

HOME DÉCOR

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THE GLOBE AND MAIL

SATURDAY, APRIL 23, 2016

SECTION HD

The great escape



Dramatic lighting, lush landscaping and a beautiful pool create an upscale resort feel in this backyard. An oversized "family bed" makes a strong statement while being functional for poolside lounging.
ARD OUTDOOR

Why leave home when you can create a resort in your backyard?

The low Canadian dollar may have you rethinking summer vacation plans beyond our borders. Perhaps even the Friday night crawl in heavy traffic to Ontario cottage country has become too much of a hassle.

There is an alternative – the staycation. Investing in transforming your backyard can create a space as rejuvenating as a high-end resort.

A gorgeous outdoor space may be anchored by impressive landscaping, but it's not quite finished without the perfect furniture to set it off. Richard Bockner – principal of ARD Outdoor, which specializes in

custom-designed outdoor furniture – offers advice on how to transform your great outdoors into a spectacular living space.

Create zones

Before plunking a dining set and chaise longue in your outdoor space, consider first how you'll actually be using the backyard. For example, when you want to step outside to, say, read for an hour, where is the best place to do that?

"The dining set may be used four times a year, but you're going to use the lounge set 68 times a year," Mr. Bockner notes. "Sometimes,

people mistake creating a space to impress others instead of investing in the best way to please themselves."

Consider sightlines

To maximize enjoyment of the furniture, envision where the eye will be drawn when you position it. "Most people will want to face the house, pool or lawn," Mr. Bockner points out, "rather than the neighbour's hedges or brick wall."

Another important consideration is how the view changes from day to night. Set up your outdoor space accordingly.

Continued on page 2

Refresher course

Add zing for spring to your space with artful accessories

It is the season again to lighten up the home. Here's how to get into spring mode, according to Debi Barnes, a sales manager at Kennedy Galleries. Start by rolling up those carpets, putting them away and laying down the sisal. Then switch up those accessories.

Tara Lindsay agrees. "Accessories are the first thing home décor retailers bring in come spring – accent chairs, cushions, throws and lampshades in vibrant colours and patterns," says Ms. Lindsay, a buyer at Decorium.

"Change [heavy] winter drapery panels for linen ones, or take them off altogether and go with lightweight linen sheers." Changing everything but the foundation pieces makes a big difference to the ambience of your home and is easy on the budget, notes Ms. Lindsay.

To refresh your home without breaking the bank, consider advice from these two experts.

THE POWER OF PAINTS This year's Pantone hues usher in spring with aplomb – Rose Quartz, Peach Echo, Buttercup, Lilac Gray and Green Flash, among others. "Add these, and suddenly the room looks and feels lighter," Ms. Lindsay says. "And they're easy to coordinate with neutral foundation pieces in grey, beige and cream."

Alternately, she suggests incorporating cream or off-white plus texture – sheepskin, for example – which would work well in virtually any vignette. And if you pair white candles on clear glass candlesticks with an off-pink bowl on a glass coffee table, you will create an elegant, fresh look.

POINTS OF INTEREST Given the prevalence of the all-white palette, inject contrast through patterns or, say, a character chair to provide some definition. Against a backdrop of smart tailored furniture pieces, that one chair could be enough to give the space a new personality.

"I think Canadians are growing tired of all those good bones and are looking for splashes of vibrant colour – yellows and greens – to liven up their interiors," says Ms. Barnes. Ms. Lindsay has a favourite recommendation for colour impact – a fuchsia swivel ottoman or stool for positioning beside a sofa or by a window.

Wall décor is another way to add visual interest to a space – a large colourful artwork, for example, with a bold geometric theme, or an animal print or floral mural.

Continued on page 8

Green is a hot colour trend this year and a coat of paint in a hue such as Seawashed Glass from Sherwin-Williams can rejuvenate a room. Accessorize with a jute rug, white lamps, bamboo shades and colourful cushions.



Brighten up the bathroom (above) with a bold wall colour, add plush towels and accessories or a new window treatment such as moisture-resistant Palm Beach shutters from Hunter Douglas.

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Creating outdoor seating and dining zones provides functionality in a loggia. Square lines are broken up with rounded white-strap and teak-wood chairs for a modern feel.

Escape

Continued from page 1

Include furniture in the budget
Mr. Bockner sees it all the time – homeowners spend half a million dollars on an exquisitely curated landscape design and then cut corners on furniture. “It doesn’t matter how beautiful your landscaping is if you don’t furnish it properly.”

