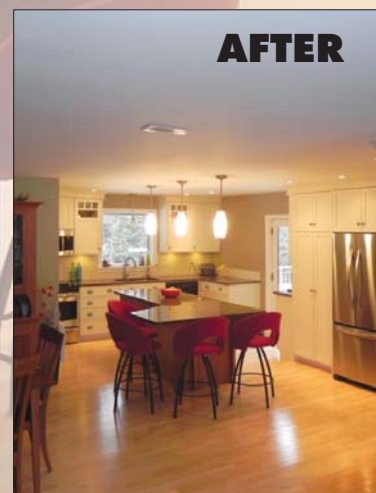
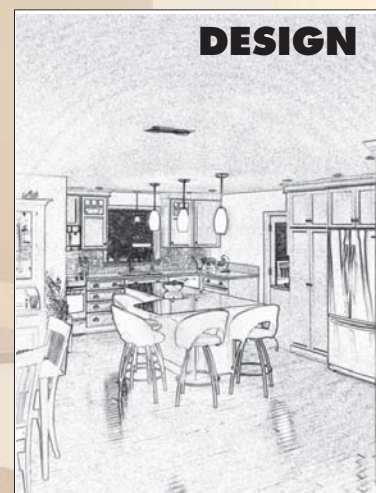
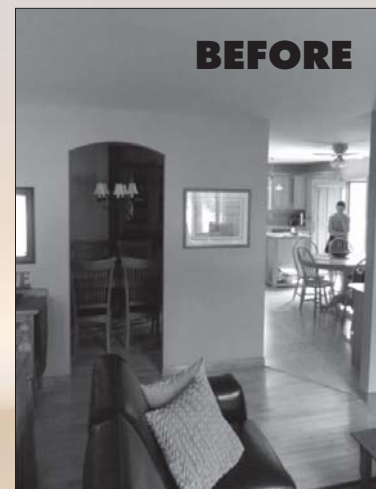
Adding on an addition will certainly make a larger kitchen. But much of the time a more affordable and sensible solution would be to open up the existing area. For instance having a kitchen, dining room and sitting room area turned into one large room can make a huge positive impact on your life style. Each of the three former rooms will now look much larger, not to mention much brighter because now each room is sharing all the windows. It's kind of like adding extra windows without the expense. And the function of the combined areas will now flow much better.

Most times the minute this area is opened up an island is possible. Why the emphasis on islands? Kitchens are all about work and prep areas and really the cook spends a minimal time at the stove, sink and fridge. Most of the time is spent at the work area. The work area now is the island, and typically this is only about 36" to 42" from the sink and appliances which allows the cook to use the appliances and working counter while standing almost in one spot. Most of the cooks time will be at the island work counter, and most islands, counting the long side and one short side, even in a modest size home can boast of 7 to 8 feet of work counters. The best part is that the cook is now facing friends and family, whether they are sitting up to the island doing home-work or socializing, or they may even be relaxing in the sitting or family area. The most common comment after this type of kitchen rework is "We had ten people in last nite for a gathering and it was not even crowded".

Are you still trying to work out your ideas?

Consider getting a professional kitchen designer in to see what is possible, you may be pleasantly surprised by what they may come up with.

This article was written by Jim Lawrence of Avondale Kitchens. Their firm designs, manufactures and installs three kitchens per week. For your project contact them directly at www.AvondaleKitchens.com 800-561-4112 or book them through your favorite decorator or contractor.



Simple tips for a naturally beautiful home

(NC)—Make your home fresh, warm and inviting by introducing natural elements into the space. Award-winning interior decorator Laura Stein offers four simple steps to bring nature indoors:

1. A little bit of wood goes a long way. Whether formal or casual, sleek or rustic, adding just a small amount of wood to a room makes it feel rich and more comfortable.
2. Natural stone ups the chic factor in any space. Since natural materials are always associated with quality, using stone and wood can help increase the value of your home.
3. Fresh cut flowers and plants are a wonderful way to breathe life into a room. For a sophisticated look, group flowers of the same colour together in the same vase. Or instead of a vase, get creative and use a water pitcher, a mason jar or even an old china teapot.
4. To maintain a clean and refreshing home, use naturally based cleaning products, such as Vim Cream Naturals Multipurpose Cream cleaner, which is made with 90 per cent naturally-derived ingredients and is effective on ceramic backsplashes, countertops and stainless steel fixtures.

