

A GUIDE TO CHOOSING NEW CARPET

There are many styles of carpet to choose from to reflect your personal preference and decorating style. Each type of carpet offers varying degrees of durability, stain-resistance and insulation value. In addition to researching such aspects of carpeting, it also pays to ask yourself a few questions before making the investment in new carpet.

For example, how much of traffic your carpet will experience? Do you have active kids or pets? Do you frequently entertain? If so, you may want to choose high durability products perhaps even paying a bit more for commercial grade. The choice of carpet also varies depending on where it will be used in your home. For example, a luxurious wool carpet may be fine for the bedroom but may not offer adequate stain protection in a dining area.

Another important consideration before buying carpet is the amount of time you can devote to cleaning. Do you have time for a thorough vacuuming once or twice a week? Are you willing to rent a steam cleaner twice a year to give your carpets a thorough cleaning? Carpets tend to trap dirt, mold, dander, pet hair and other potential allergens. They can also host fleas brought in by a pet. Regular cleaning not only keeps your carpets looking good, it also keeps allergens to a minimum. Choose a vacuum with a high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter to trap microscopic particles. Non-HEPA vacuums can actually worsen the problem by making allergens airborne. Dust can also accumulate in carpet so it is a good idea to vacuum upholstery and wipe any dust-laden area with a damp cloth.

Sound and Heat

One thing you may notice in auditoriums, churches or other large meeting halls is the prevalence of hard materials: wood, concrete, plastic. These surfaces reflect sound without muting it. Soft materials such as fabric and carpet tend to absorb and reduce noise levels. This can be a benefit in large rooms in which the sound of radio, television computer and other modern appliances can become bothersome.

Another benefit of carpet is the warmth that it provides both in terms of

ambiance and insulation properties. Carpet helps prevent the exchange of cold air up through the floor and warm air leaving the room. Some carpets and carpet pads are labeled with their R-value – the standardized insulation value. The higher the R-value, the more insulation the product provides.

Fibres

You will find a vast selection of fibres, styles and prices. Years ago, wool was the only option. Today, 98% of carpets are made from synthetic materials. There are five fibre types. They are nylon, polypropylene, polyester, acrylic and wool.

- Nylon is strong, scuff resistant and easily cleaned. It retains colour well and resists mildew. Most nylon carpets are stain-resistant to protect against household spills and stains.
- Polypropylene, also called olefin, wears well and resists stains and mildew better than most other fibres. It is also economical. However, it scores low on luxury, flattens easily and is rough to the touch.
- Polyester has a luxurious feel, rich colour and is one of the most effective fibres for resisting stains. However, it is a softer fibre that tends to mat and crush more easily than nylon.
- Acrylic has the look and feel of wool at a lower price. It has a low static level and stands up well to sunlight and mildew however it attracts and holds oily stains.
- Wool is the most expensive and the most luxurious choice. It offers moderate stain resistance however it is easy to clean because the bulky fibres hold dirt high in the pile.

Resistance

The majority of carpets on the market today are either naturally stain-resistant, or have had some treatment to prevent stains from penetrating the fibre. Most food and beverage stains can be wiped off with cold water.

If you wish to carpet the bathroom, select a carpet that has been given an antimicrobial chemical treatment to reduce the growth of common bacteria,

fungi, yeast, mold and mildew.

Pile

Pile refers to the way yarn is attached to the backing of the carpet and also to the shape of the yarn. The following piles types are good for high traffic areas. Frieze has twisted yarn tufts, which curl at the carpet surface, hiding footprints and making it suitable for high traffic areas. Textured carpet is made from a cut pile of twisted yarn tufts, creating a surface that masks footprints. Loop pile, such as Berber, has evenly cut yarn. It generally lasts a long time in high-traffic areas.

If you are replacing old carpet, it is advisable to replace your underlay at the same time. A carefully selected carpet cushion can extend the life of your carpet. It can help absorb the shock from foot traffic, thus preventing the carpet fibres from matting and crushing.

A well-informed sales person can help you with your selection and discuss such issues as density, twist level and choosing the proper carpet pad.

Most stores use fluorescent lighting, which tends to cast a blue hue that interferes with the ability to accurately judge colours. Remember, when choosing a carpet, ask to take samples home so that you can look at them next to your furnishings in both natural and artificial light.

Finding the right carpet for your home can be a complex process of choosing the best colours, textures and materials to suit your style. A good choice can complement your home for years to come. Not to mention, on winter mornings bare feet will appreciate the warmth of carpet!

THE "HOME HUNTERS"

Grant & Steve Hunter

AVOID COMMON 'DO-IT-YOURSELF' DOWNFALLS

Not everyone who buys a home has experience doing their own repairs and small renovation projects. Yet homeowners quickly discover that by tackling some of these projects on their own, they can save money. Before you start work, be aware of common do-it-yourself downfalls, some of which can result in larger, more expensive problems, or even injury.

Woodwork

Eventually, most homeowners end up doing repairs or renovation projects which require some woodworking. It may be when a new puppy gnaws through the molding or when an odd-sized closet requires custom-designed shelves. Before you begin any woodworking project, consider the following tips:

1. Make sure there is no water on the floor where you will be working and relocate the dog's dish, plant watering can, etc. Water is an excellent conductor of electricity. In the event that electrical current from a power tool comes in contact with a wet surface, it can deliver a dangerous, even deadly, jolt of electricity. If you are using power tools outdoors, move inside at the first sign of rain.
2. Due to the possibility of sparks when using power tools, it is important to ensure that the room has adequate ventilation, particularly if you are working in a garage where combustible gas or propane vapours may accumulate. Remove rags used for paint thinner or gasoline. Position your work area well away from vehicles and gas-powered lawnmowers.
3. Choose an area where children and pets will not be underfoot.
4. If you only need to do woodworking projects occasionally, you may wish to rent equipment rather than purchasing it. Doing so may save you money and there are other benefits as well. Stores that rent equipment carry a wide selection of tools, the equipment is typically well maintained, and if you require instruction on how to use a certain tool, the store clerk can provide a quick demonstration including safety tips.
5. The following are some inexpensive do-it-yourself essentials: a carpenter's square, a tape measure, a laser pointer for a

straight edge, a 'stud-finder' (to locate studs behind drywall), work gloves, and safety goggles.

Repairing a Large Hole In Drywall

Accidents happen and when they happen to be a hole in the wall, it can be disconcerting. If you've never had such an accident, you may imagine that the entire wall would need to be replaced at significant expense and inconvenience. Fortunately, drywall is one of the least expensive and most forgiving types of wall material. Brick, wood, and panelling are much more complicated to repair.

Visit your local home renovation store with the following shopping list: a piece of drywall twice the size of the hole (ask the store clerk if they have any scraps in good condition), thin wooden board twice the size of the hole, drywall screws and joint compound.

Measure the maximum vertical and horizontal size of the hole in your wall then add a few centimetres to the measurements. Use these measurements to calculate the size of the patch. Cut out the patch then place it over the hole. Using a pencil, lightly trace the patch. Cut along the exact outline of the patch. Now you're ready to work on the supporting board.