If your budget for furnishings is small, Mr. Bockner suggests bringing home some pieces now and purchasing the rest over time instead of sacrificing design and quality. “You didn’t cut back on the hot tub or the pool or the 15-foot hedges. Why do it on the chairs you put around it?”

Keep in mind too that a few hundred dollars spent on accessories like plants, lanterns, toss pillows and lighting will elevate the overall look.



Oversized lounging sofa and chairs (left) with a traditional weave and Hamptons-style wicker in a driftwood colour complement a modern home. A versatile teak-and-concrete table offers respite from the prevalence of wicker.

PHOTOS: ARD OUTDOOR

Don’t be afraid of oversized furniture
A common practice to dress a pool area is a runaway of chaises, but according to Mr. Bockner, you can get more function and make a bigger statement with a single large piece of furniture.

“Instead of putting 12 chaises, sometimes an oversized daybed or round bed is more useful, especially when flanked by chaises. And it definitely makes a bigger impact.”



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What’s in outdoors

This year, it’s all about personalized outdoor living areas, dramatic lighting and eco-friendly gardens, reports the National Association of Landscape Professionals (NALP), which is based in Herndon, Virginia. Here are the top six outdoor trends, according to the experts at NALP:

- 1. Customized outdoor living spaces**
Homeowners will continue to make the outdoors an extension of indoor living. Anticipate alfresco full-service kitchens, comfortably furnished, stylish living and dining areas, and fire pits and outdoor fireplaces.
- 2. High-tech lighting**
Walkways and backyards will feature dramatic LED or solar-powered lights and accent lighting fixtures.
- 3. Eco and nature gardens**
Environmentally conscious homeowners will opt to grow gardens that attract birds, bees and butterflies, as well as low-maintenance perennial native plants.



Native plants such as purple coneflower attract butterflies and bees.

Native plants are adapted to our climate and pests and have relationships with other native species. Examples of Ontario native plants include bee balm, coneflower, lobelia, yarrow and black-eyed Susan.

- 4. Edible gardens**
Whether it’s fruits, vegetables or herbs, growing food in containers on the balcony or in the garden will be popular with homeowners.

- 5. Water features**
Not anymore about just enhancing the landscape, water features will be selected for their functionality, such as rain barrels and rain gardens, as well as stone retaining walls, to collect water or act as a natural filter.

- 6. Tranquil tones**
Look to the Pantone colours of the year – Rose Quartz pink and Serenity blue – to lend their hues to the garden and to interior décor.

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How to boost the value of your home

A large shower versus a shallow tub scores higher with buyers

Maybe you're considering updating your home to put it on the market. Or you're staying put but want some improvements for your own convenience and enjoyment.

Whether you're selling or staying, it's important to pick upgrades that will add value to your home and also real-time value to your everyday life.

Here are suggestions from Jackie Morra, design consultant at Jackie Morra Interiors, on boosting the value of your house.

KITCHEN Short-term fix-ups that are practical and won't break the bank include repainting cupboards and updating countertops and the backsplash. For the long term, go for a layout that's conducive to food preparation and entertaining. Reconfigure the floor plan and replace the cabinetry, countertops and flooring.

"People do well in spaces that lift them up and are a reflection of who they are," says Ms. Morra.

BATHROOM A large shower versus a shallow bathtub will always score high on the wish list of any homeowner (or buyer). Ms. Morra points out too that as we age, a seamless shower is a desirable feature. It's easy to get in and out of, and there's no need to clean grout. Add bench seating and a hand-held shower.

PAINT For the biggest impact, and for the least amount of money, paint the interior of your entire home from top to bottom, including ceilings, doors and trim.



A kitchen renovation is one of the improvements that will add value to your home. In the Toronto residence above, Eurodale Developments, the Building Industry and Land Development Association's (BILD) Renovator of the Year, knocked down walls, replaced cabinets, countertops and flooring to create an open-concept plan. EURODALE DEVELOPMENTS



Golden Bee Homes, winner of the BILD award for Best Condominium Renovation, transformed a client's older condo's dining room from dull to dynamic with new floors and plenty of built-in storage. GOLDEN BEE HOMES



Spacious showers are worthy inclusions in a bathroom renovation. Don't forget to include stylish fixtures from manufacturers such as Wetstyle.

STORAGE Add built-in storage wherever you can. NIICO Millwork Group Ltd. recommends floor-to-ceiling built-ins. Hang hooks in the mudroom for coats, sports equipment or hats, over doors in bathrooms and bedrooms, and in the garage to hang tools and bikes. In closets, use pull-down rods to maximize space, LED lighting to see items clearly, pull-out shelves, angled shelving for footwear, and labelled boxes, bins and baskets.