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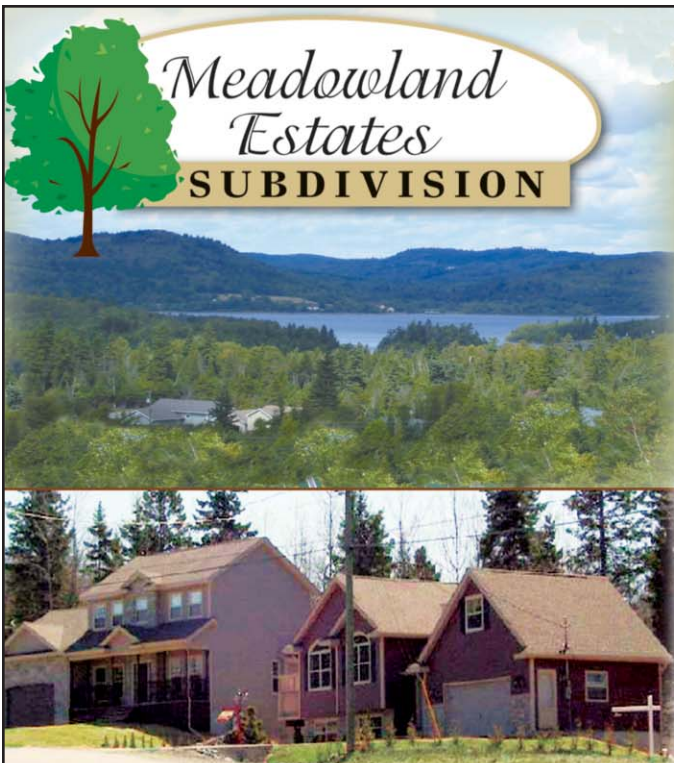
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5 Signs your roof might be wearing down

Replacing a roof is a costly venture few homeowners look forward to. According to Remodeling magazine's 2010-11 "Cost vs. Value" report, the national average cost of a roof replacement is nearly \$22,000, a costly endeavor considering the tenuous nature of the economy. What's more, homeowners who choose more upscale roofing materials can expect to spend almost \$40,000 on their roofs.

Such costs make it no small wonder that many homeowners fear the dreaded diagnosis that their home needs a new roof. While there's little homeowners can do to reduce the cost of a roof replacement, there are warning signs homeowners can look for that might indicate a roof replacement is on the horizon. Recognition of these signs can help homeowners be more financially prepared should the day come when the roof needs to be replaced.

1. The presence of algae

If the roof has lots of dark streaks and stains clinging to it, that is likely algae, which can grow on the roof for quite awhile. Algae does not necessarily do any damage to a roof, but it does do some damage to a home's physical appearance, as algae on the roof is not very pleasing to the eye. Algae is most often found on the roofs of homes located in climates that have warm, humid summers. If algae is a problem on your roof, spray washing with a mixture of water and bleach can effectively remove it.

2. Buckling shingles

Like algae, buckling shingles are another unsightly problem on a roof. But buckling shingles are more than just an eyesore, they actually might indicate significant problems. When shingles buckle, that's typically because hot air from the attic is forcing the shingles away from the home. Buckling shingles also indicate that the roof is poorly ventilated, which can take years off the roof's life expectancy while driving up home cooling costs along the way.