Cut out a piece of wooden board that is several centimetres longer than the patch. The overlap will allow you to screw the board into place behind the drywall. Drill a hole in the middle of the board wide enough for you to slip your index finger inside. Tilt the board and slide it through the hole then position it directly behind the drywall. Holding onto the board tightly with your finger, screw it into place with the drywall screws. Now you have a support for the drywall patch.

Next slide the drywall patch into place. Apply the joint compound to fill in the cracks. When the compound is dry, sand and paint the patched area to match the rest of the wall.

While at times, doing home repairs can be challenging, they can also be rewarding in terms of personal satisfaction and money saved!

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BUILDING A HOME ADDITION

Building an addition on a home can be a costly and an involved process but it can also be the best option if you need extra space and don't wish to change homes and neighbourhoods. Whether you are planning to expand your kitchen, add an extra bedroom or an entire second story, all renovations, large and small, involve a number of important considerations. By keeping these points in mind and consulting professionals, you may save yourself time and money.

1. Consider the purpose of the room and your requirements. For example, if you are adding an office, you may want to have a quiet room overlooking the backyard rather than the street. If you are planning a bedroom for a new baby, consider what use you may find for the room when your children have grown. Perhaps you hope to start a B&B or rent out a suite to a student. In either case, it would be practical to include a bathroom in the room.
2. What is the traffic flow between the addition and the rest of your home? A well-planned traffic flow will make the most efficient use of space. Hallways are generally wasted space; careful configuration of doors and entryways can avoid long hallways. Another consideration is the distance between the new addition and key rooms in your home. For example, if you are building an office and you are a parent who is working at home, you may want the office to be placed near the child's room or the kitchen.
3. Consider the access to your property for heavy equipment such as bulldozers and backhoes. A professional renovator should take a close look at your property to determine if fences, playground equipment or other obstacles will have to be removed first. You may also need to cut down trees or bushes to make way for equipment. The cost of planting new grass and landscaping after construction should be factored into your renovation budget.
4. New work will have to comply with provincial building codes as well as local bylaws and zoning requirements. Municipal zoning by-laws can regulate the height of your home, the distance of your home from the road, the ratio of window to wall area, etc. A professional

home renovator should be able to ensure that your renovation complies with the various regulations.

5. The building materials used to construct a new addition may not match those used in your existing home. You may need to paint your home's exterior, install new siding, trim, and window shutters and upgrade flooring, countertops and fixtures.
6. Another consideration is how well the new addition will fit into the existing architecture of your home. Ideally, the addition should look like it has always been there. It can be hard to imagine the final outcome by looking at drawings. There are 3-D renovation programs available on the market (or your renovator may have one) that can provide a more realistic view. To help make your addition blend seamlessly into your existing home, you may wish to include similar architectural elements (e.g. gables or a bay window).
7. Will your renovated home look out of place in your neighbourhood? Consider the size and style of surrounding homes. If you are building a second story to create additional bedrooms, your home may be the only one on your block with two stories and so many bedrooms. This could make your home difficult to sell in the future. Maintaining a style that is somewhat similar to neighbouring homes is also important.
8. Increased plumbing and electrical needs may exceed your existing services, requiring significant upgrades.
9. You may need to upgrade your heating and ventilation systems to meet the increased demand created by the addition.
10. Your home may have structural problems, which may need to be addressed before renovations can begin. For example, extra reinforcement may be needed in the roof and wall or cracks in the foundation may need to be repaired.
11. If your new addition will extend out from your home, it should be built on a new foundation. A solid foundation will ensure that your new addition does not shift or sink and cause problems where the roof, walls and floor join the existing structure. A properly built foundation will also prevent moisture from entering your home.

There are a number of ways to construct a foundation including sinking piers into the ground or excavating a full foundation. The option you choose will depend on the type of soil in your yard and the depth of the solid rock. A professional renovator should test your soil and explain the options in detail. He or she can also assess whether the existing foundation drainage system needs to be upgraded.

12. Nowadays, most rooms are 'wired' in some way. Don't forget to run cables for telephone and computer connections, cable TV and security or home entertainment systems.
13. Lastly, there is good news for homeowners who are planning to make substantial renovations to their homes. The Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) offers a GST/HST tax rebate for "substantially renovated homes, major additions, and conversions". Homeowners can apply to receive a rebate on labour and materials if they hire a professional firm, or a rebate on materials if they do the work themselves. Please visit the CRA website to find out about the guidelines for qualifying: <http://www.cca-adrc.gc.ca/tax/individuals/topics/gsthstrebate/builders-e.html>

Building an addition is akin to major surgery—if done in haste or by someone who lacks proper training, the result can be a costly second 'surgery'. By keeping the previous points in mind, you will hopefully be able to avoid the surprises and frustrations sometimes experienced by homeowners who choose to renovate.

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INTERIOR PAINTING

Painting is one of the easiest, least expensive interior renovation projects you can do. A small investment and a little elbow grease can create an entirely new atmosphere in your home. Colour is one of the first things people notice when entering a room and can actually be used to create optic illusions. You can open up a small space with a light tone or choose a colour which is complimentary to your furniture (ex. pale yellow paint and a purple sofa) to harmonise the room. The following tips can help you achieve professional results.

- The first decision you'll be faced with in a paint store is whether to use oil-based or water-based paints. Oil-based paint tends to be longer lasting and smudges wash off quite easily. However, both the paint and the thinner required to clean the brushes produce fumes which can be hazardous. Proper ventilation is essential. Water-based paint dries faster and produces fewer emissions but, in general, is not as durable.
- Preparing for a paint job can be time consuming but it can save your furniture and floors. Move as much furniture to another room as possible-they will be safe from spills as well as creating more room for you to work. Drop cloths made of oil-cloth or plastic are inexpensive and available at paint and hardware stores. When covering your floors, lay the cloth or plastic loosely and hold it in place using painter's masking tape on the underside and the trim. This type of masking tape has minimal adhesive so that it will not lift off paint when the tape is removed.
- Good brushes are not inexpensive but will last a long time if properly cleaned after use. Store brushes facing down off a nail and then upright or on their side once they are dry. Bent bristles make even application of paint nearly impossible. High quality brushes also shed fewer bristles which means fewer bristles painted onto your wall!
- This trick is great for large paint jobs. Fill a bucket about one-half full of thinner for oil-based paint or water for water-based paint. Straighten a wire hanger to be placed across the top of the bucket. When you take a short break from painting, swish the brush in the bucket then thread the straightened hanger

through the hole in the handle of the brush. There should be enough liquid to cover the bristles. Ensure that the bristles do not rest on the bottom of the bucket.

- Invest in an extension pole for your paint roller. This inexpensive gadget will save a lot of time climbing up and down ladders to reach high sections of walls or the ceiling. It also eliminates the need for bending over to paint the lower part of the wall.
- If you are painting large areas in the same colour, skip the traditional paint pan and try using a bucket with a paint screen. Pour a few litres of paint into the bucket and hang the screen in the pail. Once you have dipped your roller in the paint, roll it up and down the screen to remove the excess.
- Sometimes two painters are better than one. Divide the task of painting a room into two jobs. One person can use a brush to paint around trim, windows and doors. Once the first person has finished outlining a wall, the other can come along with the roller and fill it in.
- Don't forget about the sensitive noses of your pets! If the paint fumes give us a headache imagine how your furry friends feel. Move them outdoors or to a different location such as a friend's home or a pet kennel.
- A new colour or even a fresh coat of the original colour can add life to a room but remember you'll be spending a lot of time looking at the colour you choose. Dark colours can make a dramatic impact but make a room seem much smaller and be harder to cover with another colour. That burgundy paint that looked so good in the paint store might not look the same on four walls!