FIREPLACE Update your fireplace or remove it completely.

"I come across so many people who have a corner built-in fireplace and they hate it," says Ms. Morra. "Rip it out or recover it with drywall. It's not a big project. Either benefit from the value of the fireplace, or replace it with functional built-ins."

WINDOW COVERINGS Custom window coverings, made to fit your windows, result in an upscale, clean look and protect your furniture and floors from fading.

Opt for cellular shades or shutters to keep warm air in and cold air out. The Duette line from Hunter Douglas features an innovative honeycomb design that provides energy efficiency. Do you

have a south-facing window and want to block the light but not the view? With so many products on the market, such as Silhouette from Hunter Douglas, you're sure to find the perfect window treatment to suit your space.

FAMILY ROOMS If your basement is a catchall for outgrown hockey equipment and seasonal decorations, transform it into a family room where everyone can spend time together. Don't skimp on the finishes. You'll want a good subfloor and durable flooring. To warm up the basement, consider installing a fireplace. And include lots of storage.

MOVE THE LAUNDRY ROOM Moving the laundry room to another level where you actually live is an upgrade that will have value not just to you but also to the next person who will live in your house.

FRONT DOOR Choose a good-quality door that's not only secure, but sets the tone for the rest of the house. "People overlook this," notes Ms. Morra. "They change out the windows, but they forget about the front door. It's one of the easiest and most effective ways to add curb appeal."

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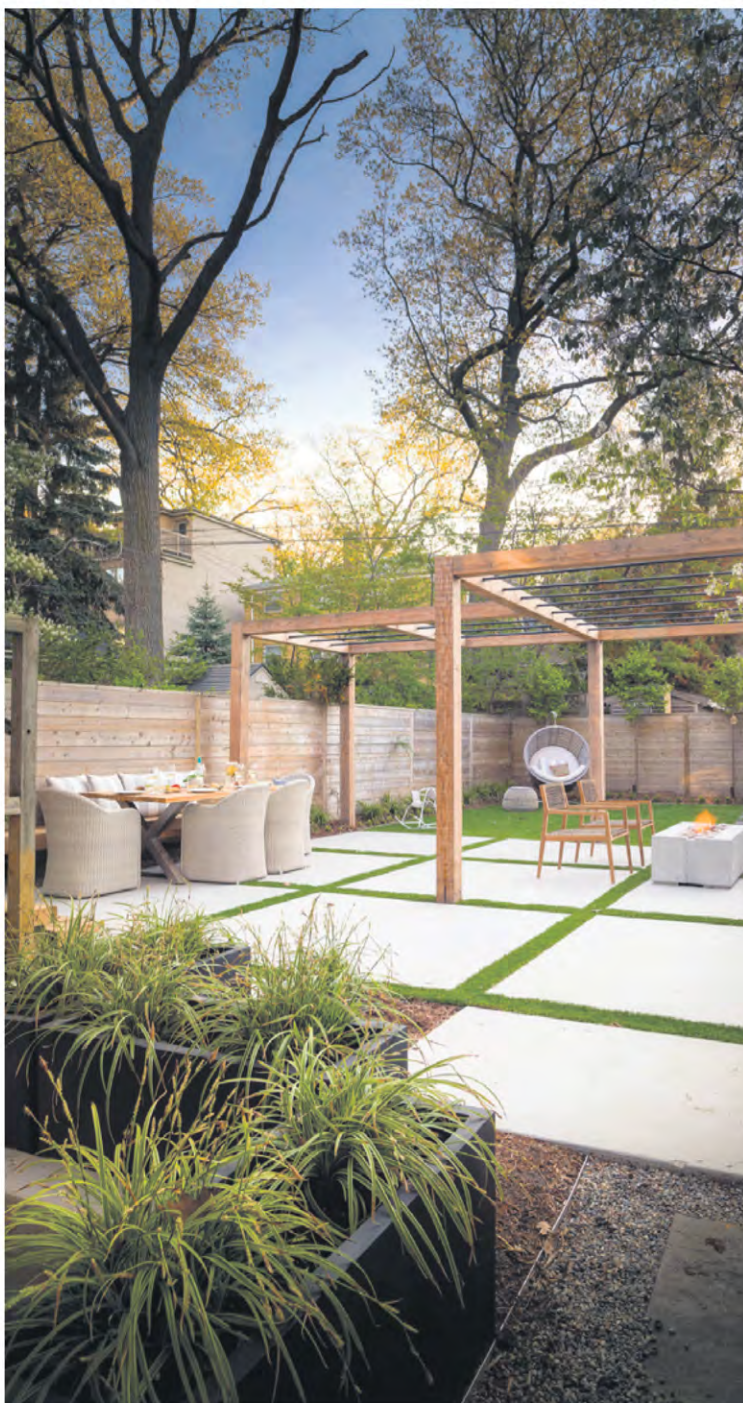
Welcome the alfresco party season – and pick up a few tips from the pros

Lifestyle maven Martha Stewart's list of top tips on entertaining was succinct, though surprisingly short. Pay attention to your guests. Interact with them. Feed them fine food and wine.

