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Get Your Grill Ready

(NC)—Canadians love to grill, and making the outdoor cooking experience sizzle all comes down to knowing what to look for in a quality barbecue. The Home Depot helps you through the decision-making process with a look at different types of grills available and their benefits.

- Natural gas – Natural gas barbecues heat up quickly and have the highest BTUs (British thermal units) for cooking. Natural gas barbecues require a natural gas line connection to your grill for setup, and are also available with side and back burners, temperature indicators and storage cabinets. The greatest benefit of natural gas barbecues is the readily available, endless supply of fuel – unlike propane gas barbecues



which need to be refilled. With a natural gas barbecue, you'll never have to worry about refills or running out of fuel in the middle of cooking.

- Propane gas – Like natural gas barbecues, propane gas grills heat up quickly and provide a high level of BTUs for cooking. They are also available with multiple burners with individual temperature controls, which will enable you to simultaneously cook different foods at different temperatures. Added features include temperature indicators, side burners, back burners and storage cabinets. Propane gas barbecues are easy to clean, easy to use, and can be counted on to produce the same kind of flame every time.

- Charcoal – Many grilling enthusiasts prefer charcoal for that tried and true authentic barbecue flavour as they cook foods at high temperatures to seal in juices. When compared with gas grills, charcoal units take longer to heat up; however, this problem can be alleviated by purchasing a charcoal barbecue with a gas-ignition system. Charcoal barbecues have fewer flare-ups than gas-fuelled units.

- Portable – Sometimes limited space makes a portable barbecue the best option. The compact design can offer flexibility and convenience, without sacrificing quality.

For more information, check out the BBQ buying guide at www.homedepot.ca.

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How To Splurge And Save Wisely In The Kitchen

(NC)—With a new year upon us, it's time for reinvention. Start fresh by injecting life and personality into the centre of your home—the kitchen. Spend the renovation budget on five key elements that will ensure both a functional and enduring space:

Countertops

The countertop is the focal point of the kitchen, and unfortunately shows the most wear and tear. Copper and stainless steel tops are the best investment for a long-lasting solution. Their porous nature can withstand high temperatures and are stain, rust and water resistant, making them easy to clean and preserve. If your budget is tight, choose natural stone such as granite or slate for its resilience and modern aesthetic appeal.

Appliances

Skimping on major appliances will leave you high and dry. It's worth investing in a reliable and durable brand that will withstand the years of heavy family use. We opted for Maytag's new line of kitchen appliances, built with Maytag Commercial Technology. This new kitchen line-up is made up of better-built components that are designed to last longer and deliver a more powerful performance.

The Sink Fixture

Often overshadowed by big-ticket items, a quality sink fixture is worth the investment. If you plan to build it into a stone countertop, buy quality now, as they are difficult and costly to replace later on. Look for an 18-gauge or 16-gauge model and pair with functional taps boasting savvy details such as integral filtration, sensors and hot-water dispensers.

Lighting

The most efficient way to instantly enlarge and enhance your kitchen is with advanced lighting. An elegant large ceiling fixture is the best splurge, combined with quality LED lights below your wall cabinets and below the countertop to illuminate drawers.

Cabinets

Opt for solid wood cabinet faces with hand-applied finishes and full plywood-box construction. Rollout trays and custom widths will maximize storage capacity and mask unsightly fillers. Additionally, look for drawers that have dovetail joinery and heavy mechanical slides, which will allow you to customize the layout for your lifestyle.

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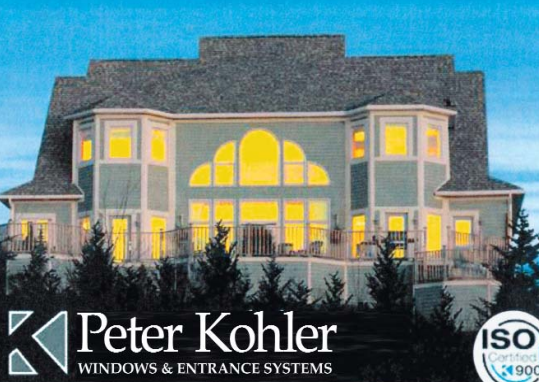
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FAQ About Wood Flooring

Home décor advice

By Michel Collin, Mercier Wood Flooring

Q: What's the difference between laminate flooring and engineered wood?

A: Laminate flooring may often look like wood but it's not. It's made of melamine-infused paper glued to a wood chip composite. Engineered wood, much like solid hardwood, is real wood. It is a veneer of hardwood in the species of your choice glued on top of (in most cases) three to five thin sheets of crossbanded wood.

It's ideal for kitchens and basements where 3/4" solid wood floors are not recommended because of high moisture level variations. Solid wood will expand or contract with heat and moisture, whereas engineered wood flooring, because it's made of crossbanded layers of wood, offers more dimensional stability. Mercier's engineered wood flooring offers optimum stability because it contains seven crossbanded layers of wood. Another advantage of engineered wood flooring versus laminate is that engineered wood can be sanded after scratches and dings develop. Engineered flooring is also a great choice for renovations because it can be installed directly onto most existing floors.

Installation is even easier now thanks to our latest product category innovation called "LOC". It's an engineered floor that does not require glue or mechanical fasteners to install. Instead it features a user-friendly locking system which is easy to install and ideal for multi-story developments, basements, and do-it-yourself project

Q: What are the advantages of prefinished wood floors over traditional installed wood floors?

A: First of all prefinished wood floors are stained and finished at the factory so you don't have to deal with toxic fumes, sanding dust, labour and the long wait required for staining and applying coats of finish at home.

Another advantage is that the finish is applied under controlled conditions, which means that you don't have to worry about dust or other contaminants affecting the finish. Manufacturers can also apply more coats of finish giving you added protection. In fact, the Mercier Generations finish features ten coats applied at the factory with extreme accuracy. It produces a smooth, uniform finish with unparalleled abrasion resistance and beauty. Lastly you save on the cost because it cuts down on the labor required to install. More information on wood flooring is available at www.mercierwoodflooring.com.

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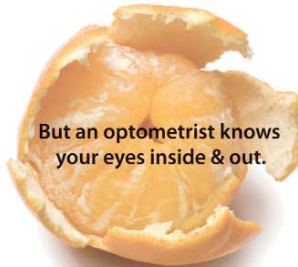
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Faucets Are Functional - And Beautiful Too

(NC)—The kitchen faucet can be used upwards of 40 times in a single day in your home, making it one of the most-used appliances in your home. Recent developments in style and technology have resulted in a wide variety of faucet options available to homeowners. So how do you choose the one that's right for you?

Whether you're a seasoned chef who loves to entertain or you quickly make dinner for your family so you can move on to other things, there's a faucet for you. Here is a breakdown of some of today's most functional and stylish kitchen faucets, at each end of the budget spectrum. No matter what you need and want, it can be found. The first step is to determine your needs and how you spend your time in the kitchen.

Classic and functional

You like classic form and durability. You're looking for a faucet that will go the distance and look stylish in your kitchen, even if you decide to update or redo the décor. You want functionality, but don't need the latest and greatest just yet. Delta's Linden faucet features a pull-out wand with an enhanced flow option making tasks like filling large pots or watering plants quick and easy. The clean style is modern without being bold. Linden starts at \$298.

Sleek and techie

You're a foodie who loves to cook at home for your kids. You need a faucet that is functional and can help make your food prep more efficient (you've got hungry mouths waiting). Look for a faucet that has touch technology, such as Delta's new Pilar kitchen faucet. Featuring a

modern design coupled with the latest touch technology that lets you turn the faucet on and off with a touch anywhere on the faucet body, Pilar is a distinctive faucet, ideal for a busy family home and sticky fingers. Pilar starts at \$594.

The wow factor for the serious chef

You love to cook and entertain. You strive to provide your friends and family with the chef's table experience and the kitchen is the style centre of your home. You need a faucet that can keep up with you and be the showpiece in your favourite room in the house. The Axor Citterio Semi Pro is straight out of a professional kitchen and combines professional essentials with reliability, durability and a striking form. Full and needle spray modes, a pliable, arcing handspray and 360-degree swivel radius are sure to ignite your passions. The Axor Citterio Semi pro starts at \$1463.

More information is available online at deltafaucet.com and hansgrohe.ca.
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Elegant Living

Elegance at the window is key, particularly as the formal living room typically resides at the front of the home, giving the first impression of its style. Luminette Modern Draperies from Hunter Douglas feature beautiful woven fabrics that offer the look and function of traditional draperies, while making a consistent, clean, modern statement. (NC)—Formal living rooms will always hold their own against family rooms as one of the most essential elements of a home, both for entertaining purposes and simply for decoration. Sue Rainville, director of marketing for Hunter Douglas, Canada's leading manufacturer of custom window fashions, offers the following advice on how to adorn a formal living room in homes today:

• **Traditional versus Contemporary:** Just because this room is deemed “formal” does not automatically mean it must have a traditional setting. This room is a reflection of the tastes and styles of the homeowner, both in attitude and furnishings and should be decorated to suit that style.

• **Floorcoverings:** Ornate decorations take precedence in the formal living room with the floor serving as the launching pad. For a more traditional feel, use Oriental rugs in common shades of red, orange, yellow and blue. For a more contemporary flare, rugs with geometric patterns or exotic animal prints such as black-and-white zebra stripes add a zesty element.

• **Window Treatments:** Elegance at the window is key, particularly as this room typically resides at the front of the home, giving the first impression of the style of the rest of what's inside. Luminette Modern Draperies from Hunter Douglas feature beautiful woven fabrics that offer the look and function of traditional draperies, while making a consistent, clean, modern statement. Unlike draperies, they also offer quick delivery, easy motorization options and the Hunter Douglas lifetime guarantee.

• **Walls:** Fill this area with

luxurious items such as ornate mirrors and wall sconces that makes the eye wander around the room. Paint hues should be simple so they do not compete with the furnishings and other decorative elements. Colours such as taupe, beige or even a light gold work best.

• **Final Touches:** Finish off the look with important accessories including lamps, antique clocks and decorative books, or even a whimsical chandelier. Remember, quality over quantity, as you want the room to emit elegance, not clutter.

Using these tips, your living room will be fit to entertain in no time. More information is available online at www.hunterdouglas.ca or toll-free at 1-800-265-8000. www.newscanada.com

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Backyard Pool And Spa Safety Rules

(NC)—Backyard pools are a great source of fun, refreshment and exercise for the entire family. Knowing and following some general pool safety rules will ensure that everyone enjoys your pool safely. During 2009 four renowned associations that actively promote water safety across Canada got together to prepare a sign of important rules for the safe use of pools and hot tubs. It was a meaningful way of recognizing an impressive set of milestone anniversaries as follows:

The St. John Ambulance•Canada (125 years old)
 The Royal Lifesaving Society of Canada (100 years old)
 The Canadian Red Cross (100 years old)
 The Pool & Hot Tub Council of Canada (50 years old)

All pool owners are encouraged to post at least one of these signs in clear view at poolside. Signs can be easily affixed to gates, fences and sheds.

The signs are available in both official languages and may be ordered directly from the Pool & Hot Tub Council of Canada. More information is available on line at www.poolcouncil.ca.

Be sure to do your part to promote safety at home and this includes making sure all bathers are fully aware of the rules before entering the pool/spa area.