Everyone can achieve evenly painted walls and professional results by working carefully and using good ingredients such as quality brushes, rollers and paint. Have fun!

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MEASURING UP YOUR HOME RENOVATIONS

It's a homeowner's renovation nightmare: when it comes time to install the beautiful custom-made kitchen cabinets they're a few inches too long for the wall. Or perhaps you've discovered that both tubs and doors have a right- and left-hand side and you've bought the wrong ones. Hopefully you noticed before applying caulking on the tub or screwing in the last hinge on the door! Expensive or long-awaited purchases, which are the wrong fit, mean extra cost and lost time.

Fortunately, most material mistakes are easy to avoid. The trick for homeowners is to know where errors commonly occur before you place an order. That way, you can learn from the mistakes of others instead of your own!

The Rules of Ordering

No matter which product you're ordering, these six crucial steps can help you avoid getting the wrong item:

1. Measure carefully. Incorrect measurements are the culprit behind many ordering problems. Measure two or three or until you're sure that the numbers are accurate. Although some product purchases require you to do all the measuring, others require a professional to measure. It may be a good idea to have the store or the contractor make the final measurements shifting responsible for any errors onto them. The fee should be minimal or nothing,
2. Provide visual aids. When ordering items or simply scouting for them, give salespeople floor plans, sketches and-best of all-snapshots.
3. Bring samples home. This is the only way to know for sure how a product will look. Many products that look perfect in the store mysteriously change colour at home. Different lighting conditions as well as contrast with other colours in the room change our perception of the original colour.
4. Tap into salesperson experience. When it comes to measuring mistakes, home centre employees have seen them all-from cabinets, plumbing fixtures, flooring, to doors and windows. Visit a few stores on a "dry run" and read up on specific products so you can ask salespeople pertinent questions.
5. Buy matching items from the same batch. This is especially important with tile, which often varies noticeably in colour from batch to batch. Mismatches often occur when insufficient quantities are of a product are ordered the first time.

You'll find lot or batch numbers stamped on the item or packaging. Make sure everything you order is from the same batch. Then write down the numbers or keep the packaging in case you need more. This is especially important if there is a long time lapse between your purchase and installation—you may have to contact the manufacturer directly if you need additional tile.

6. Double-check paperwork. It's better to scrutinize the packing list before you lug your purchase home and unwrap it. Ensure the product names, model numbers, grades, sizes, prices and quantities are correct. Keep a copy of the receipts in a safe place in case any problems arise.

Are wrong products refundable?

If you receive the wrong product through manufacturer/supplier error then it should be relatively simple to get a refund.

If you measured incorrectly or made an error in placing your order, chances are you will pay, at least partially. You may be charged a 15% to 25% restocking fee to return regularly stocked products. If the item is custom-made there will likely be no refund.

Doors that open into a wall or bathtubs that have the tap on one end the drain on the other, might be novel for a moment but returning to the store and exchanging items can be a waste of your valuable time and money! Remember to measure up first!

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NEW PRODUCTS AND TRENDS IN BATHROOM REMODELLING

In ancient Rome, citizens who couldn't afford bathing facilities in their homes would visit public baths. These were not only places to scrub away the dust of the day, but they were also places to indulge in a warm soak surrounded by elegant décor and soothing music. Thousands of years later, the modern bathroom also offers functionality and comfort. The difference today, however, is in the vast range of available fixtures, lighting, flooring, accessories, and wall coverings that incorporate function with style. If you are planning to renovate your bathroom, the following tips may help you select the best products and trends to suit your needs as well as conduct a successful renovation.

Whether you wish to retile, add a stylish vanity or completely renovate your bathroom, you will find a stunning selection of new products on the market. Some of these use technology and modern materials to create durable, water-resistant products and others are innovative designs that improve on tradition.

1. Bamboo flooring can provide the warmth of 'wood' in the bathroom with little risk of warping. This flooring is produced from tropical bamboo grass that has been processed to produce a flat, hard surface. In its natural state, bamboo is sandy beige but it can be stained to any colour. The floor must be sealed with polyurethane.
2. Electronic faucets that activate when you put your hands under them are becoming popular for home decorating. They are a great way to save water, particularly for families with children who often like to leave the water running. Unlike the industrial-style electronic faucets found in public washrooms, homeowners will find a growing selection of elegant faucet styles.
3. Perhaps the most radical design change that the bathroom sink has ever undergone is the vessel sink. It looks like a bowl sitting on the countertop but the bowl has drainage at the bottom that connects with standard plumbing. Vessel sinks have a simple, geometric look that works well with modern

dÃ©cor. These sinks are available in a variety of materials including glass, stainless steel, ceramic, stone, copper and more.

4. Showerheads have also evolved. Computerized shower valves can be programmed to regulate water pressure and temperature.
5. Etched glass has been used for years on dishware but now etched glass is used to create bathroom accessories and mirrors with a spa look.
6. A 'rainwater' showerhead is a popular new innovation. Rather than a blast of pressurized water from a traditional showerhead, the rainwater version uses gravity. The showerhead is directly overhead and water falls in a soothing cascade.
7. Bathrooms often have bright lights near the mirror to provide adequate illumination for shaving, applying makeup, etc. In many cases, the light over the mirror is the only one in the room. A new trend is to use sconce lighting to provide a warm glow of light in the rest of the room. By installing one light switch to control the vanity light and another to control the sconce lighting, you can create ambiance at the flick of a switch.
8. If your bathroom is large enough, consider adding an elegant, comfortable chair. Furniture and built-in cabinets that resemble furniture are a popular new trend in bathroom design.
9. In the spirit of luxury, entertainment has made its way into the bathroom. What could be nicer than reclining in the tub and listening to surround sound music or watching a movie on your television housed inside built-in cabinetry?
10. The bathroom is a great place to let your imagination run wild; there are no set rules about colour or style. Some general trends, however, are toward neutral coloured flooring and tile. Wood, particularly cherry wood, is becoming popular for cabinets and accents. Granite countertops, brushed metal faucets and whirlpool tubs are also in vogue.
11. Depending on the style of your bathroom, a chandelier might be perfect. If you equate chandeliers with large, elaborate fixtures, you will no doubt be

surprised by the vast new selection of sleek and elegant new designs at lighting stores.

12. Natural light is an important element in the modern bathroom. If your bathroom lacks light, you may wish to consider renovating to add a window or glass blocks.

Renovation Tips

Once you have skimmed decorating magazines and visited home renovation showrooms, you may be ready to plan your remodelling project. If you live in a condominium, you should check your strata rules regarding renovations. You may find that there are restrictions on colours and products that will influence your project.