Shared in an AMA (Ask Me Anything) chat on the online bulletin board Reddit, Ms. Stewart's advice seems shy of a few essential steps, so we asked other experts in the field to weigh in, as we usher in the season of outdoor entertaining.

"The more chair arms your guests have to rest on, the more comfortable they will be, because people can relax in their own personal space."

Jill Schwartzenruber
Casualife Outdoor Living



Retro cocktails served in simple contemporary glassware can elevate your party a notch up.

Guests can settle into the Riviera sofa with Sunbrella fabric or Welland teak and all-weather-weave club chairs around an Ontario-made Dekko fire pit after dark (top and left). When it's time to eat, they can gather around the Nautic dining table with reclaimed teak top on a stainless steel base. Furnishings are from Casualife Outdoor Living; landscaping is by the Natural Landscape Group. JEFF MCNEILL PHOTOGRAPHY

SHADE Ensure that your guests are protected from the sun's glare or, at night, unflatteringly harsh lighting from a builder-grade lamp. Mr. Hatherly recommends investing in a rotating cantilevered umbrella. "The post is on the side and acts like an arm that can swing the umbrella from one area to another, as the sun moves through the day."

For maximum shade per square foot, choose a square umbrella, but if you prefer visually softer edges to complement your outdoor space, stick to a round umbrella.

LIGHTING Set up ambient lighting to create the right mood. The twinkling of bistro lights is always easy on the eye, and stringing them through trees or on a pergola makes a festive backdrop.

"And candles are a must," declares Malvina Chevolleau, who owns North York-based Fabulous Occasions. "Place them around the perimeter of your entertaining space to mark pathways to the kitchen or bathroom, as well as in glass vessels on tabletops."

As a safer, also chic alternative, go for flameless candles, now available in a myriad of sizes and shapes. And if you have the budget, consider an ethanol-based fire pit, which can be a dramatic focal point and, being portable, can be moved to whichever area you've designated as the lounging section for your guests.

MUSIC No less important as a party ambience factor is the music. For a casual gathering, put together a playlist of summer classics or acoustic versions of pop hits, all searchable on Spotify and Apple Music, says Ashley MacIntyre, a communications and events specialist in Toronto. For a more sophisticated mood, Ms. MacIntyre recommends picking Ella Fitzgerald and Frank Sinatra. "If you want to increase the energy, choose a playlist with '90s hits," she says. "And remember, background music is intended to be just that, in the background. Guests shouldn't need to shout, but you also want to avoid an awkward silence."

HYDRATION Finally, if you know that the thermostat is going to soar, Ms. Chevolleau suggests a self-serve beverage station with pitchers of flavoured waters to help keep guests hydrated, especially when you're serving alcohol. "Blackberry mint or cucumber basil are my favourites," she says. "I've also offered spray bottles filled with water and a couple drops of eucalyptus oil that guests can use as spritzers."

Ms. McIntyre has another literally cool feature to recommend for a fresh-air fête – the hose mister. "It's a perforated hose that gently mists an area," she explains, "and guests can walk through without getting soaked."

Now that's a really good thing.

SEATING First off, a good party begins with ensuring seating comfort for your guests. And if you're buying new outdoor furniture, measure your deck or balcony and the garden to determine your actual real-estate dimensions for setting out lounging and dining zones, says Philip Hatherly, the showroom manager at Jardin de Ville, in Toronto.

"If you're working with a small space or balcony, plan a lounge area with soft seating and smart tables," Mr. Hatherly advises. Look for a table that's lower than a dining table, he says, or a coffee table with a lift top that raises a few inches higher. Both table types make it comfortable to dine from a cushy armchair or sofa.

Seating arrangements are also important, notes Jill Schwartzenruber from Casualife Outdoor Living, which has locations in Markham and Mississauga. "Consider individual seating, such as six club chairs, or two club chairs and a sofa around a fire pit," she says. "The more chair arms your guests have to rest on, the more comfortable they will be, because people can relax in their own personal space."