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Choosing The Hot Tub That's Right For You

(NC)— A residential hot tub can transform a home into a vacation destination twelve months of the year. When you decide to join the thousands across Canada already enjoying the benefits of hot tubs, you will first need to choose between the different styles currently available.

Portable hot tubs can be easily relocated within a yard or to a new property. These one-piece units are available in a variety of water jet configurations and seating arrangements. They feature acrylic or composite shells and conceal plumbing and mechanical elements behind a finished cabinet. Portable tub sizes vary significantly, accommodating anywhere from two to more than ten people at a time. They can be fitted with hundreds of different accessories from TVs to lighting and are simple and quick to install.

Often similar to portable units, built-in hot tubs are recessed into a custom enclosure in a deck or floor. They can feature acrylic shells or a concrete base with a mosaic tile finish. The latter allows homeowners to choose the size, shape and design of the tub, matching personal preference and existing décor. This style of tub boasts easier access and a more elegant design but can be difficult to repair or relocate.

For the purist, classic wooden-style hot tubs are still produced by some manufacturers. Made from staves of cedar or redwood, these tubs add a wonderful rustic look to any setting. Many modern wooden models come with built-in liners that help extend their life expectancy.

Swim spas are some of the largest hot tub models available. They are ideal for homeowners who want the benefits of both a pool and a hot tub despite space restrictions. The defining feature of a swim spa is the powerful, fully adjustable main jet that pumps a stream of water allowing swimmers to swim in place. These long rectangular shells can be finished with a custom cabinet or set into a floor or deck. More information on this topic is available online at www.poolcouncil.ca or toll-free at 1-800-879-7066.

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Spring Forward With These Four Important Household Reminders

(NC)—Mid-March means a change from standard time (ST) to daylight savings time (DST). As we remember to adjust our clocks one hour ahead, don't forget to think about these seasonal home maintenance tips:

1. Clean out the medicine cabinet: Remove items that are past their expiry date. They might be dangerous to keep in the house so be sure to dispose of them in a responsible way – many drugstores will dispose of old medicine for you. Also, make note of prescriptions or products that need to be refilled.
2. Check your filters: Often, there's no outward sign that your fridge water filter needs to be changed because the contaminants and other chemicals are imperceptible. Leading brands like Whirlpool, Maytag and KitchenAid recommend changing your filters every six months to ensure that your water and ice remains fresh and great tasting. More information can be found online at www.whirlpoolparts.ca.
3. Check the First Aid kit: Changing the clock is great time to remember to stock up your First Aid kit. Ensure all of your emergency supplies are replaced and up to date.
4. Check the batteries: Your smoke and carbon monoxide detectors are the most important battery powered devices in your home and need a reliable power source. Replace these batteries, but don't throw them out, save them for remote controls and other battery devices in your home.

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Maximize Unused Space With A Basement Renovation

(NC)—A good foundation is the key to most things in life, and this statement holds true for your home, too. Many homeowners see their basement as a cold, uninviting place and do not consider it a comfortable living space for the family. But by simply upgrading your basement insulation, this area can be transformed into a warm, comfortable space for everyone to enjoy.

Cheryl West, an insulation expert at Owens Corning, suggests installing insulation up to a value of R-24 for your basement's foundation walls, to make the most of your basement's space and to help you enjoy the overall comfort and warmth in your home.

To achieve this standard for your basement walls, install a layer of 2" INSULPINK® interlocking insulation panels and R-14 PINK FIBERGLAS® insulation batts. INSULPINK® insulation system is easy to install and is lightweight and durable, with exceptional moisture resistance. PINK FIBERGLAS® batts provide outstanding thermal performance and are made from over 70 per cent** recycled content, the highest industry standard in Canada.

Adequate insulation in your basement will not only create an additional living area for your family to enjoy, but will also help save* on heating and cooling costs all year round. This home renovation project will help transform your dark, dingy basement into a comfortable and inviting space in no time.

Something else that will keep you warm is the thought of all the savings you will make when renovating your home this spring. The ecoENERGY Retrofit – Homes program is offering a grant of up to \$5000 from the Government of Canada for energy efficiency renovations which have not yet started. Some energy utilities and provincial governments offer additional funding.

Learn more about how to insulate your basement online at www.owenscorning.ca. More information on ecoENERGY grants and incentives can be found at www.ecoaction.gc.ca/homes. What are you waiting for? Start warming up your basement today.

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Six Projects To Dramatically Update Your Kitchen In Six Hours Or Less

(NC)—With the amount of time you spend in your kitchen, why settle for out-of-date features and décor? Why not give your kitchen a 180-degree makeover by trying these six simple projects.

Home Sweet Kitchen

Start by swapping any cold and unstylish fluorescent tube lighting with more decorative chandeliers or flush-mount lighting to flood your kitchen with ambient light. Next, fill in shadowy areas – or highlight objects you admire – with spot lights, such as recessed cans or dangling pendant lamps.

Time: 2 -6 hours depending on number of fixtures

Update your Sink with a New Faucet

As a workhorse and focal point of your kitchen, update your faucet with a functional and stylish model. Try Moen Canada's Boutique® Pulldown Kitchen faucet, with its distinct styling that blends beautifully into granite and other solid-surface countertops for an upscale and stunning look. Or, try an eco-friendly option, such as Moen Canada's Dorsey™ Eco-Performance kitchen faucet, which offers consumer-preferred pullout/pulldown functionality with three unique settings – eco-performance stream or spray

for tasks like washing dishes that require a constant, yet low-water flow, or a full-flow option when filling a pot or pitcher. This simple kitchen update can yield up to a 32 percent water savings – while also adding exquisite styling into your kitchen.



Time: 1.5 hours

Shortage of Storage

With so many gadgets, appliances and don't forget food – kitchen storage can quickly become sparse. Start by organizing your current storage – purging any items that you haven't used in years. Next, if you have room – add a kitchen island or additional cabinets to provide more storage and work room.

Time: 6 hours

Add Sass with a Backsplash

Tired of cleaning food or grease splashes from your kitchen walls? Spruce up drab or dirty-looking kitchen walls with a dynamic backsplash to walls near the sink or stove top. There are hundreds of styles, textures and patterns to choose from that can increase the sophistication in your kitchen and make it easier to clean!

Time: 6 hours

Getting a New Grip on Cabinets

Cleaning your cabinets with soap and water then polishing is the best way to make them look new again. Replacing old handles and hardware to your cabinets with a new stylish design and finish to match your new faucet will add the final polished look to your kitchen.

Time: 2-5 hours depending on number of cabinets
Advance the Technology

Whether it's a microwave that fits in a drawer... a refrigerator with a TV... an oven that you can program... or a customized wine and beverage cooler, adding new upscale appliances can take enjoyment in your kitchen to a whole new level. However, if these high-end appliances are out of your budget, upgrade your current appliances with new energy-efficient models in the latest finishes.

Time: 2 hours shopping + waiting on deliveries

In no time at all you can easily turn your kitchen from drab to fab with just a few simple projects. For more information about any of Moen Canada's products, visit moen.ca or call (800) 465-6130.

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Achieving Comfort With Central Air Conditioning

Blame it on global warming or overpopulation, but the increasingly hotter temperatures leave much to be desired for many people. As a result, we seek out cooler areas for a respite from the sun and heat. Generally the oasis is an air conditioned building.

However, those who have wrestled with a cumbersome, heavy and leaky window air conditioning unit know how inconvenient window units can be. Perhaps you've considered installing central air conditioning in your home, but think it might prove too difficult and costly? Think again.

Homeowners with a forced-air heating system already in place have the majority of the framework done for an air conditioning addition. Typically, the system can be added by two technicians in a mere two or three days. For a 2,000 square-foot home, the average cost may be between \$3,000 and \$4,000.

If there is no ductwork in place, the cost will increase and it'll likely take twice as long for the job to be completed. But don't worry about your home being destroyed. A competent contractor experienced in doing this sort of retrofitting can hide ductwork in closets, attics and behind walls without having to tear up the home.

Once you've decided on adding a unit, there will be certain procedures to follow.

1. The contractor will have to do calculations for the anticipated load on the system based on how much heat gain your home receives. This will help determine the size of the unit needed to cool the home efficiently. A unit that is too small may have to work harder and never completely cool the home. A unit that is too large may cool the rooms too quickly and not be able to properly assess humidity levels -- shutting off before humidity is reduced.

2. Next you'll decide on a unit. There are package units that pair all the equipment into one piece that attaches to ductwork. Then there are split systems that have the condenser outdoors and the fan and coils inside.

3. Placement of the unit will be your final consideration. You don't want to place a unit next to a window or doors if you are bothered by noise. Even quiet units will make noise. Also, you don't want to restrict air flow around the condenser. It needs to exhaust warm air. You can, however, camouflage the unit with landscaping; just don't cover it up.

4. You may need to have your ductwork inspected to ensure it can meet the capacity of the cooler forced air for efficiency.

5. As you would with heat, a programmable thermostat ensures you cool the house when needed and don't waste energy. SH102069



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Home Decorating Tips: A Small Change Can Make A Big Difference

(NC)—For many Canadians, there is no better time to tackle a home decoration project than the spring and summer months. Warm weather brings the ultimate in flexibility for designing and carrying out a décor plan, and it's also a great opportunity to get inspired by the refreshed palettes of the season.

When it comes to the latest home design trends, it's all about comfort. Industry experts are pointing to the "simple sophistication" of an understated colour scheme (think subtle beiges, pale greens and cloudy blues) paired with rustic or casual accessories. Frugal decorators are also opting to refurbish their existing furniture and home accessories as opposed to investing in costly new items – a sign of the cautious economic times.

According to Shelli Gardner, CEO and co-founder of Stampin' Up!, a crafting and décor company, there has been a significant rise in the popularity of vinyl art applications and stencils and that can be applied to walls or furniture. "These types of products are perfect for creating quick and distinctive home décor accents. What's more, because they are cost effective, they are a great option to keep up with changing trends and tastes without having to spend a lot of money," she said.

Options abound for creative types looking to update their homes.

Stampin' Up! offers two popular collections of decorating tools with Décor Stencils, a set of accents and patterns that allow decorators to transform a room with any colour of their choosing, and Décor Elements, a collection of self-adhesive vinyl art that is easy to apply and remove from surfaces. The decorating products can be used on walls, mirrors, wooden furniture, windows, or virtually any other hard or smooth surface. The Décor Elements collection, which was originally launched in 2008, features a variety of exclusive images that have been enhanced and expanded for 2010. In keeping with the increased trend towards comfort and familiarity, recent additions to the collection's designs include floral blossoms, songbirds and playful images for a child's room (visit stampin-up.ca to see more samples). Application is as simple as rubbing the design on to a wall with the help of a transfer sheet.

For Canadians looking to update their kitchens, Gardner suggests working with the new chalkboard-style wall applications, which combine fashion and function to create both a decorative focal point and a tool for family members to jot down recipes, shopping lists, and messages.

Whether it's a full-house makeover or a simple update to a room, it's the perfect season to get inspired, get creative and have fun.

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Gardening 101

(NC)—The weather is getting warm, and while you've entertained the idea of gardening, you may not think you have what it takes. You too can garden once you know what you're doing. Gardening is a fulfilling hobby and great exercise too. The Home Depot offers you the following Gardening 101 three-step checklist to set you on the path to greening your thumbs this spring season.