The next step is to consult a professional home renovator. Ideally, you should interview three renovators and obtain written quotes from each. When you have chosen a firm, they will be able to turn your drawings and suggestions into workable plans. Depending on the scope of the project, a professional renovator can advise you as to whether your renovation violates any municipal codes. They will also be able to provide expertise regarding the placement of electrical outlets, plumbing requirements, structural limitations, etc. Installing a whirlpool for example, involves all three of these considerations.

Remember that a renovation can take a while. If you are doing a major renovation, which involves removing the toilet or the shower, be sure to have a backup. If you have one bathroom in your home, you may need to befriend a neighbour!

The exciting new products on the market, along with careful planning and professional workmanship can help you create a personal spa atmosphere that provides function and luxury for years to come.

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PLANNING YOUR RENOVATION

For some people, the fears of cost overruns and months of living in a construction zone are enough to dissuade them from undertaking a renovation project. That's a shame because there are many good reasons to renovate. If you like the neighbourhood where you live, for example, but feel cramped in a small, outdated kitchen, upgrading may be a better solution than moving. A well-planned renovation might also increase property value. If your home is older than most in your area, new flooring or other updates can help to bring your home up to par with others on the market. Knowing the basics about the renovation process and the professionals involved can help you avoid unnecessary expenses and delays.

The Planning Stage

A renovation project is an opportunity to create the space you've always wanted. In the initial planning stages, create a wish list. Write down everything you would want to add or change in a room. For example, you may wish to install a convection oven or a larger refrigerator in the kitchen or new flooring and a Jacuzzi tub in the bathroom. Later, when you get an idea of cost from a professional renovator and from your own research, you can decide which options to keep and which ones are too expensive.

To help you plan your renovation, browse magazines and online home decorating websites. Visit home shows and home décor stores to see some of the latest innovations in building products, countertops, appliances etc. Take note of product prices and energy ratings as you shop. You may find that certain upgrades will pay for themselves over the long run in terms of energy and water savings. A professional renovator can also be a good source of ideas and product suggestions.

Home Inspectors

Once you have created your wish list, you are ready to consult professionals for their input. If the renovation you are planning is extensive (e.g. involves knocking out a wall or electrical adjustments) it is wise to hire a home inspector. A home is a system; occasionally, a renovation in one area can have unexpected consequences in another. In addition, if your home has any existing problems such as water damage or a weakened floor, it is best to find out about them before you begin construction. The Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) recommends that home inspectors start their assessment in the basement as many problems in

other parts of the home originate there. A cracked foundation and excessive moisture, for example, can cause deterioration throughout the entire structure.

A home inspector can help you to evaluate the overall condition of your home and set priorities for current and future renovation projects. A copy of the inspector's report should be provided to the professional renovators asked to bid on your project.

Real Estate Appraiser

Many people undertake renovations in hopes of increasing the value of their homes. Unfortunately, there is no simple 1:1 formula for recouping the costs. Many factors come into play including the age of your home and the value of those in your neighbourhood. If you are concerned about the return on your investment, you may wish to consult a real estate appraiser. The appraiser can help determine how a renovation would affect the value of your home. In general, homeowners can expect an eventual return on investment of approximately 70 percent for the kitchen and bathroom but only 50 percent for finishing a basement, according to the Appraisal Institute of Canada.

Renovators

The next step is to solicit bids from professional renovators. It is a good idea to get more than one opinion on the best way to proceed with the project and the estimated cost. They will quickly examine the space you wish to upgrade along with the items on your wish list in order to give you a price estimate. They can also advise you if the project requires further design or architectural services.

When choosing a renovator, consider not only their price estimate but also how well you can communicate with them and whether they seem knowledgeable and organized. It is amazing how much you will miss a kitchen or bathroom as it is undergoing renovations! A qualified renovator will be able to get the renovations done within a reasonable amount of time.

Once you have selected a renovator, it is time to go over your wish list in detail. They will inspect your home to take measurements and ascertain the locations of electrical and plumbing lines. The renovator may be able to offer logistical suggestions on your design such as improving the flow of traffic in a kitchen. If a room requires a change to the electrical wiring or plumbing, they will likely be able to tell you at this point.

Next, the renovator will draw up plans. Review them together and if you approve of them, you will likely need to pay a deposit. (Be sure to get everything in writing and all keep the receipts. Do not pay in cash.) The final plans should include details of the project including the layout and materials as well as descriptions and prices of the products. There should also be a timeline indicating the stages of the project. Keep in mind that this timeline is not completely reliable because several variables can have an impact on the length of the project, such as availability of special-order items.

Lastly, a professional renovator should also be able to advise you on the proper permits (if any) that are required under your local municipal by-laws for various projects. Generally, the renovator will take care of acquiring the permits and arranging for inspections when the project is completed.

A successful renovation requires a team effort between you and the industry experts that you hire. To ensure a good outcome, you need a clear plan and good communication. Then all that's left is for you to sit back and enjoy the results.

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SELECTING TILE

Porcelain is a semi-translucent ceramic that is valued for its delicate appearance and its strength. It was created in China by combining white clay and a type of feldspar found almost exclusively in that country. When the ingredients are fired at extremely high temperatures, the feldspar melts to form a natural glass that fuses to the clay particles.

Medieval craftspeople used lead glazes fired on red clay to create colourful, waterproof tiles that were used as flooring for churches, expensive homes and stately buildings. Sophisticated decorations applied to tiles required the development of tin glazes, a technique that emerged from Middle Eastern countries.

As early as 500 BC, glazed and decorated tiles were used to adorn Iranian palaces and monuments. Tiles from this era still survive at the palaces of Susa and Persepolis. The "Eternal Soldiers", a mosaic at Persepolis, was created with glazed tiles in various shades of yellow, green and brown.

The fascinating evolution of the production techniques used to create beautiful and enduring tile is far from over. Visit your local home renovation store and you will find an amazing selection of tile for a variety of uses in and around your home.

Purchasing and installing tile can be a significant investment but consumers often don't realize that the wrong tile choice can be even more expensive. Unsuitable tile can result in water damage, stains and even broken bones! Once tile has been laid it is quite time-consuming to remove or repair.

The following is a list of some commonly available types of tile and their basic characteristics and applications:

Glazed vs. Unglazed

Ceramic glaze is a glass-like material that is baked onto the tile, so that it bonds firmly to provide a hard, protective shell. Glazing makes it possible to create tiles in a wide range of vivid colours. Unglazed tiles are typically available in natural shades of white, beige, brown and gray depending on the clay and other materials used to make the brick.

A common misperception is that all glazed tiles are too slippery for wet areas. In fact, most high-moisture areas such as bathrooms, kitchens and foyers require

glazed tiles. Moisture can seep into unglazed products depending on the composition and the firing temperature of the tile. This can be a serious problem because the longer the tile stays wet, the more likely it is that bacteria and mildew will multiply. Perpetually damp tiles can also lead to wood rot in the floor beneath the tiles. Tile manufacturers make a wide range of skid-resistant glazed products.

In general, unglazed tiles that have been fired at relatively low temperatures, such as terracotta, are porous allowing water to soak into, or even through, the tiles. These types of tile are often labelled "nonvitreous" or "not impervious to water". Unglazed tiles fired at high temperatures are more dense and therefore more water resistant. These tiles, labelled "vitreous" or "imperious" are very water repellent. Although it is possible to apply sealer to unglazed tiles, glazed tiles are the best choice for wet areas.