She also points out that a round table encourages more conversation, compared to a square or rectangular table, which is apt to limit guests to interact only with those next to them or across from them.



The newest outdoor furnishings are designed with the same level of comfort and style as indoor furniture, such as the Roda Double sectional sofa (above), available from Jardin de Ville. It seats multiple people and its upholstery withstands adverse weather conditions.

TRENDS

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Mars and Venus at home

When it comes to decorating, male and female preferences can be worlds apart

No matter how much gender equality we achieve, when it comes to decorating choices and buying patterns, men and women are like chalk and cheese.

Bestselling author and relationship counsellor John Gray coined the phrase – “men are from Mars, women are from Venus” – to describe the fundamental psychological differences

between the sexes and how they affect relationships. And when it comes to home décor, male and female preferences can also be planets apart.

We asked three experts – Bill Forberg, CEO at Shelter Furniture; Muriel Goodwin, designer at Markham Furniture; and Vanessa Pokrzywa, interior designer for Imperial Carpet and Home – to share their observations on the Mars-Venus divide.



Décor pieces fit for a stylish man cave might include a leather Stressless YOU Michael chair with wood frame (far left), a rustic cabinet with trumpeter motif from Decorium (left) and an Italian leather sofa with square arms from Markham Furniture (below).



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WHAT MEN WANT

■ **Sofas and chairs**

Men seek comfort in their man cave – the place where they watch sports. Think deep sofas with deluxe seating with feather and down wrapping. Unlike women, who will sit close together, men want at least a foot and a half of space between themselves and will turn sideways to talk.

They prefer square arms, sectionals with chaises, and flat seams or baseball stitching rather than piping. Their fabric of choice is either soft (chenille or men’s flannel suiting) or synthetic because it stands up to abuse better than linens or cottons. Leather is also big with guys for its look and for maintenance (spill something and wipe it off). They prefer squared-off, rather than rounded, silhouettes.

■ **Colour and pattern**

Men gravitate to earth tones such as warm browns, tans, chocolate and greys. They rarely choose light colours or jewel tones. They prefer monochromatic and geometric patterns and colours.

■ **Artwork and accessories**

Here again, males prefer monochromatic and geometric patterns and colours, and in accent pieces such as coffee and end tables, they prefer wood.

■ **Rugs**

Men like graphic patterns and deeper colours, such as blues, charcoals and greys, and abstracted patterns that appear almost like a painting. They like the latest trend of distressed rugs with that faded, roughed-up look, as well as geometric and contemporary styling.

WHAT MEN DON'T WANT

- Sofa details like piping and skirts
- Chintz and floral patterns
- Toss pillows and throws

WHAT WOMEN WANT

■ **Sofas and chairs**

Women prefer sofas with traditional curved arms, like William Birch or Lawson style, and are more likely to choose a skirted sofa than exposed legs. When they have their friends over, they’ll sit close, draw their legs up and curl into the sofa. They want soft seating, such as a down blend.

They are more adventurous when it comes to fabrics, going for small or large prints. If the sofa is a solid colour, then they’ll want it textured, like corduroy or basket-weave, and add patterned pillows.

■ **They change it up**

Women are more inclined to change décor with the season by switching up pillows, throws and accent pieces, and exchanging warm tones and patterns in cozy materials for bright colours in crisp fabrics.

■ **Artwork and accessories**

They are drawn to colourful pillows, rugs, throws and lamps, as well as softer fabrics, tufted backs and beds with fabric headboards.

■ **Rugs**

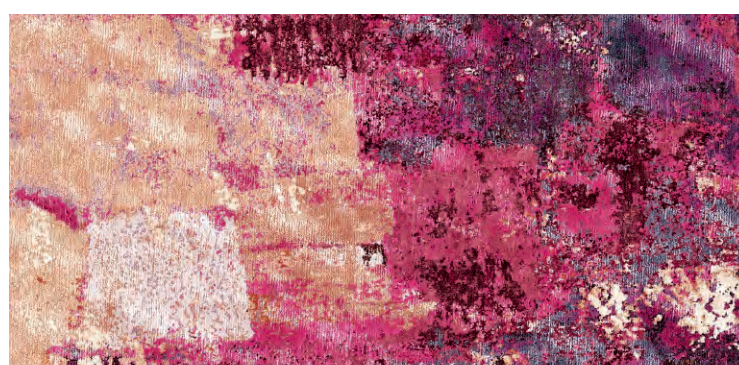
Women tend to like carpets in lighter, brighter colours, such as pinks and blues, or carpets with washed-out, distressed looks. They gravitate to the traditional as long as it’s an updated version with a lighter background and bright contemporary colours.