Step one: Build your basic gardening toolbox

There are six basic tools a beginner needs to get started: a spading fork, a hoe, a watering can, a round-ended shovel, a bow rake, and a set of garden shears. All of these tools can be purchased for less than \$150. While you can always add to your toolbox later, these basic tools will take you far.

Step two: Know your space

Before you start picking plants, pre-investigate your outdoor space so you have all the right information at your fingertips. Do you have a small or large space? Measure it and bring the dimensions with you for clarity. Is your space sun-drenched or shade-covered? This will directly impact the plants you choose. Do you want plants that will last year after year or for a single season only? This will determine whether you select perennials or annuals. Ask for assistance while you're shopping. Between The Home Depot's exclusive line of Optimum plants and the expertise of its garden centre associates, you'll be set before you know it.



Step three: Get out there and play

Once you have your toolkit and your plants, get outside and have fun. Gardening is a productive activity in every way. Not only can you beautify your home while reducing stress and getting exercise, you can also enjoy the fruits of your work throughout the season, whether it's with a beautiful landscape, fresh flowers or delicious vegetables and fruits.

Follow these simple steps and you will be a master gardener in no time. More information on plants, projects or products can be found at The Home Depot garden centre nearest you or online at www.homedepot.ca/gardencentre. www.newscanada.com

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Something Old And Something New: Marrying Decor At Home

(NC)—Combining classic and contemporary decor elements is one of the most interesting ways to subscribe to favourite trends while incorporating proven elements that give a space enduring appeal. Yet the thought of straying from one fixed style is enough to intimidate some homeowners into furnishing entirely with coordinated items. Luckily for the risk-averse, classics evolve and leading design companies find subtle ways to marry influences.

Back to black

It seems like every season brings a new declaration about which hot colour has taken its turn replacing black. The fact of the matter is that the iconic shade most of us turn to for reassurance will never be replaced. It will, however, continue to evolve.

Today we see softer shades with more texture, depth and versatility. Caviar, the latest evolution of black introduced by kitchen and bath leader Kohler, is a good example. With a unique warmth and depth that makes Caviar a versatile grey, the new colour for cast iron pairs swimmingly with stainless steel appliances and a variety of natural stone and concrete surfaces. Just like black, it's a safe and beautiful choice.

Opposites attract

Toying with unexpected fixture and finish combinations is a good way to balance the old and the new, though it calls for a more daring attitude. As classic finishes and colours continue to be reinvented, the pool from which to choose an opposite that attracts is looking more like a sea. The romantic lines of a traditional faucet can pair beautifully with a bold new palette, just as classic colours and shades can bring familiarity and enduring charm to clean geometric lines.

Pairing a timeless vanity and lavatory with a modern, versatile faucet is another good way to diversify. For example, achieving harmony among the two styles brings the best of both worlds: warmth and comfort, as well as clean, simple structure.

Looking beyond what's actually in the space, and instead getting a feeling for the mood it creates, is a good way to ensure balance. Taking the safe bet of rigid consistency opens a room up to the possibility of boredom, both visually and in terms of its energy.

At the end of the day, a homeowner must love the way a room makes them feel to truly be able to enjoy it. Be honest about your needs; this isn't the place to compromise and it's essential to have the features and functions that will simplify every day. But do take some risks with aesthetic considerations. It's these details that will capture your attention and imagination, making the practical as interesting and enjoyable as can be. www.newscanada.com

Rodney Weston MP/député - Saint John



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Real Estate Tips: 5 Ways To Maximize The Return On Your Investment

(NC)—You've outgrown your home and are ready to move. The big question is where to spend your money so you get the maximum profit from your home with the minimum investment. Royal LePage offers the following advice on preparing your home for sale.

1. De-clutter –Almost every home shows better with less furniture. Simply removing a couple of items will make the rooms look bigger and be more enticing to buyers.
2. Clean – A clean house is a welcoming house. Make certain everything sparkles from mirrors to floors. Don't forget to clean out closets and kitchen cabinets.
3. Update the Kitchen - Kitchens are the heart of a home and the room that buyers look at first. Budget tips for updating this space include new faucet and sink, refinishing the cabinets with a fresh coat of paint and installing new hardware.
4. Paint the Interior – While the plum colour on the walls works for your decor, it is not everyone's taste. Painting can update a home and increase its attractiveness to buyers. Use a neutral colour like light beige and paint all rooms the same colour.
5. Curb Appeal – First impressions count. Trim bushes and trees and keep the lawn mowed. Spray wash the exterior doors and windows, paint the trim, doors and window frames. You may also want to plant flowers along the walks.

An agent can help you maximize your home's impact on potential buyers and bring top dollars. More advice on preparing your home for sale or finding an agent in your region can be found online at www.royalpage.com.

www.newscanada.com

Must-Haves for a Mature Household

(NC)—According to the AARP and National Association of Home Builders, the aging population will be the number two issue affecting the remodeling industry over the next five years. Why? Because today's homeowners overwhelmingly prefer to live independently in their current homes... even if it means remodeling to meet their needs. Whether you modify your current house – or purchase new – these are some must-haves to ensure you'll have a safe, secure and easily maintained home to age in place:

Floor Plan

- Open floor plan with wide, accessible paths
- Single-story home or a two-story with a first-floor master bedroom

Bathroom

- First-floor master bathroom equipped with safety products, such as grab bars, elevated toilet seats and shower chairs
- Curbless shower, featuring a handheld showerhead with an extra long hose
- Adjustable- or varied-height countertops

Kitchen and Laundry

- Adjustable- or varied-height countertops
- Upper wall cabinetry three inches lower than conventional height
- Pullout kitchen faucet with lever handles
- First-floor laundry with front-loading machines

Electrical and Security

- Light switches by each entrance to halls and rooms
- Security system connected to police, fire and EMS
- Flashing porch light or 911 switch

Flooring

- Smooth, non-glare, slip-resistant surfaces
- Less than ½-inch pile carpet with firm padding

Exterior

- Low-maintenance exteriors, such as vinyl or brick
- Covered garage or carport
- Handrails near steps

For more information about ADA-compliant pullout kitchen faucets or bath safety products, such as SecureMount™ Grab Bars, elevated toilet seats and shower chairs visit from Moen, visit moen.ca or call (800) 465-6130. www.newscanada.com

Decorating Rules You'll Be Happy To Break

By Cheryl Grant, Trends Consultant

(NC)—Lots of helpful decorating hints, tips and rules have been published over the years. But for every rule written, someone has invariably decided against it and has had fantastic results. Gone are the days of holding true to the line. You can wear white after Labour Day and you can break the rules of decorating. Today's interior design should be a personal statement. It should reflect who you are, what you love and how you want to live. Here are a few decorating rules from the past that can be ignored.

Old Rule: Don't mix interior design themes (Traditional, Country or Modern). Focus on one theme.

Wrong. Today the gloves are off. You can mix elements of the three design categories with wonderful results. Mixing modern pieces into country or formal, traditional rooms can add drama and make a unique personal statement. Richly textured cork or distressed, finished hardwood flooring, normally suited to a country home, will bring easy comfort to a traditional interior.

Old Rule: Small spaces demand light colours, while large spaces are

best suited to a dark palette.

Wrong. While a light colour does make a space appear larger, and darker colour will warm up a large room, it may not support the final decorating effect you're after. A colour scheme should be selected based on the look and feel you want, regardless of the room size. Cozy, dramatic or strong décor statements can be attained with deep, rich colours. Light, airy and easy-living atmospheres are created from soft pastels or neutrals.

Old Rule: Wide-plank flooring is best suited for a larger open space.

Wrong. Wide-plank flooring looks great in a large space, but it can also make a smaller room appear larger. Plank width should be selected according to the effect you want. Narrow plank (2" to 3") offers a retro feel, adding significant texture to a décor. Wide plank (5" to 7" and up) adds large-scale drama, while providing a cleaner look through minimal texture.


Old Rule: Never paint over natural wood.

Wrong. Often old wood paneling, wood trim or furniture pieces can look dated. No amount of stripping and refinishing will lend a clean, modern edge. If you love your wood trim or moldings, but the wood stain depresses the overall décor, paint it white and watch the room come alive. Don't tear down that paneling or throw out that old dresser. Refinish with a soft, matte, neutral paint. Add new hardware and voilà – you have a brand new look. Natural wood baseboards and door jams can break up the overall look of a room. Paint the wall trim to blend with the interior walls for better balance and flow.

Old Rule: Stick to one type of flooring for consistency.

Wrong. You can mix different types of flooring to add character and texture to a room. Just ensure the colour matches to maintain a consistent flow and keep your space open. Cork, hardwood, leather, laminate, tile and broadloom combinations work well within the same space. Often extra large spaces (Great Rooms) need to be "cozied up". You can add that warmth and even define the use of the room by inlaying different types of flooring. Take a look at a Canadian flooring company, Torlys for flooring ideas.

So go ahead and break a few rules. Create your own interior design statement. The results can often add that special wow you've been looking for. www.newscanada.com



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Create A Patio Oasis On A Budget

(NC)—Turn your patio into a summer oasis without breaking the bank with these five simple steps from Hilary Farr, designer and host of W Network's Love It or List It.

Lighting

You can transform your garden into a romantic or festive summer oasis inexpensively and easily. String up outdoor lights: use your soft white LED outdoor Christmas lights or try eco-conscious solar powered or paper lanterns. For a more exotic look, invest in a few standing torches. If you have a permanent shade structure or patio roof, install a chandelier to create an elegant outdoor extension of your home.

Outdoor Rug

An easy and inexpensive way to bring the warmth and intimacy of an interior room outdoors is with a patio rug. Choose a vibrant or earthy shade to accent the colour palette of your outdoor space. Look for a sturdy stain-resistant material that can withstand weather damage, mildew and direct sunlight.

Revive Patio Furniture

Instead of replacing your white plastic patio chairs, make them look new again by using Vim Cream to remove dirt and tough stains. Add a finishing touch with new chair covers or colourful throw pillows.

Invest in Greenery

To create a secluded getaway feel on your patio, add "green" walls with potted outdoor plants. Use large decorative containers or plant flowers and bushes at the edge of the concrete slab or terrace. By adding stones or a pathway from the garden you create depth and the illusion of more space.

Bring the Barbeque Back to Life

It's not as hard as you think to get your barbeque ready for grilling season by giving it a good cleaning. Use Vim Cream to easily remove tough grime on the grill and grease tray. Apply oil to cast iron cooking grills to protect the coating and to decrease sticking.

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(NC)—With Earth Day around the corner, people are starting to think about their commitment towards the environment. They tend to become overwhelmed with everything they think they should do to be “greener” and can often forget that every little action counts and adds up. According to Gillian Deacon, bestselling author and Cascades Tissue Group spokesperson: “Going green is not a destination, it is a journey. Don't feel you have to change everything in one day. When even one member of the family starts to take simple green steps on a regular basis, the effect is contagious. Greener living is so rewarding on so many levels.”

“Studies show increasing numbers of Canadians are taking small steps to make their everyday lives greener,” says Suzanne Blanchet, president of Cascades Tissue Group. The challenge now is to go even greener. To help, Cascades Tissue Group created www.simplegreenaction.ca, an initiative that raises awareness about the environment and helps Canadians act ecologically every day.