Another consideration when selecting a glazed tile is durability. Kitchens, bathrooms, hallways and foyers tend to be high-traffic areas. Select tile with a glaze that is very hard and scratch-resistant. It can be almost impossible to tell whether a glaze has such characteristics just by feel and appearance. Check with a knowledgeable sales representative to help you sort through the countless products and make a choice that suits your unique needs.

Porcelain

Porcelain tile is made by firing white clay paste and feldspar at extremely high temperatures. The result is a very strong tile that is imperious to water (i.e. vitreous). Porcelain tiles are available glazed and unglazed.

Porcelain tile can be tinted any colour because it starts out as pure white. The colours available in porcelain are truer and more intense than most other natural clay-based tiles. Due to that colour clarity, porcelain tiles can even be made to resemble marble.

Quarry Tile

Do not be fooled by the name - most modern "quarry" tile was not hewn from the earth - it was more likely made from fired red clay. The name is related to appearance. Quarry tiles are unglazed so they often look like cut, unpolished stone.

Because quarry tile is not glazed, it absorbs moisture and is prone to stains. It is well suited to patio and pool areas where the natural look and skid-resistance of an unglazed surface are desirable characteristics.

Glass

Although glass tiles are most often used on walls and in mosaics, advances in tempering techniques have produced fairly durable tiles for floors. Most glass tiles are still not as strong as porcelain. If you like the luminescence and depth that only glass can produce, you may wish to sacrifice some strength for appearance. These tiles are available in a range of finishes from glossy to frosted.

Natural Stone Tile

Granite, marble, onyx and travertine are a few of the most popular types of natural stone tile. Traditionally, they have been polished to create a deep shine that maximizes the colour and beauty of the stone. On the market today, you will find many alternatives to polished finishes including sandblasted finishes. Polished tiles tend to possess more vivid colours and greater stain-resistance than stone tiles with rough finishes.

Although one may think all stone would be impervious to water, in fact this is not universally true. Marble and granite are harder, more water and scratch-resistant than onyx and travertine. If you really like the look and colour of travertine or onyx, try to use them on the walls or apply a sealer for use on the floor.

Cement

Unlike most tiles, which are made from clay, cement tiles are actually small slabs of concrete. They can be stained to almost any colour and any design including the veined appearance of marble. Cement tiles can be rough and porous or polished to a sheen. In areas with high moisture or the potential for stains, the tiles should be sealed regularly.

Let your imagination run wild when it comes to choosing the colour, size and styles of your tile but don't neglect the practicalities!

THE "HOME HUNTERS"

Grant & Steve Hunter

THE RIGHT PAINT FOR YOUR DECORATIVE PROJECTS

Bringing a room to life with a fresh coat of paint or unique effects such as stencilling or sponging is a favourite project amongst 'do-it-yourselfers'. Paint is an easy way to create dramatic results. For a meagre investment of twenty or thirty dollars, a room can be transformed. Darker colours can be used to create a cozy, subdued ambiance. Bright, light colours can open up a room and make it seem more energetic and cheerful.

Deciding on which colour to paint a room is only the beginning. Upon arriving at the hardware or paint store, shoppers are presented with a myriad of oil and water-based paints, glazes, varnishes and emulsions. Although the terminology and profusion of products can be overwhelming, a basic understanding of the various types of paint available will help you make the best choices for your home decorating projects.

All paint contains the following:

1. pigment (colour)
2. binder or medium which keeps the pigment in suspension and binds the paint to the wall

Water-Based Paint

Instead of lime, chalk or hide glue, modern water-based paints contain latex, vinyl emulsion or polyvinylacrylic (PVA) as well as binder and solvent. These ingredients coat the wall and produce solid rather than translucent coverage. Water-based paints are a good choice for most indoor projects because they dry quickly and produce fewer emissions than oil-based paints.

Water-Mixable Oil Paint

This product was introduced a few years ago as an alternative to the standard choices. Water-mixable oil paint is made from a type of oil that has been chemically altered to allow it to mix with water. Although the drying time for this product is longer than latex or acrylic, it does clean up easily with soap and water instead of mineral spirits. The drying

time for this product is longer than latex or acrylic. This type of paint has the same rich quality finish of oil paint with a surface durable enough to be washed but should only be applied over a latex, acrylic or primer undercoat.

Water-Based Glaze

Water-based glaze (also referred to as acrylic medium) can be used on a variety of indoor projects from an artist's canvas to large wall murals and wooden chairs. Glaze is a thick transparent substance that appears milky when wet but dries to a clear finish. It helps to slow the drying process, allowing more time to create decorative finishes.

Glaze is a versatile medium; you can mix your own colours by adding acrylic paint (tubes are available in arts and crafts stores) to achieve the desired colour and intensity. The semi-translucent quality of glaze is particularly desirable when you wish to reveal an underlying surface such as wood grain.

Water-Based Varnish

After creating a unique wall effect such as a mural, it is advisable to protect it with a coat of varnish. This will allow you to wipe off dirt and dust without damaging the underlying work. Just as with water-based glaze, water-based varnish appears milky when wet and will dry to a clear finish. Caution: if you apply thick layers, the result can be a cloudy film that is susceptible to nicks and scratches. Water-based varnish is the best choice to protect water-based paints and glazes.

Oil-Based Paints

For projects that will be subjected to high-traffic and/or high moisture, oil-based paints may be your best choice. They provide rich colour with a strong, smooth finish that can be washed. Oil paints have longer drying times than water-based paints and will produce more fumes. Proper ventilation is required during application and for the next two to three weeks as the paint dries and cures.

Oil-Based Varnish

Oil-based varnish is used to form a protective coating on painted surfaces and woodwork. It tends to impart a slight yellowish hue to the painted surface and will darken with age. This should be taken into consideration when planning a project. For example, blue paint may begin to look green; red paint may appear orange.

Polyurethane varnish is the most commonly available type of oil-based varnish. Cleanup and thinning require mineral spirits.

Oil-Based Glaze

This transparent medium has a creamy colour when wet and dries clear. It does not yellow as much as varnish, making it suitable for a variety of decorative projects. Oil-based glaze often requires a precise mixture of glaze, pigment and mineral spirits; check the label for the manufacturer's directions.

Rules of Thumb

Remember that in general, water-based paints should never be applied over oil-based paints and the two types should never be mixed. For example, if you are creating a coloured oil-based glaze, the pigment should also be oil paint.

Lastly, keep in mind a wise old artist's adage: fat over thin. If you are working on a project that requires many layers of paint, be sure to start with thin layers and apply the thickest layers last. Just as with wood, paint expands and contracts with heat and humidity. The thicker the paint, the more it will expand and contract. If you apply a thin layer over a thick one, the top layer may crack. To be on the safe side, thin, even layers will produce a reliable result.

Now that you know the basics of paint, varnish and glazes, there is no limit to what you can create!

THE "HOME HUNTERS"

Grant & Steve Hunter

TRANSFORM YOUR HOME WITH THE MANY MOODS OF COLOUR

If you want to bring your walls into the picture, transform them with splashes of colour and interesting colour combinations that compliment the basic elements in a room. That's easier said than done for those of us who have lived comfortably with off-white walls for years!