3. Granule loss

Granule loss is typically a byproduct of normal shingle wear and tear that results from inclement weather, such as hail. Older roofs might experience granule loss, but granule loss can also occur on a new roof if a defective roofing product was used. Any granule loss, even if slight, should be addressed, as the side effects of granule loss include a weakened roof and leaking. If granule loss is not addressed, the consequences could be severe the next time a storm occurs.

4. Mold

Unlike the warning signs already discussed, mold is not visible on the outside of the home. Instead, homeowners should look in the attic of a home to see if there is any mold growth. If there is, the roof is likely leaking, and the health risks of mold growth in a home are substantial. Mold is not necessarily easy to detect, so a professional inspection might be in order if mold growth is suspected. If a professional determines mold is, in fact, present, then the mold will need to be removed and all options, including a roof replacement, must be considered to keep mold from coming back.

5. Roof rot

Perhaps the most discouraging sign a homeowner can see on his or her roof is roof rot. Roof rot appears when a roof is in considerable decay and, if not addressed, its consequences can stretch far beyond the roof, damaging other parts of the home thanks in large part to water getting through the roof. If roof rot is either not noticed or just ignored, it won't take long for water to get through the roof and blaze a destructive path through the rest of the home.

Homeowners might fear a full roof replacement because of the cost associated with such a project. But if ignored, problems with a roof could eventually prove far more costly than the price of replacing the roof. SH122768

Great gifts for green thumbs

By Maja Begovic

(NC)—Almost every one of us knows someone who loves to work in the garden. But buying gifts for gardeners can be difficult, especially if you're not as horticulturally-inclined as they are. Here are some suggestions that can make any serious gardener happy:

Tools and gadgets

If it looks like their gardening spades have seen better days, get them a new set of gardening tools. If you aren't sure, have someone at the store help you choose the most useful items. Also, kits that help test the soil, meters that help measure soil moisture and other gadgets that make gardening chores easier or more comfortable (think kneeling pads and good gloves) will surely please any avid gardener.

Decorations

Every garden needs a few quirky yard decorations. If the gardener in your life has a sense of humour, consider a decoration which reflects that personality trait. Buy decorations made for outdoor use and

designed to blend in with different garden themes. A hummingbird feeder is another popular item that all gardeners can appreciate. Just don't forget the food. Hummingbird feeders are filled with a sugary liquid that keeps these beautiful birds coming back for more.

Think outside the box

Finding it hard to uncover a special something for the gardener in your life who seems to already have everything under the sun? Consider a gift certificate from their favourite supplier or a local botanical garden. You can also purchase garden essentials through a non-profit organization like Christian Children's Fund of Canada (www.ccfcanada.ca) on behalf of the gardener in your life. Your donation will help equip families living in extreme poverty with tools to grow nutritious fruits and vegetables that can be sold to provide a source of income. It makes an excellent gift and can help save lives.

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Why bother writing a will?

(NC)—There must be powerful reasons to avoid making a will because so many people die without one. In case you happen to be one them, here are five reasons that strengthen your position:

- The province that you live in can do a better job deciding how to disburse your assets than you can.
- The province can choose a better personal representative to handle your estate during probate than you can.
- The province can choose a more caring guardian for your minor children than you can.
- The government will use your estate tax dollars more efficiently than your favorite charity would use a charitable bequest.
- Your grieving loved ones will be better off looking after your affairs without your directions through your signed will.

Clearly the reasoning in the above is flawed, and it can cause many difficulties to loved ones. It's true that people unwittingly affirm these reasons year after year as they continue to put off the minor inconvenience of making a will.

Like many people, you may be uneasy about going to a lawyer to talk about this subject. Yet, a lawyer who specializes in estate planning knows the right questions to ask and the best ways to help you accomplish your goals. These professionals are well trained and normally well worth the time and expense they require.

Creating a plan for your assets through the preparation of your will is too important to delay. Your family will appreciate it. The charities you support will appreciate it. And you will appreciate the peace of mind you get from fulfilling one of your most important stewardship responsibilities. A properly drafted will is the only way to provide an orderly and timely plan for the settlement of your life.