Here are a couple of ideas:

Store It – When making lunch for your family, be sure to use environmentally friendly containers. Refillable containers and reusable cloth wraps or pouches make so much more sense for health, for the planet, and for cost-savings.

Switch It – Help save trees by switching your toilet tissue. If, for one day, every Canadian switched just one roll of virgin fibre bathroom tissue for a roll of Cascades Enviro 100% recycled fibre bathroom tissue, more than 61,000 trees could be saved. It takes more than 15 years to grow a tree, and just seconds to flush.

Walk It – Cut back on your car usage and make an effort to walk more. This may not always be an option, but if you do have to drive why not invest in carbon offsetting your usage.

Eat It – Buy locally grown and organic products. You'll not only support your local community, but you'll also be eating healthier and will reduce “food miles,” cutting down on the burning of fossil fuels.

Write It – Print on and use recycled paper products for your office and at home. Making this small change can save trees, energy, water, and landfill space compared to virgin paper.

Those are only a sample of simple ways to make earth day good resolution last all year.

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Spring Bathroom Trends For 2010

(NC)—The spring is a great time to inject new life into your bathroom or powder room by refreshing your space and making small changes that can have a big impact. But figuring out where to start and how to keep up with the hot trends can be overwhelming. Join us as we cut through the design clutter and bring you the “must have” bathroom trends for spring 2010, so you can create a beautiful, functional space that suits the needs of your family.

Make a personal statement

Your home is an extension of you and your family and should reflect your personality and unique style. Don't be afraid to inject bold colours or patterns, particularly in powder rooms. Think patterned wallpaper (yes, wallpaper is back), bright accessories, distinctive mirrors, even coloured sinks.

Embrace your curves

Eliminate any remnants of the cold, sterile bathroom of the past with a soft, curvy space that welcomes you. Replace hard edges with round, warm corners. Installing a new showerhead or handshower can not only change the look of your bathroom, but also your shower experience. The Hansgrohe PuraVida handshower features three spray

modes for maximum comfort and a sculptural shape that commands attention.

Water-saving smarts

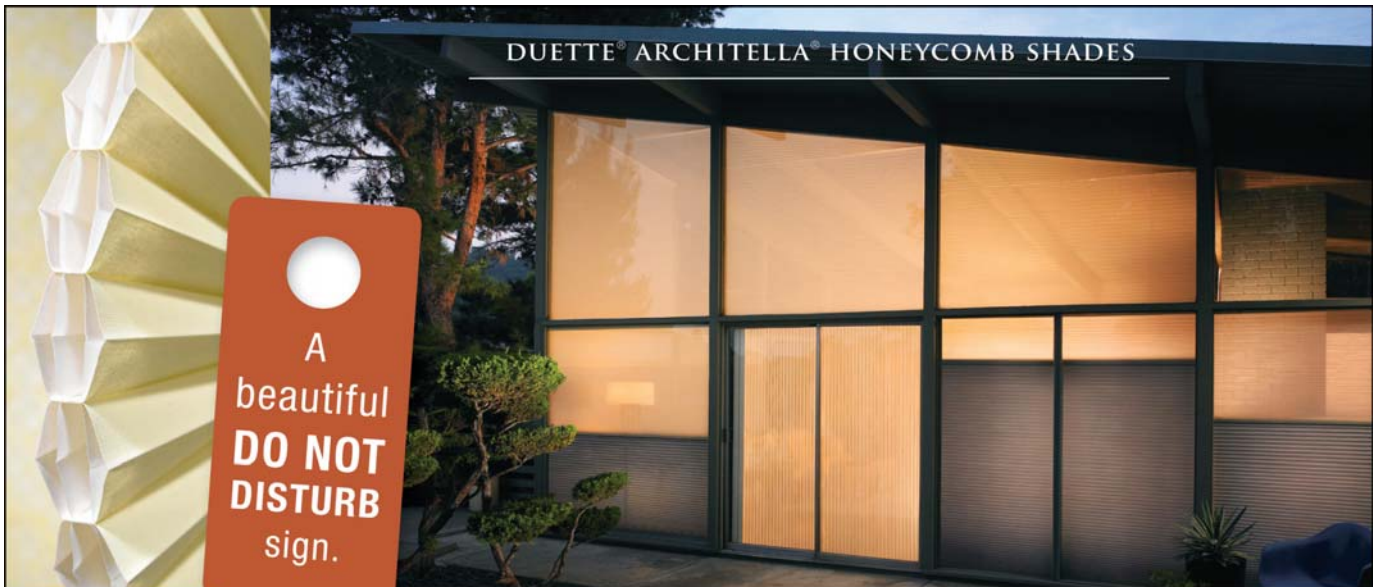
Saving water not only helps the environment, it also saves money. And cutting down on water consumption in the bathroom is easier than you might think. Dual flush or low flush toilets can significantly cut water consumption and low flow faucets are great for the environment and stylish too. The new Virage lavatory faucet from Brizo saves up to 20 per cent more water than a traditional faucet and features architectural twists that are truly unique.

Go fancy with your floors

Ceramic tiles are the typical choice for bathroom floors, but why not try something different for a dramatic and unique look? Bamboo and cork are ideal: both are naturally resistant to bacteria, mold and mildew and deter moisture - and provide a beautifully finished look.

More information can be found online at hansgrohe.ca and brizo.com.

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One, Two, Three, Four – A New Look For Your Windows

by Janice Morrisette

Photo Caption: Two ways that a careful choice of window dressing can contribute to an exciting and practical dual-purpose space. Trendy roller blinds in a sheerweave material control natural light at the windows, while floor-to-ceiling PanelTrac in the same fabric sets boundaries between living areas.(NC)—Planning a window treatment can, at first glance, look quite complicated. So many choices.... So many decisions.... But follow these simple directions, and you'll have it all together in no time.

I'm indebted to Mary Dobson, who you have seen on Citytv's CityLine, for guidance in writing this piece. Mary is also spokesperson for Levolor Window Fashions in Canada, and she knows whereof she speaks.

First, Mary says: "Think function. The reason we put coverings on our windows is to control natural light, and for privacy." With the right choice, you can have full sunshine, filtered light or complete blackout. The need for control, and for privacy, may well be different from room to room – and there are many ways of getting just the degree of control you want.

Second, Mary says: "Think style. A window treatment is part of a room, and it should co-ordinate with your design ideas and with your lifestyle." A window treatment can be traditional, contemporary, country, or any other style you feel comfortable with. Use colours, textures and hardware to make the windows part of the room.

Third, Mary says: "Think products. There are many different types of roller shades, blinds, plus Romans and PanelTrac. Decide which will serve you best." For example, cellulars are practical, versatile, save energy and control light in unique ways. Wood blinds, in a range of materials and colours, look great in the den, a home office, a kids' room and even a dining room. Roller shades come in a rainbow of colours and fabrics. Roman shades add a touch a class. PanelTrac, floor to ceiling panels, can create new ways to use your living space.

Fourth, Mary says: "Measure everything. Measure it once, twice and even a third time, because to get the best results, all window coverings have to fit correctly." Your best guide to accurate measurement is the Levolor website, which gives you directions for every type of installation.

You can review the many types of window coverings, study a wide range of different styles for each room in your home, and get help with measuring online at www.levolor.ca.

www.newscanada.com

Transform Your Messy Garage To A Spacious Sanctuary

(NC)—A little inspiration can help turn garage chaos into an efficient work and storage area. Crawl out from under the clutter and follow these easy tips:

1. Start with a clean slate then divide and conquer:
Pick a rain-free day to empty your garage. Clearing out the entire garage forces you to decide to keep or toss each item. Group items into keep, donate, and discard piles. "Keep or toss" decisions are easier when items are separated into smaller groups of similar items.
 2. Lay it out:
Use a garage blueprint estimator, like the one found at www.gladia-torgw.com, to plan out your different storage options and ensure there is still room for the car.
 3. Install an organizing garage system:
Select a modular system with adaptable cabinets, bins and hooks, like the Gladiator Garage Works system, that will grow and change with your lifestyle and family needs. Gladiator Garage Works is available through the Sears catalogue and at Lowe's stores across the country.
 4. Organize by interest:
Organize your garage by interest (i.e. gardening, auto care) to make it easy for everyone to find their own special tools or equipment. When work or play is done enjoy a cool drink from an Energy Star qualified garage refrigerator designed to handle extreme humidity and winter.
 5. Have a 'game plan':
Gladiator Garage Works offers storage options that help with the transition from one sport season to the next. Keep clubs out of the way with a golf caddy and balls safely stowed with mesh baskets. Wall panels and hooks keep hockey sticks, rakes and shovels close at hand.
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Home Beauty Makeover

(NC)—With the downturn in the economy and a slowdown in home sales many homeowners are going to be living where they are for longer than they expected. Home improvements will not only make staying in the same home more palatable but will increase the home's value. Many homeowners have found it's time for a home beauty makeover. They are selecting concrete pavers to add that beauty. Whether it is a new driveway, front walk or patio homeowners are finding out that concrete pavers are the best material for the job.

Concrete pavers:

- Are beautiful. Rustic stone-like pavers are available and come in many shapes, colours and sizes. Light coloured pavers can offer a cooler surface around patios and pool decks.
- Are strong. Their uniform size and high quality concrete allows them to fit tightly together and form a strong interlocking surface.
- Don't crack like asphalt or poured-in-place concrete. Paver joints allow for a small amount of movement without cracking. They also do well in a freeze-thaw environment.
- Are easy to repair. You can remove and reinstate the same pavers with no ugly patches after repairs to the base or underground utilities.
- Resist oil and antifreeze that leak from cars, making the pavers particularly good for driveways.
- Can accommodate lighting fixtures that fit right into the paver pattern. These low voltage systems include wiring and a transformer that plug into a standard 110-volt outdoor receptacle. The lighting defines patios, walkways and driveways at night, increasing safety and adding a bit of mystique to your home.

For driveways and larger areas it is a good idea to hire a professional contractor. These contractors can complete a high-quality job quickly and safely because they have the right equipment and materials. To learn more from the Interlocking Concrete Pavement Institute (ICPI), find an ICPI certified installer or to view beautiful paving work visit www.icpi.org.

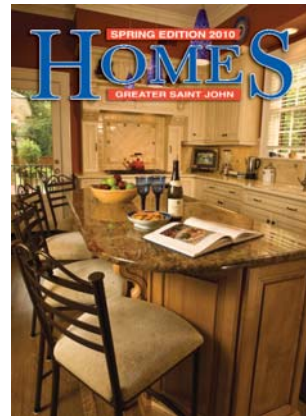
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Going Tankless

(NC)—The past few years have seen growing interest in tankless water heaters. While well known in Europe, they're still rather new to North American households. They sound like a no-brainer for homeowners considering new water tanks - unlimited hot water, savings on energy costs by heating water only when needed, and taking up less space than a conventional tank.

Going tankless requires very thorough research on the part of the homeowner. Homeowners considering tankless water heaters need to be aware of a number of factors prior to making their decision. Direct Energy has a few tips for shoppers to keep in mind as they research their options.

First, carefully calculate your hot water needs. Assessing capacity depends on the number of appliances and facilities requiring hot water at the same time. Large families with multiple hot water needs will require a tank with a higher capacity than a couple living in a small home.

Another important consideration is water quality. Water quality varies from area to area. Because they are more susceptible to scaling than a conventional water heater, tankless units are not recommended in hard water areas.