White and light neutral wall colours are always a safe choice for home decorators but they often give the impression that a room is somewhat unfinished. Darker, multicoloured pieces of furniture against light coloured walls may look very much like an artist's canvas in which only the foreground has been painted. Pale walls can help to create the illusion of space, but they do little to create a unified, stylish look in a room. If you want to bring your walls into the picture, transform them with splashes of colour and interesting colour combinations that compliment the basic elements in a room. That's easier said than done for those of us who have lived comfortably with off-white walls for years! The following is a brief introduction to the ways that colour affects our moods and how you can use colour effectively in your home.

Colour is a topic that has interested researchers for years. They know for example, that tomatoes and other plants grown with red plastic mulch over the soil will produce more fruit and foliage than plants grown without this mulch. The plants have a chemical response to the wavelength of the reflected light. Just as plants respond to light, so do people. In one study, researchers discovered that a red office is more stimulating and may improve performance but it can also cause anger or tension in a worker.* Blue was found to produce relaxation as well as sadness and fatigue. In another study, children in a classroom that was painted pink tended to feel stronger and drew more positive pictures than children in a blue classroom. These results were attributed to the fact that warm colours like red have a longer wavelength and are thus more stimulating, while cool colours such as blue have a shorter wavelength and are thus more sedative. And what about unobtrusive white? When compared to workers in with red or blue offices, workers in white offices complained of more headaches and instances of nausea.

In another study, researchers developed these general correlations between colour and mood: White = purity and clarity; red = power and strength; pink = sensitivity and love; orange = stimulation; yellow/gold = energy; green = harmony in mind, body, and soul; blue = healing and calmness; violet = spirituality; brown = earth-like and natural; and black = depression.**

Colour not only affects people's moods through chemical reactions in the brain to different wavelengths, but colour also has powerful cultural associations. In many Middle Eastern countries, people view blue as protective and paint their front doors blue to ward off evil spirits. Although black represents mourning in North America, white is the colour associated with grief in China. Personal experience also plays a role. For example, blue or brown may be a cheerful colour to someone who has happy memories of family meals in a blue kitchen or a playroom with brown wood panelling. People often choose colours for their home based on a combination of all of these factors.

How can you use colour to your advantage?

Knowing a bit about how colours affect mood, you can deliberately set the tone in a room. For example, a bright, sunny morning helps most people start their day on a happy note. Try using bright, cheerful colours such as yellows and oranges in the room where your family eats breakfast. It is not necessary to paint the entire room these colours, even one yellow wall or some orange accessories or artwork can liven up the room

In a room where you wish to read or do computer work, choose colours that encourage a sense of serenity and focus. You may wish to emulate earth tones by choosing natural brown wood flooring, with beige or taupe walls and muted shades of green or blue for the trim, furniture and/or accessories.

Most people feel the greatest freedom to experiment with different colours and styles in the bedroom because it is tucked out of sight of most guests. In general, dark shades will encourage relaxation and sleep; rich colours are energetic and romantic. Try painting one wall deep wine or cinnamon and balance it with lighter shades on other walls such as cream or mineral yellow, as well as furniture and accessories in espresso, orange or brushed metal.

Feature Wall

If you wish to add colour to a room but are hesitant to use a bold colour throughout, a feature wall is a good solution. Feature walls are most commonly used as an accent in a neutrally coloured room, but they can also be used to define space in open plan areas such as lofts. When you decide it's time for a change, you can change the colour of your feature wall, and the look of the entire room, in a single afternoon.

When selecting a feature wall, look for the prominent surface in the room-it will often be the first wall you face when you enter the room. Ideally, it should not have any windows or doors to distract from the feature effect. Another good choice would be a wall with a fireplace or interesting angles.

Look for colour inspiration in your existing furniture, artwork or rugs. For example, you may wish to bring out the sage green in a chair covering or the rust red of a favourite painting. Be aware of the moods that colours can create and plan accordingly for the room. You may not wish to paint a blue feature wall in your dining area as you may find dinner conversation to be a bit dull! Likewise a bright red wall could lead to some heated discussions!

When painting a feature wall, it is best to choose low sheen or flat finish to ensure it does not overpower the room. In addition to various paint techniques such as sponging, you may want to experiment with different types of wall treatments such as tinted Venetian plaster or metallic plaster.

Even if the most adventurous colour you've ever tried on your walls was beige with a touch of pink, you may be pleasantly surprised by your experiments with colour. The only rules are to choose colours that you enjoy and that compliment the main colours in your furniture, as they help create the right mood in a room.

** Research by Nancy J. Stone and Anthony J. English*

*** Impact of Three Interior Color Schemes on Worker Mood and Performance Relative to Individual Environmental Sensitivity by N. Kwallek, C.M Lewis, C. Sales, and H. Woodson.*

THE "HOME HUNTERS"

Grant & Steve Hunter

WALLCOVERING TIPS

When you think of wallcoverings do you have flashbacks to the floral wallpaper in your grandparent's house? If so, perhaps its time to reconsider this maligned form of decoration.

Modern wallcoverings come in an amazing variety of materials such as woven natural hemp, grass, jute and wood, as well as foil, vinyl, polyester and, of course, paper. These products are a relatively simple way to change the look of a room. With wallcoverings, you don't need to be a professional artist to add design and texture to your walls. All you need is some patience and a little courage!

When you visit a home décor store, you will discover thousands of products and designs. Choosing a suitable wallcovering can be an overwhelming task. Below you will find a brief introduction to several different products and some basic tips for hanging wallpaper.

Types of Wallcoverings:

Grasscloth

This handcrafted product is customarily made from arrowroot, a native vine from Korea. Weavers use looms strung vertically with cotton threads. The grass is weaved horizontally through the thread and together the grass and the thread form a tight weave. This material is then glued to a paper backing and left in its natural state or dyed. Grasscloth is versatile; it adds texture and subtle pattern to a wall while complementing a variety of interior designs. This type of wallcovering is not recommended for use in high moisture rooms such as the kitchen and bathroom.

Mylar

Mylar has become the generic term to describe metallic wallpaper, but it is actually the trademark name of a Dupont product. Mylar is a polyester film that is fused with a very

thin sheet of metal such as aluminum. Unlike foil wallpapers, Mylar does not tear easily and is durable.

Paper Weave

This type of wallcovering is commonly made in Japan, and is very similar to real grasscloth. However, the weave is actually paper that has been cut into thin strips then twisted and spun into lengths of yarn. This yarn is then woven to resemble grasscloth. Paper weave wallcoverings provide delicate texture to walls and are often less expensive than grasscloth. Paper weave is not recommended for use in high moisture areas.

Hemp

Hemp wallpaper has a coarse fibre structure that resembles grasscloth, but has a much finer weave. The hemp fibres are glued to a paper backing to create the final product. The irregularities in colour and pattern of hemp fibres add to its unique charm, however, take care when applying the wallcovering so that the seams don't show.

Jute Weave

Jute is a strong coarse fibre traditionally used to make burlap. It is commonly produced in India and neighbouring countries. Both the warp (vertical weave) and weft (horizontal weave) of this product may be made entirely from jute or combined with yarn of other fibres. The jute weave is laminated to a paper backing.