WHAT WOMEN DON'T WANT

- Bulky furniture
- Dark leather recliners with drink holders
- Lack of details and accessories



Women enjoy décor elements such as a Stressless YOU James chair in mustard leather with clean Nordic lines from Decorium (right); colourful wall art (above); sofa with rounded arms from Markham Furniture (below left); fine wool hand-knotted pink made in Nepal from Imperial Carpet & Home (below right).



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Refresher course

Continued from page 1

FRESHEN UP THE FURNITURE Reposition furniture to come up with different focal points, says Ms. Barnes. "In the winter, you gather around the fireplace or the TV. For spring, try orienting furniture to the windows and the view outdoors instead."

Slipcovers offer a quick, easy way to refresh rooms, with a relaxed cottage feel. They've been used for ages in Europe's manor homes to cover winter's velvets and tapestries. Although the cost of custom slipcovers is somewhat pricey, the advantage makes up for it, as they protect your furniture from the oil, sweat and sand of summertime, as well as the seasonal shedding of your pets.

DAZZLE UP THE DINING ROOM It's fairly easy to get the dining room in spring mode. Set the table with the season's fresh natural linens, available in a host of lovely new colours – soft yellows and greys, vibrant corals and pinks. Complete the look with a new table runner, some spring flowers and a cheery bowl of lemons or persimmons.

SWITCH AND SPRUCE UP The kitchen too should get gussied up for spring – go for a new sink mat and some bright new tea towels. In the entryway, add fresh flowers and change the artwork – or move it to another room. Replace the hall table with its basket of winter scarves and tuques with a colourful chair or bench. Change the wall mirror to a full-length floor mirror to allow light to bounce around and create the illusion of spaciousness.



A Taylor Made dining set, available from Kennedy Galleries, gets a burst of spring with a seasonal bouquet, new linens and a sisal rug. Bright shots of blue add life to a predominantly white palette.

BRIGHTEN THE BEDROOM A change of linens will go a long way to spiff up the bedroom. Dress the beds with new sheets and pillowcases in the stylish new hues of the Pantone colour wheel, such as Snorkel Blue and Peach Echo. Pack away the heavy winter drapes and switch to light fabrics. But keep those black-out curtains, as the new season means there's more sunlight streaming in earlier in the morning. Or opt for roman blinds, underneath sheers, in a lightweight linen.

Rotate the mattress (no need to flip anymore) and store away the carpets. Switch to sisal rugs or keep the hardwood floors bare.

Spruce up your pet's surroundings with a jazzy dog bed from Decorium's new collection.



BOOST THE BATHROOM Bring out pretty soaps and towels in freshened hues to encourage a change in your morning routine, which will help make you feel rejuvenated.

PET PROJECT Your pets also need a change of scenery for spring. Available in smart colours and fun patterns, the dog beds in Decorium's new line are stylish enough to grace your living room and coordinate with your home's fresh palette.



Clean slate

5 tips for bringing spring shine to your home

Not looking forward to that time-honoured ritual called spring cleaning? Here's how to do it better, in less time, and by using cleaning products recommended by the experts. Take a page and then some from Consumer Reports' *How to Clean Practically Anything*.

1. BARBECUE GRILLS Get the grill very hot and run a long-handled metal brush dipped in water over the grates. When the grates cool, wipe them clean with a paper towel dipped in hot water. Remove any rust spots with the wire wheel attachment of an electric drill, but wear goggles and gloves. For easy future cleanups, spray grates with a non-stick grill product available in many grocery stores.

2. BLINDS Follow the manufacturer's instructions. For PVC and wood blinds, put on soft cleaning gloves and wipe with your hands, a soft dust cloth or a vacuum-dusting attachment. Put PVC or aluminum blinds in a bathtub filled with warm soapy water and rinse. Keep the roller mechanism dry. Hang blinds at full length to dry. Using the soft brush attachment, use your vacuum to clean fabric shades.

3. CERAMIC TILE Try to remove stains with liquid detergent and water. If that doesn't work, try a mixture of baking soda and water for greasy stains and hydrogen peroxide, or a mild bleach solution for coffee, tea, food or fruit juice stains. Mop tile floors with a solution of mild detergent and water, then buff with a chamois cloth. For wall tiles (such as a backsplash or shower stall), use a sponge soaked in soapy water. For soap scum and mineral deposits, spray a commercial cleaner designed for tiles, allow it to stand for five minutes, then wipe off. Scrub grout with a toothbrush dipped in a solution of one part bleach and six parts water.