Venting requirements are also a factor. Venting will be dependent on the model and make of the tankless unit.

The lifespan of a tankless unit is slightly longer than that of a conventional water heater. A tankless unit can last in the neighbourhood of twenty years, depending on water quality and usage requirements.

While annual maintenance is not generally required, it is important that homeowners familiarize themselves with the associated user manual. Maintenance for tankless units is determined by model and brand.

Those are a few of the considerations to keep in mind if you're thinking about going tankless this year. More information is available online at www.directenergy.com or call 1-888-334-8221.

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Backyard Bird Activity Is The Song Of Nature

(NC)—For many, the visit of songbirds is the main reason to create a pretty garden in the first place.

Birds are a delightful distraction, but they also do a lot for us. They keep ecosystems running efficiently by pollinating plants, eating waste, and by controlling rodents and insect pests. The health of our planet is often measured in the condition of bird populations and your backyard, with a few quick tips, can easily attract them:

- Landscape with native plants producing seeds, berries or nectar.
- Provide warmth and shelter from predators with vine, shrubs and trees. Even a dying tree provides cavities for nesting spots.
- Quench their thirst. Any water fixtures, like a birdbath, a fountain, or a pond with flat rocks for perching, make your garden a very popular spot.
- Feed them well. The best bet is to place a bird feeder in your yard filled with proven, specialty blends. A popular choice is Wild Bird Food in the Scotts Songbird Selections Blend line, designed specifically to attract a wide variety of song birds.

“There are several ways in which birds feed,” says Syd Pell at Scotts. “On the ground, at the feeder, or both. Be aware, however, that it might take several weeks before the birds in your area discover your new feeder.” Be patient, he says, and consider the following:

- Place the feeder where it will be seen, since birds mainly use their sight for food.
- Sprinkle some seeds on the ground or on top of the feeder to add an enticement.
- Keep the feeder clean and if birds have not begun to eat, change the seed at least once per month.

www.newscanada.com



Spring Cleaning Tips For Dirty Dilemmas Fast and Simple Solutions

It's spring and the experts at Molly Maid come to the rescue with some fast and easy tips to make your house shine.

- For grease stains on your carpet, pour a generous amount of baking soda or cornstarch over the grease and brush lightly over the soiled area. Leave on overnight and vacuum the next day.
- A wad of chewing gum on your carpet comes off with ice. Freeze the chewing gum and when it becomes brittle, shatter it and vacuum up the broken pieces.
- For cleaning stubborn spots, exfoliating gloves are helpful when surfaces need scouring and Ribbing to remove caked on dirt.
- Don't throw out an old toothbrush or denture brush. They come in handy for cleaning around sink faucets and grout.
- To dust blinds, wear a clean pair of cotton gloves or an old sock, and run your fingers along each slat to pick up dust as you go.
- Keep kids' plastic toys clean. Wash them in warm, soapy water.
- Put salt on spills while the oven is hot. When cool, brush off the spill and clean up anything that remains with a damp cloth.
- Always tidy up before any major clean. Take dirty dishes to the kitchen, pick up toys and put newspapers in the recycling bin.

For more cleaning tips, visit www.mollymaid.ca or call 1-800-663-6243.

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"If you don't have the best protective material applied to those areas, the metal will rust resulting in perforation which will require costly and extensive repairs or your vehicle will have to be discarded," continued Balzacs. Resale value of a car increases when it has been Ziebarted.

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Keys To Child Safety At The Window

(NC)—Looking around your home and anticipating ways to prevent injury is an important first step in keeping children safe. One of the most overlooked areas in the home is the window. Whether opened or closed, windows pose a potential safety problem for young children.

Here are a few tips from the experts at Hunter Douglas, a leader in child safety enhancements in window fashions, on making your home – and particularly your windows – safer for children.

- Use window guards on all windows above the first floor. Screens aren't strong enough to stop the fall; they are meant to keep insects out, not to keep children in. Look for quick-release features for easy emergency exits.
- If it's necessary to keep windows open for ventilation, install locks that limit the size of the opening.
- For sliding glass doors, apply bright stickers at a child's eye level to alert him or her to the presence of glass.
- Be sure to keep all furniture and cribs away from windows.

To help prevent injuries from window covering cords, Hunter Douglas has engineered a variety of alternative lifting systems and well as Vignette Modern Roman Shades – the industry's first Roman shade with no exposed rear cords.

- The LiteRise lifting system eliminates pull cords and lifts and lowers the window fashions with a gentle touch on the bottom rail.
- Another alternative that completely eliminates pull cords is PowerRise with Platinum Technology, a battery-powered remote control system that operates window fashions at the touch of a button.
- Consider installing window coverings with the UltraGlide single retractable cord system that keeps the cord at a constant length that is out of reach of most small children.
- For window fashions with continuous cord loops, Hunter Douglas provides a cord tensioner that keeps the cords taut under spring tension so that children cannot become easily entangled.

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



Kitchen Cabinets: What's Your Sign..Of Quality!

Just like a horoscope, your kitchen can say a lot about your personality. There are many ways to incorporate what is important to you in your cabinetry, but quality is what makes a kitchen the highlight of your home. This article will give you, the home owner, the perspective of a kitchen designer and cabinet manufacturer with over thirty years of experience, to the top five most important qualities in your new kitchen project.

#5 Melamine or Plywood Interiors- Everyone knows plywood is the best...or is it really? This has to be the most concentrated on item and likely the least important issue in a new kitchen. There are some major advantages to the melamine finishes. First and foremost, melamine has a lifetime finish, it is very easy to wipe clean, and never needs refinished. To get an idea of quality and durability of the finish of melamine, it has the same finish as Formica counters or Pergo laminate floors. So keep in mind that plywood interiors are not a value that will add much to resale value, almost all new home buyers are focussed on durability and ease of maintenance.

#4 Dovetail Drawers- Especially in the USA, dovetail drawers are a sign of quality, as a designer I would emphasize the word "sign". In Europe where kitchens can cost as much as three times as their North American counterparts, melamine or metal drawers are the norm.

#3 Laminate or Granite Counters- With designers and new home buyers alike, granite is without question the best. It has the durability and resale value. But did you know there is another way to get that \$6000 look and quality for closer to \$500? Available on the market now, from very few select kitchen manufacturers, are the "Avondale Seamless Sinks and Counters". These counters are a specialty product manufactured with no seams, they come in any shape and just like granite counter tops, they come with under-mounted sinks. They are actually 20% easier to clean than real granite and best of all at the time of resale, you can receive the same dollar return as if you had spent the money on granite. Check out more at www.AvondaleKitchens.com

#2 Installation- It is one thing to decide on your kitchen design, but who is going to install it? What about all the loose ends like timing, mouldings and sorting out transport damages? Typically, custom kitchen suppliers include all this in their selling price, that way you, the homeowner, can delegate it all to one source.

#1 Designs - This has to be the far most important part of any project. Maybe you already know exactly what you want, and how you plan to do it, and that's fine. Do yourself a favour and have a professional kitchen designer look your ideas over. The cost? Depending on the designer, they will review your plans at no charge, and all they ask is for a chance to bid on the project. The designer will likely smooth out the project and allow you to avoid any unforeseen problems. A professionally designed project will typically bring in more than the extra cost when it comes time to sell your home. Like money in the bank, a professionally designed kitchen is a good investment in the best or the worst of times.

With these top five priorities, you will now have a fresh perspective to what is important when you get ready for your project. When you sit down with your professional designer it is wise to have some clippings from magazines with ideas, colours and styles that you are attracted to. With some professional help, and a little planning, turning your new kitchen

project into a dream kitchen will be a breeze.

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.



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Pre-delivery Inspection An Important Part Of New Home Ownership

(NC)—There is a critical first step all new home buyers in Ontario must take when your new home is ready for occupancy, known as the Pre-Delivery Inspection or PDI. Much more than just a quick tour, the PDI represents the first opportunity for buyers to view their home in its completed state and thoroughly assess its condition.

All builders of new homes and condominiums in Ontario are required by Tarion Warranty Corporation to conduct a PDI with their customers prior to a home's date of possession. Tarion is a private corporation that protects home buyers according to the terms of the Ontario New Home Warranties Plan Act, which requires that builders provide warranty coverage on every new home built in the province.

"The PDI is an important starting-off point in the new home warranty process," according to Carol Metcalfe, director of claims at Tarion. "Most builders are committed to constructing a quality product, but today's new homes are large and complex, made up of many different systems and components. The PDI therefore provides homeowners with a prime opportunity for assessing a home's overall workmanship and features."

The PDI takes place when your new home is ready for occupancy, and before you take possession. During the PDI, you and/or an individual you select to attend (your designate) will be given the opportunity to examine the interior and exterior of the home with your builder or your builder's representative present. The objective of this inspection is to make a written record of all items that are incomplete, damaged, missing, inaccessible or not operating properly.

It is the builder's responsibility to explain how the various systems in your home work – including the heating, electrical, plumbing and air conditioning – thus making the PDI a good opportunity for your builder to go through them with you. It is very important that you understand how to operate your home's systems because not using them properly could affect your warranty coverage.

During the PDI, homeowners should carefully examine the home both inside and out. While inside, they should look for things like chips in porcelain sinks or scratches on counter tops, damage to floors or walls, and doors and windows that are not secure or do not open and close easily. Outside they should check things like the quality of brick-work and siding, whether window screens have been installed, and the appearance of the driveway and landscaping.

Additional information on the PDI, including a complete list of things to look for during the inspection, can be found in 'Getting Ready for the Pre-Delivery Inspection. Copies can be obtained by calling 1-877-9TARION or online at www.tarion.com.
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Make Your Kitchen Fabulous In A Multi-Generational Home

(NC)—Families living in multi-generational homes often face the task of ensuring the kitchen is safe and accessible for all members of the family, but complete renovations are not always possible. Making small changes is easy and can be very effective. Here are some practical tips for updating the kitchen to make it functional for all ages:

- Knob-style hardware on kitchen doors can be small and difficult to grasp. Consider replacing them with handles that can make gripping easier for those with arthritis or limited dexterity in their hands.
- Reduce the amount of heavy lifting by reorganizing kitchen cupboards. Put heavier things like pots and pans and bulky small appliances in bottom cabinets and shelves. Installing a lazy susan in a corner cupboard can make reaching for items easier. Store commonly used dry ingredients and other items close to the stove for easy access.
- Install a touch operated pull-down faucet. With the new Pilar kitchen faucet from Delta, water can be turned on or off with just a tap anywhere on the faucet, making it easy to use for everyone in the family.
- Lower the water temperature in your home to decrease the possibility of scalding.
- Look for a stool with adjustable heights so it can be used by all members of the family to get to those out of reach items.
- Store the microwave on the counter instead of mounting it up high, so it's easy to reach and there is less chance of hot food spills.

More information is available online at deltafaucet.com.

www.newscanada.com

Solar Lighting Beneficial in Many Ways

As society continues to grow more environmentally conscious, more and more homeowners are looking for ways to do their part outside their home as well as inside it. One increasingly popular option for eco-conscious homeowners is solar lighting. But the benefits of solar lighting go beyond the environmental.

* Financial. Solar lighting is quite possibly the most affordable option for outdoor lighting. That's because once solar lighting is installed, there are no more costs to speak of. Employing solar energy to power its bulbs, solar lighting doesn't use any electricity, keeping energy bills low as a result.