What you do today can make a difference to your own well-being, to the future of the people you care about, and to the charities that you support. The value of having an estate plan can be measured in peace of mind, as well as in dollars. Do the best job you can today, knowing that additions or revisions to your will can be made in years to come.

If you do not have a will or your will has not been updated recently, a free copy of Will Planner is available from the Director of Development at ALS Society of Canada, 1-800-267-4257 x 205.

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How to stage your home to make the sale

(NC)—The “For Sale” sign is up, and the open houses are scheduled. The hard work of purging, patching, painting and pruning is behind you, so now comes the fun part—staging your home.

Not so fast, says Royal LePage executive Yvonne Ratigan. “Homeowners need to step back and take an objective look at their house,” she says. “Too often, our homes tell too much about us. In fact, what we need to do is create an environment that says something about the space and how it can be used.”

To make the biggest impact with potential buyers, Ratigan recommends these five tips for last-minute staging:

1. Remove all personal items from display. Family photos, fridge 'art' and awards should be stowed away so that buyers can picture themselves in your home.
2. Arrange furniture to provide a sense of spaciousness. Instead of four chairs at your kitchen dining area, opt for just two. Add a mirror to the front hall to help with a grand entrance. Remove knick-knacks from a dining hutch and replace with a simple white bowl.
3. Choose neutral linens for beds and bathrooms. Rather than patterns and prints, opt for neutral solid colours.
4. Let the light shine in. Open window coverings and consider adding extra lighting where needed, using floor and table lamps.
5. Make every room tell a story. Rooms and outdoor spaces should be staged to provide a sense of how the space could be used. For example, two patio chairs on a front porch tells a story of watching the world go by.

In addition to these tips, Ratigan recommends asking your real estate agent to recommend a professional home stager. “Having an objective view from someone who is not as attached to the home as you are is very



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important,” she says. Additional information about how to stage your home can be found online at www.royallepage.ca.

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Bathroom additions made easy

(NC)—Anyone who's ever done it knows that adding a bathroom to the home can be quite a challenge. Finding the right plumber and installing the drainage line can take days of construction, not to mention deep pockets.

"We can help with that," says Daniel Cayer, the national sales manager for Saniflo Canada, an industry leader in macerating toilet systems.

"Not only do our systems provide a cost-effective solution to homeowners and renovators, the macerating toilets also provide an alternative when standard plumbing fixtures are impossible or cost-prohibitive due to the positioning of existing drain lines. With our products, anyone can install a bathroom where needed: a basement, garage, attic, or even under the stairs."

Cayer says the macerating toilet systems eliminate the need for conventional rough-in with below-floor drainage. Because walls and floors remain intact, these above-floor systems do not require expensive renovations, and installation is quick and easy.

"Whether you are considering adding a spare bathroom to your home or even renovating an existing one, we offer a more simple solution to what can be a complex problem," Cayer continued. "Our toilets can be installed



in as little as half a day.

With macerating systems, he explained, flush water is routed through the toilet into a macerator where a rotating blade reduces waste and toilet paper, so it can be pumped away through 3/4-inch piping to the nearest drain line. This small-diameter pipe means drain lines can run without opening up walls and floors. Macerating systems also feature additional drainage inlets, allowing for the connection of a sink, bath and shower. The result is a desired bathroom installed quickly and cost effectively, anywhere you need.

More information is available online at www.saniflo.ca or toll-free at 1-800-363-5874.
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BATHROOM SAFETY

- Place non-slip mats in all areas where weight transfers occur.
- Properly install grab bars & tub bars where needed. (Do not use towel racks as grab bars).
- Install a stable raised toilet seat or TOILEVATOR.
- Consider a bath lift or shower chair for safety, comfort and balance.