4. LEATHER FURNITURE Treat stains immediately. Check manufacturer's care instructions. Put a drop of water in a hidden location. If it doesn't soak in, colour is pigmented; if not, it is aniline-dyed. For these dyes, vacuum regularly. Vacuum pigmented leather and wipe periodically with a soft cloth dampened with water. For both types, annually use saddle soap or another cleaner made especially for leather. Apply neatsfoot oil if cracking starts.

5. WINDOWS Clean windows from the top down. To make your own solution, use a mixture of half a cup of sudsy ammonia, one pint of rubbing alcohol and enough water to make a gallon. Pour into a spray bottle. Take a sponge to apply the cleaning solution, wipe across the window with a dampened squeegee blade, then wipe the blade. Polish with an old newspaper. To avoid streaks, clean on a cloudy day or when windows are in shade.

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Curve appeal

Is rounded furniture better for our well-being?

Could curved furniture promote happiness? Yes, according to a University of Toronto study on how people's brains react to different shapes and objects. The 2013 study, led by neuroscientist Oshin Vartanian, suggests that not only do most of us prefer interiors with curved shapes, but a region of our brain known to contribute to pleasure is actually stimulated when we view them.

Participants in the study were placed in a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) machine and shown hundreds of images of interior spaces and furnishings; the results showed that they overwhelmingly preferred curving shapes to angular designs.

But in addition to upping our comfort level, curved furniture also serves a design purpose.

"Bigger spaces, like the designs of some newer homes, tend to have high ceilings, huge great rooms and square lines. Curved furniture can help soften that space and warm it up," says Valerie Simone, a design consultant for Martin Daniel Interiors.

"We're seeing a lot of curves in more contemporary and classic pieces. The curved sofa is particularly popular because it can be used to divide a great room from a dining or family room or be used as an accent piece in a bay window."

While round tables

promote a sense of camaraderie in an office space, they can produce a similar effect in the home – and also come with the added benefit of more forgiving edges should you bump into one.

According to Lindsay Hewitt, an art director at Carrocel Interiors, curved furniture was an oft-repeated design throughout the 20th century.

"Lines started to become clean when the modern transition happened in a post-war era. The focus was on functionality and removing garnish and detail in favour of pure form," she says. "We saw more of a strong curvature come in with the art-nouveau and art-deco looks."

With mid-century modern furniture experiencing popularity in the market right now, there are a number of circular concepts, which add fluidity and motion to any room. "We're seeing circular mirrors everywhere," Ms. Hewitt reports.

Circles are starting to replace the geometric shapes that have been popular in everything, from furniture to graphic design. "We're starting to move into a direction of something softer on the eye," she says. "We won't lose the previous straight lines, but a bit of fluidity will soften them up a little bit."

Accent pieces are a great starting point to bring that sensibility into a room. Ms. Simone says that Martin Daniel Interiors has been working with half-moon and oval consoles lately, which help give larger spaces and entranceways a nice flow.



Rounded shapes are softer on the eye and add a sense of fluidity to square rooms such as an Italian-designed elegant console table from Martin Daniel Interiors (top). Curves and circles are popular in classic and contemporary pieces, such as a circular desk from Carrocel Furniture (below).



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Nature calls

The modern bathroom is all about natural finishes, style and personalized luxuries

Back in the day, the bathroom mostly got short shrift from homeowners, buyers and, consequently, builders. After all, it was essentially a functional room.

Not anymore. Nowadays, the bathroom is seen as a personal retreat, a place for relaxation and rejuvenation. Home sellers and real estate agents – as well as renovators and designers – are paying attention, ensuring that bathrooms are updated to be stylish and inviting with luxurious details.

A popular trend in bathrooms is the use of natural products as finishes, such as wood, marble, natural stone, river rock and limestone.

"I try to use natural finishes wherever possible," says Martin Ciccone, of Toronto-based Martin Ciccone Design Ltd., who is a member of the Association of Registered Interior Designers of Ontario (ARIDO). "Hardwood floors are not uncommon in bathrooms. With moisture-resistant finishes, they're durable and beautiful."

Other noteworthy trends pertain to tiling. If you're using plain tiles, install them in unusual patterns for a creative twist. Consider large-format tiles, which are all the rage in Europe. Requiring few or even no grout lines at all, large tiles are easy to clean and create an intriguing spatial illusion.

On-trend too is the large seamless shower, which creates a clean modern look. Modern bathrooms also typically feature heated floors. When Mr. Ciccone does a bathroom renovation, he takes the heat factor up a notch, installing heat in the shower stall – underneath the floor and the shower seat.