* Aesthetic appeal. Traditional outdoor lighting often requires outdoor outlets and power cords. However, solar lighting utilizes rechargeable batteries that are recharged by the sunlight hitting the solar panels, eliminating the need for unsightly external power outlets and power cords.

* Practical. Many homeowners admit routinely forgetting to turn on their outdoor lights, reducing their investment value as a result. However, solar lighting doesn't require the homeowner to remember a thing, as solar lighting is automatically operated, meaning the lights will come on once the sun goes down without so much as the flip of a switch.

* Safety. Solar lighting also adds to a home's safety and security. Because solar lighting is automatic, it's easier to see at night when arriving home because the lights will already be on should a homeowner get home after dark. What's more, because solar lighting automatically comes on, homeowners can feel safe knowing that the lighting is on even when they're on vacation or away for the weekend, reducing the risk of potential home break-ins. GT104257

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You've Chosen Bamboo, Now What?

You have made the decision to go with an eco-friendly bamboo floor. Congratulations! You have made a step toward going green. Now, how can you go one step farther? By going with strand woven bamboo flooring.

So what is strand woven bamboo? It is the material that is made when strands of bamboo are woven together and treated with an adhesive. This material is then compressed until it sets up. Afterwards it is cut into whatever size boards or planks that are required. You may ask, what makes this a green material? Rather than loose the pieces of bamboo that are left behind in the process of making standard bamboo planks, this material is recycled immediately by making it into strand woven bamboo.

What Are The Benefits?

Strand woven bamboo is one of the most stable woods that can be used for wood floors. The durability and toughness of strand woven makes it very hard to beat when used in high traffic areas. With the fast growth cycle of bamboo there is always an ample supply of material. Strand woven bamboo is extremely easy to clean. Usually you only need a dust mop to clean it. If it does require actual mopping then a simple solution of vinegar and water will get the job done quickly. Strand woven bamboo tends to be more moisture resistant than traditional bamboo flooring. This can greatly increase the life span of your floor.

There are several other benefits to having a strand woven bamboo floor. One such benefit includes being allergen free. If you are unhappy with the color of the stain, or if becomes faded or scuffed over time, then it can be

sanded and refinished the same as any traditional hardwood floor. One thing to keep in mind is that bamboo flooring will actually require refinishing less often than a traditional wood floor. This could possibly save you a good deal of money over time.

So Why Does Strand Woven Bamboo Last?

Bamboo itself is a naturally durable wood. Once you take bamboo, layer it, and send it through a lamination process you end up with a sheet or plank that is extremely durable as well as being very resistant to damage. This combined with bamboo's natural ability to expand and contract with relative ease can lead to an extremely long life span for your floor.

With just a little elbow grease and a little hard work you will soon have a very elegant and captivating floor. Keep in mind that you should look for companies that do not use formaldehyde in the making of their product. Formaldehyde can be used in some furniture construction as a wood preservative. It can make you sick over time if there is little or no ventilation in your home. Once you have your floor installed it will be time to sit back, relax, and enjoy! Your new strand woven floor will help add grace to whatever room you install it.

No matter what the reason for choosing your new strand woven bamboo flooring, you will be able to enjoy it for years to come. With an unmatched durability you will be pleased with your beautiful new bamboo floor.



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Colour Forecast For 2010 Reflects “New Beginnings”

(NC)—Green is looking to be the “it” colour of 2010, reflecting a new decade and, perhaps, new beginnings.

“Green has such meaning and symbolism,” said Sharon Grech, Benjamin Moore colour expert. “It represents renewal, and is eternally the colour of spring and new growth. In recent years, it has become the emblem of the environment, shorthand for the global movement that’s dedicated to preserving and conserving our planet. Green also is the easiest colour for the eye to see, and the most restful and comforting of all. Benjamin Moore’s Cedar Green 2034-40, in particular, is a compelling hue that we predict to be a top favourite this year. You’ll find it on the yellow end of the spectrum. It’s a colour that, on its own, can contribute a vibrant pop to a room, or create a softer look when paired with neutrals. It also is a perfect foil for bright contrasts, such as deep blues and orangey reds.”

Benjamin Moore’s official declaration of the 2010 trend colours is featured in a free booklet, *Envision Colour 2010*, offered by the company’s network of paint and decorating retailers throughout North America. While Cedar Green leads the parade of what’s hot in the coming year, a total of 18 colours organized into three palettes are proposed as palliatives for the nation’s collective mood and all of the cultural and social influences impacting it. The publication is illustrated with photography of room settings with inspiring suggestions on colour combinations and

imaginative wall treatments.

“Of course, one pervasive trend in 2010 is going to be smart spending,”

said Grech. “And, when it comes to decorating, paint is among the wisest investments you can make. Give a single wall a new coat of colour and it’s one of the simplest, most economic and effective makeovers. Splurge and paint a whole room or try a decorative technique. Nothing compares.”
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Ray Carpenter, Owner/Manager

Easy Home Makeover

(NC)—Instead of making major renovations, transform your home by simply rejuvenating and modernizing. Hilary Farr, designer and host of W Network's Love It or List It, offers six simple tips for upgrading your living space without breaking the budget.

Update Your Furniture

Give a favourite old couch a new look. Add some throw pillows in all sorts of colours and textures. Why not give your old chairs a new look too? Reupholster them in a rich-looking new fabric.

Declutter and Organize

You'd be amazed by how great a space can look once it's cleared of knick-knacks, paperwork and random items. Why not plan a thorough spring-cleaning and, while you're at it, be ruthless and toss or give away what's no longer needed. Organize what's left by investing in storage such as decorative baskets and boxes. This will help you show off those special pieces such as coffee tables, bookshelves and cabinets. Then rearrange books, picture frames and vases where they can now be seen and enjoyed.

Paint

Fresh paint on the walls can instantly open up and appear to enlarge a room while also creating a dramatic or even subtle change in décor. Be adventurous, but choose colours that will enhance your furniture and floors or carpets. For that finishing touch, paint your old furniture and picture frames a bold new colour that complements the room.

Rejuvenate Baseboards and Walls

Baseboards frame the entire space of your home, so keep them looking fresh and bright by vacuuming and cleaning. Keep walls looking their best with Vim Cream, which is specially formulated to remove scuff marks, dirt and stains.

Special Treatment for Windows

Plastic blinds and paper shades can do the job but won't make the most of your windows or décor. Use options which will not only do the job but also look gorgeous. Choose roman blinds in a beautiful fabric, wooden plantation shutters or luxurious looking curtains. Any of these affordable options gives long-term value—whether you plan to stay or sell.

Restore Floors

If your home is older, try lifting a small piece of carpeting. You might find gorgeous hardwood floors beneath. It will be worth the work to remove any carpet adhesives to be ready to finally sand and finish. Rejuvenate and add a shine to existing hardwood, laminate or linoleum flooring by using Vim Oxy-Gel all-purpose cleaner, which leaves a fresh scent.

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Spring Into Backyard Preparation

(NC)—Preparing your backyard for spring can be a daunting task and many Canadians don't know where to begin or what items are available to help make the job easier.

The backyard experts at Canadian Tire have put together the following tips to help Canadians prepare their backyard this season to make it the best it can be.

Preparing your lawn

- Clean unwanted debris that may have accumulated over the winter months.
- Aerate and weed your lawn to improve water, air and fertilizer uptake. Choose a manual weeder like the Fiskars telescopic stand up weeder that removes the entire root of invasive weeds, eliminating the need for herbicide use.
- Healthy, thick lawns naturally deter weeds and other pests. Choose a natural fertilizer, like Scott's eco sense fertilizer, that is ideal for planting new lawns or repairing bare spots to give your lawn a healthy start.
- In preparation for the spring gardening season, check your equipment to ensure it is in good working condition. Don't forget to sharpen the blades on lawn mowers and weeders.

Bring out the Barbecue

- Cleaning the Grill: Remove warming rack, cooking grates, flame tamers and burners.
- Use a plastic scraper to loosen build-up, food residue and ashes inside the grill housing and lid.
- Checking your Propane Tank: Dented or rusty propane tanks may be dangerous and unsafe to use. Inspect your tank for these trouble spots and replace the tank if necessary
- Checking for Gas Leaks: It is highly recommended that you inspect all hose and connections for cracks, cuts, or damages. If so, do not use and get them replaced.

Patio Furniture

- Dust: Unfold and set up all patio chairs, tables and umbrellas. Dust the outdoor furniture with a dusting cloth.
 - Wash and Dry: Wash furniture with a clean sponge and soapy water and allow the furniture to air-dry. While the furniture is drying, check all the hardware. Check nuts, bolts and screws to make sure all are fastened tightly and show no corrosion. If folding chair hinges seem to stick or catch, use a lubricating spray or household oil to help them function more smoothly
 - Protect: When the furniture is completely dry, spray all upholstery with an outdoor fabric weatherproofing spray.
- www.newscanada.com

Quick Tips For Successful Patch Repair

(NC)—Grass seed is a great solution if your lawn is thin and patchy – but just throwing some seed on it is not going to work. Take a look at these quick tips from leaders in the field, Scotts Canada:

- Early spring is the right time, after the last frost.
- Prepare the patchy areas with a strong raking to remove thatch and to loosen the soil. Aerating your lawn improves results.
- Mow the lawn short around the patches to make it easy of new seeds to make contact with the soil and take root.
- Use the most advanced seeding products available. Top quality grass seeds improve the results exponentially and the newest developments can also make the entire process much easier.

"We've produced EZ Seed in the Turf Builder line for example," says Scott MacDonald at Scotts. "It's a 3-in-1 mixture containing high quality grass seed, a premium slow release fertilizer, plus a super absorbent mulch—for guaranteed seeding success.

"The difference is in the mulch which absorbs and releases eight times its weight in water, surrounding the seed in a moist, protective layer," he explained, "and continues to infuse the seeds with water and nutrients. The result is grass that is as much as 50% thicker with half the water — and that's why we call EZ Seed 'water smart'".
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Spring Cleaning Room By Room

The weather may be getting warmer, the flowers are blooming, and you're ready to throw open the windows and let in some fresh air. Now is the time when many homeowners decide to cast away the winter blues and ready their home for the warm weather season.

Spring cleaning can be the perfect time to redecorate or make space for new renovations. While the notion of cleaning and organization can seem overwhelming to some, if you tackle a room a day, you will see progress in no time.

Bathroom

The bathroom is generally the smallest room in the house. It can be a great place to start your spring cleaning and build up to larger rooms.

- * Dust the vents and fans.
- * Take down dark-colored draperies and linens and replace with lighter colors and fabrics.
- * Give the shower and bath a thorough cleaning.
- * Wipe down moldings and the corners of the ceiling.
- * Mop the floor.
- * Wash down the toilet, sink and other fixtures.
- * Clean expired drugs out of the medicine cabinet.
- * Empty the trash pail.
- * Replenish tissue and toilet paper supplies.

Bedroom

The bedroom may be a collect-all room for items that have to remain out of sight. Now is the time to tackle the clutter.

- * Remove and launder bed linens and draperies.
- * Dust the ceiling fan and window blinds.
- * Dust down all furniture and decor items.
- * Vacuum the floor.
- * Switch out winter clothes for spring wear in closets, removing little worn or old items as you go (for donation).
- * Organize bureau drawers, especially the sock or lingerie ones.
- * Tackle under-the-bed cleaning.