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Transform tired looking kitchen cabinets into classics once again

(NC)—As the hub for so much of a family's activity, the kitchen is one of the most popular rooms in a home. So it's no surprise that with all the cooking and entertaining, the heart of the home can suffer from some natural wear and tear. The good news is making kitchen cabinets look like new again can be quite cost-effective with some easy do-it-yourself projects. Here's how:

Update the hardware – Chipped or worn or out cabinet knobs and pulls are easy to replace – and affordable too. Prices range from about \$1.00 for a basic knob to \$5.00 for a beautiful polished nickel knob or chrome finish handle by Martha Stewart Living, available at The Home Depot. Brighten with a fresh coat of paint – If new kitchen cabinets are not in the



budget, consider updating worn or wood grain finish cabinets using a cabinet transformation kit. Rust-Oleum offers an easy do-it-yourself system that requires no stripping, sanding or priming. It's also available in a light and dark colour option.

Add panel moulding – Another option for giving cabinets a facelift is adding more detail – essentially a panel effect – with wood moulding. This do-it-yourself project will require more work, but results in a completely new look. Once the moulding has been applied, finish with a fresh coat of paint and enjoy the transformation.

For more DIY projects to update your kitchen and the rest of your home, visit the new online DreamBook at www.homedepot.ca/know-how.

www.newscanada.com



URBAN LANDSCAPING: THE STORY

Neil and Lorna Pond have been beautifying the Kennebecasis Valley for over 22 years with their company, Urban Landscaping Ltd. From its beginning as a small landscape contracting company, Urban Landscaping has developed into a multi-faceted horticultural company offering creative landscaping and design work, customized property maintenance services, organic based fertilization programs, compost-soil manufacturing and a retail landscape centre with bulk mulches, soils and stone.



With its team of professional, dedicated employees, led by Operations Manager Carole Anne Ahier, Urban Landscaping has successfully captured their customers' unique "vision" for their property whether starting with a clean slate in a newly constructed home, or breathing new life into a property with a "landscape makeover".

Neil and Lorna are excited to have had Urban Landscaping receive multiple landscape awards in recent years for various local projects which showcased their company's landscaping creativity and quality of execution. They invite you to visit with them online at www.urbanlandscaping.ca, or in person at Urban Landscaping's office at 65 Marr Road "where imagination meets creation!"



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A Whole New Look With Tile & Grout Cleaning

Hamilton's Tile and Grout Restoration Division

Grout is porous and allows dirt and other contaminants to be trapped below the surface. Your tile isn't clean until the grout is clean. Dingy, dirty or stained grout is almost impossible to get clean using home methods. We have the equipment and know-how to restore your tile and grout surfaces to a beautiful appearance.



Tile & Grout Cleaning

As a homeowner you know that cleaning your tile and the grout area between can be challenging. The dirty, dingy or stained grout lines between the tile are very difficult to get clean on your own. Normal mopping of a floor leaves dirty detergent residue in the grout lines. Our extraction cleaning system incorporates cleaning agents, vacuum and a high pressure rinse to remove the dirt that homeowners can't.



if left unsealed, dirt, cooking oil, grease and detergent residue become embedded. Once it's embedded it requires professional cleaning to remove.

After professional cleaning, we recommend an application of a Clear Grout Sealer which makes the grout lines easier to maintain between professional cleanings.

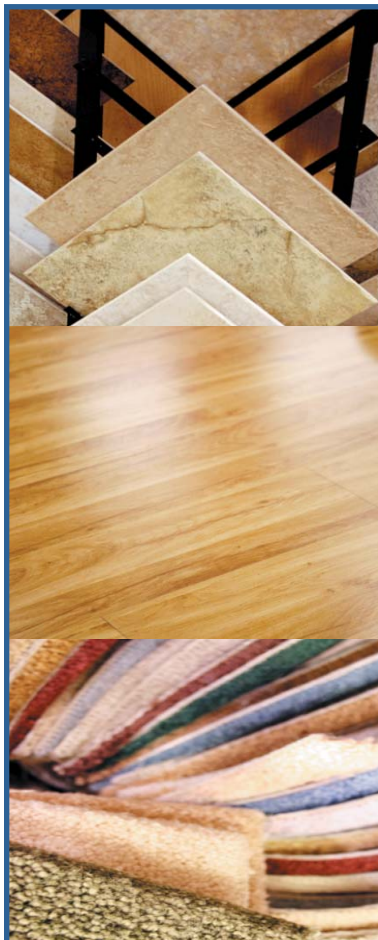
Clear Grout Sealing

When a tile floor is installed it's not common for a grout sealer to be applied. Grout is porous, and

without the costly expense of replacement.