For those of us who prefer baths, the deep soaker tub offers pure luxury, but as we age, there's the concern of getting



in and out safely. There are tubs available with an entire side that drops down and then raises up, according to Mr. Ciccone, who buys all his products from TAPS Bath Centre. "If they don't have what I need," he says, "they get it for me."

The modern toilet is not exempt from comfort and luxury considerations. Actually, it is one of the easiest fixtures to replace, notes Mr. Ciccone. Standard toilet height is approximately 15 inches off the finished floor, which may not suit everyone. If you switch to a toilet that's appropriate to your height, you'll notice the difference right away.

Take note too of the slew of features geared to convenience that are now available on toilets – ranging from a sensor-equipped seat that lifts as you approach and lowers as you walk away,

to programmable settings that keep the seat warm and washlets with nozzles that oscillate and pulsate while cleaning. Also on the market is a hands-free, temperature-adjustable, warm-air dryer, and a nozzle that self-cleans and sanitizes.

Don't neglect those finishing touches that add ambiance to the bathroom. Repurpose a vintage dresser to accommodate a sink or perhaps a unique found piece to serve as the perfect makeup table. To complement a bathroom renovation big or small, repaint or stain that tired-looking vanity, medicine cabinet or shelving.

Lastly, space does matter, or the illusion of it anyway. When changing up things in the bathroom, especially one that's not spacious, make decluttering a top priority and include storage solutions.

It's hip to be square. Square, angular and geometric fixtures such as these from American Standard at TAPS Bath Centre are a hot trend in bathroom décor and work well in modern and transitional settings.



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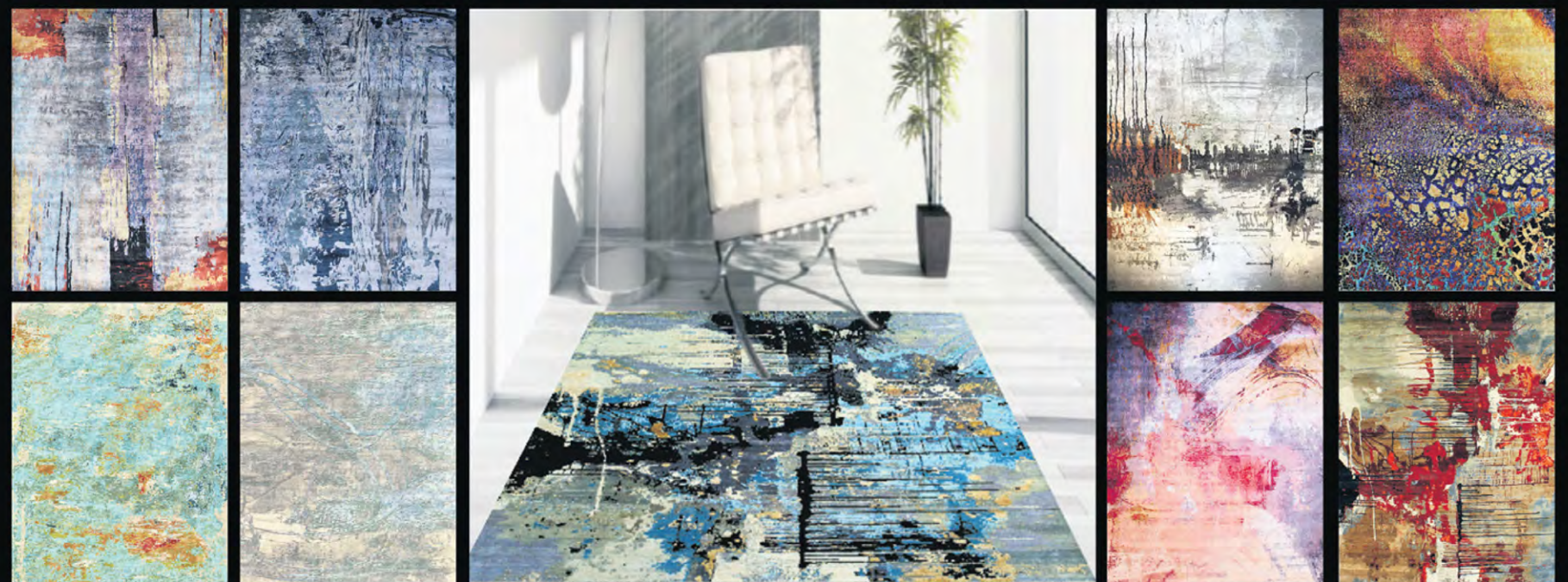
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