Suede

'Suede' wallcoverings are manufactured to resemble leather with a napped surface. Various cloth and paper fibres are used in its manufacture. This product lends a unique look and feel to a wall. Due to the varying fibre content, check with the manufacturer regarding durability in high moisture areas.

Vinyl

Vinyl wallpaper is comprised of a thin flexible vinyl film attached to a paper backing. This product is perfect for high moisture areas and is washable. This product is available in a variety of textures from shiny to matte and designs range from solid to patterned.

Standard Wallpaper

Standard wallpaper is a paper substrate onto which the decorative print is directly applied. A thin vinyl coating is then applied to protect the surface. The vinyl coating does not provide complete protection against grease, moisture, etc. Standard wallpaper is usually the least expensive of all the products listed here. It comes in a wide range of colours and patterns. Embossed wallpapers have a raised texture and tend to be slightly more expensive than regular flat papers.

Applying Wallcoverings

Have you ever spent hours trying to hang wallpaper only to find that the patterns don't line up or you ran out of paper just before you finished?! Although applying wallcoverings can be a challenging experience, the following tips can make your job easier.

1. Calculate how much wallcovering you will need. The first step is to figure out the total wall area. Measure your walls and multiply the width by the height. Divide that total by the square footage (or square metres) of each roll. For example if the wall you plan to cover is 10' wide by 8' high the total square footage is 80'. If each roll is 45 square feet, you would need 1.8 rolls. Round up to two rolls and you may end up using some of the extra to match patterns. If the store will allow you to return unopened rolls, buy one extra just in case.
2. Ensure the wall surface is clean of grease, dust and dirt. A good cleaner is TSP (Trisodium Phosphate). Fill in any dents or picture-framing holes in the wall. Allow the filler to dry then sand to a smooth flat finish.

3. Make sure you have all these tools ready to go before you start: measuring tape, carpenter's square, pail, brush for applying glue, firm flat-edged brush for smoothing out air pockets, gloves, sharp craft knife, pencil and protective drop cloth for the floor.
4. Check the wallcovering for imperfections before you start. As you unroll and check it over from one direction, re-roll it in the opposite direction. Reverse rolling helps to flatten the product, which will make it easier to hang. If part of a roll contains an imperfection you can cut it out in a door or window frame
5. Start on the largest straightest, wall in the room. If you are right-handed, work from left to right and visa versa. Measure the height of the wall where you intend to hang the wallcovering. Because slight imperfections in the construction of walls and ceilings are common, you should take more than one measurement for each cut. Take a measurement approximately every 25 cm.
6. Use the carpenter's square to ensure your cuts are straight. When you have measured a piece and are ready to cut, place the carpenter's square against the edge of the roll. Most rolls are cut precisely so the edge should be a straight line. The other edge of the square should line up with your cut marks giving you a straight line at exactly 90 degrees from the edge.

THE "HOME HUNTERS"

Grant & Steve Hunter

CREATING YOUR DREAM HOME OFFICE

Email, faxes and voice mail have forever changed the office concept. Gone are the beige furnishings and the daily rush hour commute for many people who work from home. Depending on the type of business you are in, it may be possible to dodge the corporate office full time or a few days per week. Conducting business from home can save time, offer flexible hours and even tax advantages. You may be able to deduct a portion of your property tax, mortgage interest, and other utilities from your income tax. Check with your local taxation office or accountant for details on restrictions.

Before you decide to work from home you may want re-evaluate your "office". Is it simply a poorly lit table with a computer on top? If so, it may be time to get creative. You can build an addition, renovate an existing room or make upgrades to your current workspace. With any of these options, remember that an office space should be attractive, comfortable, quiet and make efficient use of space.

An addition can be as small as six feet wide-just large enough to accommodate a desk, filing cabinets and even a small meeting table. If you do not anticipate needing the office for the life of your home, consider building an addition, which can easily convert to a solarium, den or music room. Certainly the benefit of starting from scratch is designing exactly the space you want. A high ceiling, French doors leading onto a patio or built-in wall shelves are some of the attractive options.

Renovations to an existing room are typically less expensive than an addition and can be equally creative. If you need both an office and an occasional guestroom, why not simply hide the bed until it's needed? A Murphy bed can fold up against a wall and be concealed behind panelling, which matches the room, or a large decorative screen. The reliable standby sofa bed is another option if you have the space. Choose a quality sofa bed, which can furnish a seating area for clients.

A great new design tool is the interactive CD, which allows you to create and view your ideas before you start building that addition, applying wallpaper or installing shelves. Many offer realistic two-dimensional layout and three-dimensional walking tours. You can purchase these CDs at most computer stores and from the Internet. (A good selection is available at www.hyperlink.com including Bob Vila's Home Design program.)

So whether you decide to bring in builders to add a new room or you just want to rearrange your shelves, a home office is the opportunity to create your ideal work environment. If you are working with limited space and funds, remember that a little ingenuity can go a long way. You might discover new uses for items you already have, or invest in furniture that has dual purposes or can be expanded to provide more workspace.

Consider these design tips:

- Use a low-pile carpet that allows chairs and carts to roll easily.

- Get colourful. Many office furniture manufacturers will allow you to use your own fabric (such as a floral print to match your living room couch) at no extra charge.
- Use an old chest to hold hanging files.
- Modify an antique liquor or tea trolley to hold your computer equipment.
- An office door with glass panels will help open up a small space, increase brightness and even help you keep an eye on the kids.
- Refinish an old armoire to match your office furniture and use it as a stylish filing cabinet.
- Incorporate pullout designs to provide extra space. There are great new options available from keyboard trays to tables and desks.
- Plenty of natural light will reduce eyestrain, however, ensure that the computer and windows are positioned to avoid glare on the screen.
- Add a desk lamp lit with a blue "grow bulb" from a garden or hardware store to provide a full spectrum of light.
- Velcro fasteners on the underside of a desk are cheap, effective means of concealing computer and telephone wires.
- If you are buying new equipment consider a space-saving multifunction peripheral (MFP) which combines the features of a printer, copier, fax machine and even a scanner.
- Position your monitor to be arm's length from your body with the top few lines of text at eye level.
- Your chair should be low enough that your feet rest on the floor or on a footrest.
- All frequently used equipment should be placed in front of you to avoid twisting.

Once you have that dream home office your spouse may still say you spend too much time at work but at least the commute will be short!

THE "HOME HUNTERS"

Grant & Steve Hunter

DECORATING A LOFT

Loft living is a unique experience. They offer open floor plans, tall, dramatic windows and walls as well as a flood of light in the daytime and perhaps a spectacular city view by night. In keeping with the modern, industrial feel, many lofts have exposed pipes and ductwork and concrete floors and/or walls. Originally coveted by artists, more and more people in recent years have embraced loft living. However, a common challenge confronting many new owners is how to decorate. Without many dividing walls, one task area or 'room' flows into another and the boxy shape can be visually overwhelming. Lofts require a far different approach to decorating than would be used for the average house or apartment.