Grout Re-coloring

When your grout has deeply embedded stains and dirt that won't come clean or perhaps you just want to change the decor in your home, Grout Re-coloring can renew the look of your tile and grout surfaces



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You Are Unique....

and your furniture should be also! Nothing dominates a room more than a sofa. If it's a mistake, you are sure to notice it every time you enter the room. Nothing can deprive your family of comfort more easily than the wrong choice in a sofa.

You have to consider the style, type of cushion, tailoring, scale, manufacturer's reputation, and your budget. A good sofa is an investment that will last a long time. The reason you want a quality piece of upholstered furniture is because the sofa that is built with quality materials will still look as good two, six, or ten years from now as the day you bought it.

Most of what makes a good sofa is invisible to the consumer so here are some of the guidelines that you can follow to help you with your decision. Many people make the mistake of not measuring, of not knowing which measurements are crucial or buying a piece of furniture that's the wrong scale for the room. You don't want an oversized, overstuffed sofa in a small room. If the sofa you are looking at isn't the size you have in mind, ask if it can be ordered in a custom size. With custom furniture, it can be made to order. A designer can assist you with these decisions by providing a furniture plan for your room.

Another important consideration is the cushions. Do you want a tightback sofa or one with loose cushions? A tightback sofa with loose seats may be appropriate for families with children. The best cushion filling for you depends on whether you prefer a firm or soft seat. On a sofa of good quality, standard fill is a polyfoam cushion wrapped with dacron polyester; it sits firm, and doesn't need to be fluffed when you get in and out of the seat. Insist on high-density or high-resilience foam. Another cushion option is encasing the foam in down, which gives a softer feeling. Also, there is an all-down option which is soft and fluffy, but will give a lived-in look. Lastly, there is spring and down which consists of springs inside the foam and then covered with down. There is no need to constantly fluff up the cushions. It is not that one is preferable to the other..... it is a question of what the person wants to sit on and what style the furniture is. A designer always asks how the room is going to be used in order to help you make your cushion choice and can assist in decisions such as seat and back combinations.

The frame on your sofa should be made from kiln dried hardwood that is screwed, glued and never nailed. The heavier the wood, the better it holds up. Corners should be doweled and corner-blocked to keep the frame from wobbling. The frame should carry a warranty by the manufacturer to the consumer.

Beneath the seat should be 8 gauge, fatigue tested, no sag springs. The idea is to hold the springs in place by tying them to one another and to the frame. The decks should be upholstered with white bonded sisal pads and two layers of felt padding. This makes it so that when you sit down, the cushion sinks comfortably and you don't feel as if you are perched on top of it.

Choosing upholstered furniture based on the color or look of a fabric is a mistake that many people make. Fabric may represent only about 20 percent of the cost of the sofa, but it elicits more than its share of the errors in judgement. You do, however, pay for good tailoring in a sofa and this is where a company's reputation counts. You don't want to have loose buttons or threads and you want the fabric tailored well to the frame. Durability in your fabric selection is important and it is something you need to take into consideration. Silks fade in a sunny window and linens will wrinkle! . There are many fabric and style combinations available and the choices can be overwhelming. A designer can help you choose a fabric that is durable and a design that is "uniquely yours".

Renee Godin is owner of **Interiors By Renee** at 28 Pettingill Road in Quispamsis. She will be showcasing her new line of custom upholstery "**Collections By Renee**" on April 14th and 15th at the upcoming Valley Expo at the Q-Plex.

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