Kitchen

You likely spend the bulk of your time in the kitchen. It may need the most clean-up work.

- * Empty the refrigerator of expired foods. Load the dirty dishes in the dishwasher as you go.

- * Remove refrigerator/freezer items to a cooler and thoroughly clean all the shelving, bins, etc.

- * Dust ceiling fans, shelving, blinds, light fixtures and ceilings.

- * Spot-clean any wall surfaces that have been splattered by cooking.

- * Use a wood cleaner to scour grease or cooking residue from cabinetry.

- * Apply oven cleaner to the stove or run the self-cleaning cycle.

- * Remove the knobs from the stove top and clean the surface and burners. Don't forget to also clean the range hood.

- * See if any food has accumulated in the dishwasher catch drain. Remove.

- * Wipe down the surfaces of all other appliances, and clean the interior of the microwave.

- * Launder draperies.

- * Sweep and mop the floor.

- * Organize or sort through pantry items for expired ones.

Living/Dining Room

The bulk of cleaning in these rooms will likely entail dusting and surface cleaning.

- * Dust down all artwork, lampshades, furniture, ceiling corners, fans, fixtures, etc.

- * Move furniture from the walls.

- * Vacuum furniture, including under sofa cushions.

- * Remove draperies and launder.

- * Remove books from bookcases and dust.

- * Clean electronics after unplugging.

- * Dust decorative accents.

- * Swap throw pillows and blankets for lighter hues.

- * Remove items from china cabinets and clean.

- * Polish silver flatware.

- * Thoroughly vacuum flooring, carpeting and accent rugs.

- * Steam clean or shampoo the carpet. SH102072

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Easy Spring DIY

(NC)—Is this the first spring in your new home or the spring to finally undertake some of those fixer-up projects you've been thinking about for so long? With a little help from The Home Depot, you can tackle these small projects on your own and at a cost your wallet will appreciate!

Here's just a few that should top your list this spring:

Clean the Eavestroughs – Leaves and debris make a home out of eavestroughs. Cleaning them can be dirty work, but necessary in order to prevent unwanted flooding. With a ladder and some gardening gloves, removing the debris is easy. However, damaged eaves need to be repaired and can be done section by section with replacement pieces and some caulking. If eavestroughs have sustained enough damage over the years and are in need of replacement, consider having a new system installed with screens to protect the troughs. This will make cleaning them in years to come, much easier!

Refresh the Entrance – Taupes, greys and greens are hot colours for outdoor window treatments and doors this spring. With a simple coat of paint, new door hardware (handle and lock) and outdoor light, your home entrance can have some high-impact curb appeal. The time commitment is small – about half a day. Take the paint refresh even further by adding a new splash of colour to your trim and your shutters.

Scrub Down the Exterior – The wear and tear of winter weather can leave windows and siding on your home in need of a good cleaning. Most often, a ladder, cleaner and extendable brush is all you need to tackle the windows on your home's exterior. Pressure washing can remove the dirt and grime on vinyl or metal siding – and is also the first step if a new paint job is also in order this spring!

Install a Small Deck – A great weekend project, installing a new deck can be done in just five steps. And with the new online deck planner from The Home Depot, it is a project even the new DIYer can tackle. Already have a deck? Make sure to refresh it, along with any fencing you may have, with a new coat of stain to keep it looking its best all season long.

For more information on small DIY projects, please visit The Home Depot store in your community or www.homedepot.ca.
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Post-Modern Homes Choose Walls With Concrete ~ Construction Quick Tip:

(NC)—Building a home includes dreams of a house that might last for centuries—or at the very least, a soaring return on the investment. So with a choice in materials when building from scratch, take note that the advanced technology starts with concrete walls. The inefficiency of wood framing is yesterday's choice. Builders of homes and commercial buildings, now champion the use of pre-assembled, interlocking concrete forms. Each panel consists of two layers of polystyrene, steel reinforced and filled with concrete. With this system, industry leader Nudura points to important energy savings – as well as significant environmental and human health benefits. Wood walls, for example, are subject to rot and mould irritation over time. The wood frame method is also subject to thermal bridging where outside cold seeps in to cause uncomfortable cold spots, drafts, and mustiness. On the other hand, the Nudura concrete walls have shown to deliver energy savings of up to 70 percent and delivers a building envelope up to three times more sound resistant, four times more fire resistant, and nine times stronger. Floor and ceiling construction is now advanced too. More information is available online at



www.nudura.com.

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What Will 2010 Look Like In Our Homes?

by Mary Dobson, Levolor Window Fashions, Canada

Photo Caption: The rough with the smooth, the traditional with the contemporary. Roman blinds control natural light while influencing the way you look out on the world. Floor length drapes close to transform the room into its own private space – Reclaimed Refinement.



First up, a traditional look, made more interesting now by mixing vintage pieces with organic elements. It makes use of rough textures in wood and fabrics, but blends them with the classic lines of elegant furniture. We're calling this look Reclaimed Refinement, and in terms of window fashions I'd say translucent romans provide sensitive management of natural light while contributing to the traditional aspect of this subtly balanced look.

Comfortable Contemporary will fill a need for many. Until now "Contemporary" has often meant hard, cold, and engineered. This 2010 look keeps the clean lines, but adds warmth. Man-made materials now express natural motifs and feminine curves. As for window fashions, natural fabrics and woven shades fit right in. I'm thinking of PanelTrac to define large spaces, roller shades in all their many patterns for light-control duty.

One way we build our own interiors is by storytelling. The souvenirs we bring back, the family photos we treasure, the artwork on our walls are all part of a story that says who we are. Hence Collector Chic, a look that answers the question "Can vintage and modern pieces work together?" with a resounding "Yes!" Here we see a blending of masculine and feminine; new and old; glass, metals and ceramics; rich textures and bold patterns. Between you and the light outside I suggest two extremes – the slick modernism of cellular blinds close to the window, covered by the exuberance of full-length, even hobbled, roman blinds in any fabric that turns you on.

Lastly we have a blast from the past, Mid-Century Modern. You may call it the Mad Men look, your elders may think of Sputnik and Explorer. But for us it's not a time capsule, it's teak and metal combined, leather and linens, clean lines but with a softer look than back then. In your windows we suggest wood blinds once more, teamed with flat romans using heavily textured linens.

A closer look at many of these window fashions is available online at www.Levolor.ca.

www.newscanada.com

(NC)—The wheel of fashion turns, constantly, and we should be glad it does. Would you want to wear the same clothes, see the same movies, hum along to the same tunes and look at the same walls year after year? I enjoy my work as a designer and guest expert on Citytv's CityLine, but what I like most is the excitement of discovering new styles, and helping other people enjoy them too.

So – we've just dipped our toes into a new year. What's ahead in the home for 2010? For the last few years it has been green, green, green. That's still here, but in the background. Now, the focus is more on us, ourselves – our respect for the past, our need for direction in our lives, our longing for simple things, and the pleasure we take in simplicity.

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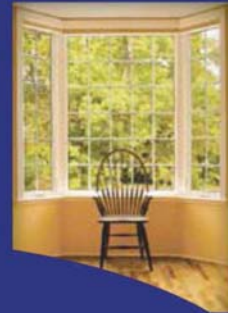
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Tips For Drips

(NC)—Following winter hibernation, the itch to start cleaning and preparing for spring is hitting Canadian homeowners. This might be a good time to take a look at your sinks, faucets and showers too. Direct Energy has a few tips to catch the drips, and keep your plumbing in good working condition.

Drips: Surprisingly, drippy faucets can waste up to 15 gallons of water per day. This means approximately \$15 per month on your water bill. A plumbing professional can either service the issue or install a new faucet for you.

Flushes: According to Environment Canada, toilet flushing accounts for 30 per cent of daily home water usage. Prevent unnecessary water-loss by testing your toilet for leaks. Drop some food colouring into the tank, if the colour seeps into the toilet bowl within 10 to 15 minutes your toilet has a leak.

Showers: Save water by installing a low-flow showerhead. A ten minute shower with a conventional showerhead can use up to 42 gallons of water.

Drains: Drains need a little attention too. A quick home remedy for clean drains is a monthly appointment with vinegar and baking soda. First pour the baking soda into the drain, and follow up with a cup of vinegar.

More tips and plumbing information can be found online at www.directenergy.com or toll-free at 1-888-334-8221.

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Think You Are Covered? Review Travel Insurance Coverage Before Every Trip

(NC)—No one ever plans to get sick or have an accident while on vacation, but the unexpected does happen. Medical emergencies – both within Canada and abroad - can be very costly, particularly for travellers who are not fully covered.

“Many travellers believe they have adequate travel insurance through credit cards or employer plans, but don’t realize the limitations of their coverage,” said Tim Bzowey, vice president, Travel, Home and Auto, RBC Insurance. “They should be aware of the type and amount of coverage they have and purchase supplemental travel insurance to fill in any gaps.”

Credit cards often provide coverage for a limited number of days or limit the amount you can claim while employment benefits may not cover all medical emergencies and have limited travel benefits. Also keep in mind that government health insurance plans often pay only a portion of medical costs.

Here are a few questions to ask yourself when reviewing your travel insurance coverage:

- Does the plan have a deductible? If so, make sure you're aware of this clause and are comfortable with the amount you may need to pay.
- Will the company pay your expenses up front? Reimbursement isn't much help if you need expensive surgery and don't have the cash or a credit card on hand.
- What does the policy cover? Does the policy cover the cost of being flown home by air ambulance with a private nurse?
- Does the policy have an emergency phone line you can call from anywhere in the world? If so, are the representatives multilingual?

Next time you're making travel arrangements, ask for RBC Insurance travel insurance, visit rbciinsurance.com or call 1-800-387-4357.

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Top Tips To Make A Home Green

(NC)—A well-planned, high performance home costs less to operate—and as importantly, high performance is the promise of premium resale value.

Sustainable components include energy-efficient heating, lighting, cooling and water systems, as well as the reduction of natural resources like wood. Clip this checklist as a preliminary guide for both you and your builder:

- **Location:** Build for lifestyle convenience where you can walk, cycle, or take public transit.
- **Position:** Consider north-south positioning to maximize use of the sun's energy and heat.
- **Generate:** Install solar panels and generator to offset public energy supply. Add a solar water heater.



- **Walls:** Build with concrete. An award-winning wall system, advanced by Canadian company Nudura, builds with pre-assembled forms, each one stacked, reinforced, and then filled with concrete. Once locked together (like Lego) the system creates a solid, monolithic concrete wall. This method (www.nudura.com) has shown to deliver energy savings of up to 70 percent and delivers a building envelope up to three times more sound resistant, four times more fire resistant, and nine times stronger.

- **Materials:** Premium green choices should include low- and zero-VOC (volatile organic compound) paints and sealants, plus high-performance windows, roofing and flooring.

- **Landscaping:** Design your gardens for low use of water and pesticides. Plan with drought-resistant native plants, perennial ground covers, plus flowers and shady canopy trees. www.newscanada.com


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2010 Trend: Embrace What You Love

(NC)—At the turn of each season, expert predictions on top trends to watch and follow are among the design world's hottest topics. Where they get their ideas may seem a mystery to us, but it seems we may very well be the main inspiration.

In recent years, we've embraced a number of design directions that only continue to grow in prevalence and influence. As these trends are reinforced by homeowners across Canada, it's clear that there is much value in the simple notion of choosing to experience and surround yourself with things you love.

Nature is one of the most powerful and popular influences for the home. The natural beauty of organic materials – wood, glass and stone among the most popular – allows us to bring the calm and inspiration of the outdoors into our homes.

Natural materials also cater to the ever-growing demand for sustainability. Offering far greater durability than synthetics, natural materials have a much longer lifespan – thus reducing the need for replacement and instead depending on periodic maintenance. Although the natural choice may be more costly at the outset, long-term value and dependability continue to make it a worthwhile investment.

We're also seeing a move towards recycling. Transforming antique furniture – still dependable for its quality craftsmanship – is becoming more

popular for its sustainability, originality and charm.

Our demand for sustainable options is only growing, especially in relation to choices for the most water-intensive areas inside our home, the kitchen and bath. This widespread inclination towards ecological choices has given kitchen and bath industries all the incentive to continue developing new innovations that more effectively marry responsible design, functionality and convenience.

Kitchen and bath leader, Kohler, has just introduced a new bathroom collection designed around its tremendously popular Persuade dual flush toilet. The collection also features space-saving options, making it an accessible choice for even the smallest home. As we continue to choose sustainable offerings, advancing these developments will remain a valuable point of investment – so fuelling the long-term shift of sustainability from a trend to an enduring lifestyle.

As we continue to gain confidence in our own preferences, we raise the bar for design. The old adage equating pain with beauty no longer has validity within the home. We demand comfort alongside style and performance. The days of enduring inconvenience in exchange for aesthetic appeal are long gone, giving us good reason to continue demanding what we love and refusing to settle for less.

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A Path To First Impressions

(NC)—While you may enter your home from a side door or through the garage, most new visitors enter through the front entrance. The walkway to the main entrance sets the tone for visitor's first impressions. If the walkway is deteriorating and in need of repairs it might be time to replace it.

One of the most versatile and customizable options are interlocking concrete pavers. Made with high strength, durable concrete, each unit locks together to form a surface that is visually attractive and withstands the elements.

When planning a walkway project with interlocking concrete pavers, one of the first decisions involves choosing a style that suits your house style and your personal tastes. There is a wide array of colours, shapes, sizes and textures that can satisfy both needs.

Why concrete pavers?

- Don't crack. Each interlocking paver unit has joints that allow for a small amount of movement without cracking.
- Are easy to repair. You can remove and reinstate the same pavers with no ugly patches after repairs to the base or underground utilities.
- Present no problems with snow removal. With pavers, you can plow, shovel or use a snow blower.
- Come in many shapes, colours and textures.

Some homeowners install smaller walkways themselves. Larger projects typically require hiring a trained contractor. The Interlocking Concrete Pavement Institute web site at www.icpi.org can provide further information on these topics.

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Energy Efficient Homes For 2010

(NC)—As Canadian homeowners enter a new decade, the topic of home energy efficiency is hard to overlook. Over the past year, many homeowners made energy efficiency upgrades to their homes and took advantage of federal and provincial rebates. On December 31, 2009 a new energy efficiency initiative took effect in the form of the National Minimum Energy Performance Standard for residential gas furnaces. The new Canadian standard requires that all gas furnaces operate at a minimum of 90% efficiency. This applies to new purchases only; homeowners are not required to switch out existing gas furnaces until they are ready to do so.

An additional energy efficiency tool is also available to help homeowners save energy. Direct Energy suggests Canadians take advantage of an energy audit, which can identify areas in the home which can be upgraded to a more energy efficient standard. A Direct Energy home energy assessment will result in a tailored list of suggested energy efficiency upgrades for each home audited. Many of the energy efficiency upgrades, if implemented, can qualify the homeowner for various federal and/or provincial rebates.

Completing an energy audit should be the first step a homeowner takes towards increasing the energy efficiency of their home, and reducing their energy bills.

More information is available online at www.directenergy.com or toll-free 1-888-334-8221. www.newscanada.com



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'No Renovation Required' Bathroom Update

(NC)—You can give your bathroom a fresh update without blowing the budget on renovations. Consider these four simple tips from Hilary Farr, designer and host of W Network's Love It or List It.

Paint or Wallpaper

A fresh coat of paint will instantly uplift your bathroom and can be the inspiration for designing around a new colour palette. You can also change the ambiance of the room by wallpapering one wall in bright or ornate wallpaper.

Accessorize

Buy new bathroom accessories in a classic stainless steel and elegant design. Hide toiletries in pretty bottles and storage containers.

Complete the new look with scented candles, large wicker baskets and luxurious looking bath products.

The Bathtub

Help your tub look like new again with Vim Cream, which contains a powerful formula for removing soap scum, lime scale and bathroom grime. An old toothbrush to scrub faucets and grimy grout will make them sparkle like new.

Linens

Instantly brighten and refresh the bathroom space with a spring-inspired shower curtain. Add new textures to the room with fluffy hand and bath towels in a neutral palette mixed with a few bright colours.

Stack them in large baskets with pretty soaps and lotions.
www.newscanada.com

The Shades You Need – Off-The-Shelf Or Custom Made?

by Siobhan O'Connor

(NC)—When it comes to dressing up your windows, there are two ways you can realize your vision, and both of them will give you good choice and excellent value. One is to choose from what's on the shelf at a nearby retailer; the other is to select materials from samples and have your new window coverings custom made.

I asked Mary Dobson which is the better way to go – off-the-shelf or custom. Mary, as well as being a regular guest on Citytv's CityLine, is spokesperson for Levolor Window Fashions in Canada.

"There's a good argument for both," she replied. "Buying from the store provides instant gratification. The bigger retailers will have good selections of colour, fabric and trim – and you can probably install your shades the same day you bought them. But if you have your own special vision for the window, you could be better off taking the custom route. Which, I assure you, is neither a big hassle or a big extra expense."

Mary counted off a number of benefits that are available only through a custom order. One is the largest possible range of fabrics and colours – exotic and unusual patterns and textures that will create a unique look in your home. The quality will be superior, which means they will last longer. Another is that a window covering professional will guide you in making up the order, perhaps suggesting creative and practical options that will give you greater satisfaction in the long run.

I asked Mary about the price differential. "It's not really a matter of price," she said. "People work to a budget, and it's the budget that decides what they spend. It's more a matter of choice; going the custom route opens up a lot more possibilities."

She also suggested a visit to the Idea Centre at www.levolor.ca, where you can see the many product choices available.

Home Burglaries Influence More Consumers To Consider Security Systems

Trend Expected to Increase During Summer, Busiest Time of Year for Home Burglaries

It's alarming to walk into your home and discover you've been burglarized. It's happening more often in many areas of the U.S. with the trend expected to continue during the summer when more people are away from their homes, making their property more vulnerable to intruders.

Mary Hunt is a recent victim. Her Chicago home was burglarized, but since she had a monitored alarm system, police busted the burglars minutes after the break-in.

"You'd never think that when you leave your house someone will try to intrude," Hunt said. "But thankfully, in my case, the alarm caught them in the act."

The home burglary rate is expected to worsen this summer, traditionally the peak time. And with the rise in home break-ins comes increased consumer interest in the benefits of home security systems, reports the National Burglar & Fire Alarm Association (NBFAA), a leading industry organization that represents companies comprising over 70 percent of the multi-billion dollar home security market.

"As the crime rate in many markets continues increasing, we keep seeing more people calling security companies who are concerned about their safety," said Merlin Guilbeau, NBFAA executive director. "Security systems have become the 'must have' item for the home."

There are numerous studies and statistics which support the need for consumers to arm their homes with security systems:

Rutgers University recently released a study, using five years of data, which scientifically proved that burglars tend to avoid homes with alarm systems.

The FBI reports that a home is burglarized every 15 seconds in the U.S. and crimes to property, like homes, represent over 75 percent of all crimes reported.

According to a Temple University study, a monitored alarm system makes a home three times less likely to be burglarized versus a home without an alarm.

Most home alarm systems are easy to operate, inexpensive to install and come with monthly monitoring fees that cost about a dollar a day. Besides helping to deter burglars and providing peace of mind when residents are away from their homes, security systems can also save money by providing consumers with up to a 20 percent discount off homeowner's policies offered by most insurance companies. Additionally, many monitored systems offer protection from fire and carbon monoxide.

Many safety experts say now is the time for consumers without home security systems to consider buying one.


"When you go on a summer vacation, burglars can go to work on your house. It's important that you make sure you are protected," said Kathleen Baty, 'the Safety Chick,' an author and crime victim who was held at knife point in her home by an intruder. "Getting a security system can be a huge relief and make your vacation truly relaxing."

- Besides purchasing a home security system, the Safety Chick also recommends the following tips to help protect your home:
- Plant thorny bushes like roses and bougainvillea around the windows
- Turn down the phone ringer so burglars won't hear you aren't there
- Buy motion-sensor lights. Some are solar powered, reducing energy usage
- Install a film on your window glass, making it tougher to smash

The increase in home burglaries means high numbers of emergency calls are coming into security monitoring centers. ADT, the nation's largest provider of home security, operates four interconnected, fully redundant monitoring centers nationwide, including Aurora, Colo. Since October, all four centers have had over 3.2 million emergency calls.

"As there continues to be a growing need for security systems," said Guilbeau, "we want all consumers to answer one question, 'Got Security?'"

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Keeping Your Lawn Green

The "green" movement has been on homeowners' and consumers' minds ever more steadily in the past decade. We are creatures of habit and old habits die hard. However,

with persistence, our way of living is continually evolving to one which is becoming more in tune with the environmental issues of the day. Among other things, consumers are adopting environmentally friendly habits of composting kitchen and yard waste, recycling plastics and paper, and using reusable bags for groceries.

Environmentally friendly habits are also being adopted in outdoor living around the home. Although landscaping has been the leader in the green industry for years now, the upkeep of the landscape once it is installed has lagged somewhat in environmental practices. This is especially true in lawn care. Many chemicals have been available for the consumer to tackle weeds and insects, either on their own or through a lawn care company. However, as of the Spring of 2010, lawn care is now "greening up"!

The New Brunswick government has issued regulations on the use and availability of pesticides for maintenance of lawns. Combination products such as "Weed and Feed" will no longer be available and chemical concentrates for weed or insect control have also been taken off the shelves. More than ever, reliance will need to be placed on sound environmentally friendly practices of lawn maintenance such as regular treatments of organic based fertilizer, liming, aerations and topdressing with compost. Homeowners needn't throw up their hands in frustration at the lack of chemical availability – they should throw up their hands in delight! By working with the environment and giving the lawns some healthy food to eat, all will enjoy the benefits of being "green".



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Some lawns may have persistent issues which will require a combination of organic and chemical solutions. Seek out lawn care professionals who are IPM accredited for advice on how to deal with your lawn. They can lead you on the right path to a green lawn.

Urban Landscaping is the only company in the greater Saint John area to date to have achieved full IPM accreditation. Call to discuss how they can help green up your lawn.

- Lorna Pond, CLP
Urban Landscaping Ltd.



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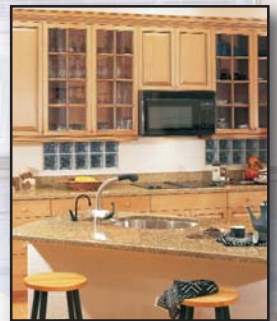


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