First determine what you need from your floor space. Do you need an office? Do you wish to have a separate dining area or will you use bar stools around a kitchen counter or a table in the living area? If there is more than one person in the space, is privacy important? If you have a loft bedroom with a partial wall, will you need to find a way to block out the morning light or noise from the living area below?

If you wish to create a sense of separate rooms in the open living area, create clusters of different but complimentary furniture and accessories. For example, you can delineate the 'dining room' by using the same type of wood or metal for the table, chairs, and other furniture items. In the 'living room' area, choose furniture in a similar style and colour but use a completely different colour scheme for the fabric on the couches and chairs as well as the rugs and accessories.

Furniture placement is another way to delineate different living areas. Using four basic layouts: square, rectangular, oval and circular, you can create imaginary walls. For example, position your living area furniture to create a circular cluster to exclude another area of your home such as the dining area. Couches, tables and other large pieces of furniture can become tools to mark off one area from another.

Flooring can also be used to create visual breaks in large open areas. You may decide to use tile in the kitchen area, hardwood or laminate in the dining area,

and a plush carpet in the living area. Area rugs in different shades and textures can also work well. A raised platform is another solution.

The vertical space in a loft is a wonderful opportunity to flex your creative muscles and be bold. A wall that is 5 metres (16 feet) high practically demands a piece of art that makes a statement. In a typical family home, you would never consider choosing a painting that is as tall as you are but in a loft, it may be perfect. If your budget prevents you from purchasing artwork, consider creating your own abstract art. Purchase one large canvas or try putting three equally-sized canvasses next to each other for a modern arrangement. Using paints that compliment your furnishings, brushes and maybe even some stencils, you can create a unique piece of art that is sure to be a conversation piece.

The height of most lofts also makes standard ceiling lighting obsolete. A globe light perched two stories above you will not provide much in the way of usable light. Table lamps are more practical for reading and desk work. Wall sconces will provide diffuse light. Embracing the unique characteristics of loft living, you may wish to take advantage of the vertical space with a chandelier suspended on a long chain above the dining table or a cluster of a few small pendant lamps hanging asymmetrically by varying lengths of cord.

If you require a private space for working but your loft does not include a separate office, it can be challenging. Consider whether there is room for a desk in the loft sleeping area. If like many lofts, the upper floor has a partial wall you may be able to use shutters or drapery to fill in the wall in order to block out sound. A more permanent solution would be to install glass blocks or drywall to complete the wall although you should consult your strata/building rules before doing so.

The age and style of a loft is also a very important consideration when decorating. There are two basic types of lofts: older buildings such as warehouses which have been converted to housing, and new lofts. Lofts in old buildings often have exposed brick walls, thick, solid timbers, and wood plank flooring that may be several decades old. These elements add character, warmth, and a sense of history. In new lofts, which are built solely for the purpose of loft living (or live/work studios), the building materials are often concrete, metal and glass with accents of wood. If you like a completely modern

look, a new loft may be your best choice. If you fell in love with the amenities of a new loft space but wish to add some warmth, you have many options.

A simple way to soften the effect of industrial materials is by using natural materials. Try wood or bamboo floating floors over the concrete slab. Carpeting will certainly add warmth to the space along with another important benefit—it will reduce the sound reverberation that occurs in large open spaces. If new flooring is out of your price range, consider painting your concrete floor (check with your strata/building rules first). Use area rugs for added comfort and visual interest. Select natural fabrics such as wool, linen and cotton for your furniture.

For those who enjoy loft living, the wide open spaces are not deterrents; they are part of what makes the space so attractive. With some small adjustments you can create a roomy, modern space that still feels like home.

THE “HOME HUNTERS”

Grant & Steve Hunter

SMALL SPACE, GREAT TASTE

Compactness is a good quality to have in a car, but when it comes to a home, it's not always ideal. Although smaller houses, apartments and townhouses are more economical and certainly reduce housework, they can present a decorating challenge. This is especially true when you downsize from a larger space. How do you create an inviting, uncluttered space and still fit in all of your belongings and furniture for eating, sleeping and relaxing? Two popular trends are making it easier for the small home dweller to make the most of every inch of space without feeling hemmed in: functional furniture and multi-purpose rooms.

Kitchen and Dining Room

1. In a tiny kitchen, a table for casual dining can take up valuable floor space. Instead of a freestanding table, try a wall-mounted version that can be folded out for a meal and then tucked up against the wall when it's not in use. Choose a table colour that blends into the wall to make it less noticeable or choose a finish that matches the kitchen cupboards or countertops.
2. If you need something more substantial than a foldout table, consider installing a food preparation island that doubles as a seating area. Typically, the work area is on the side of the island closest to the sink with the seating area on the opposite side. Choose an island design with an overhang to make it easier for people to pull up a chair.
3. When selecting a table for the kitchen or dining area, look for styles that can be expanded with leaves to provide extra space for guests. During normal usage, the table becomes quite compact.

Bedroom

1. Instead of a bed with space underneath for dust bunnies, look for a bed that has a solid base with built-in drawers for storage. Remember, a recessed base can help avoid stubbed toes!

2. If you have a small bedroom that needs to accommodate a desk, a television/games entertainment area and storage for clothing, consider building a loft bed. A traditional loft bed has a ladder and open space beneath the bed, however, you can also build a loft bed that's easier to climb into and solves some storage problems. Along one wall, install a set of stairs with a railing to the loft bed. The space beneath the steps can house built-in drawers. Underneath the bed itself, you can create a walk-in closet. Alternatively, you can build a bed with sliding drawers underneath. The bed would only need to be high enough to accommodate your longest pants or dresses. These options eliminate the need for dressers or closets in the room.
3. Murphy beds have been around for decades and for good reason. When you're done sleeping simply fold it up against the wall and close the cabinet drawers. The major improvements over the years have been the quality of the mattresses and the sleek styling of the cabinetry with shelves and drawers.

Living Area

1. Use tall bookshelves and cabinets to take advantage of the vertical space. Not only do they take up less floor space, but people typically perceive tall, narrow pieces of furniture as being less bulky in a small room.
2. It's becoming more common for each family member to have their own computer but most small homes are usually short on office/desk space. Furniture manufacturers are addressing this relatively recent trend by creating a wide range of multi-function cabinets that open out to reveal a sliding keyboard tray, an area for a monitor and space below for a CPU. When the computer is not in use, the unit looks like any other traditional cabinet with storage for books, bedding, etc.
3. A couch is often the single largest piece of furniture in a living room, so pay special attention to choosing a style that compliments the shape of the room. For example, if you have a long rectangular room, choose a long, narrow

couch to complement the layout. A shorter, deeper couch will work well in a square room.

4. If you expect that your living room or den will sometimes need to double as a guest room, invest in a good quality 'hide-a-bed' or 'futon'.
5. Built-in furniture and storage tend to take up less room than stand-alone furniture. Custom-built solutions become more affordable when you consider the time you would have spent looking for the perfect piece of furniture to fit an awkward space.

Bathroom

1. Increase the storage space inside a standard sink cabinet by installing either freestanding or secured shelves.
2. If you decide to install wall-mounted shelves yourself, invest in a stud finder to locate wood and metal studs as well as pipes.
3. A tall, shallow cabinet can add storage space and a place to hang towels. It is also an effective way to keep razors, medications and other potential hazards out of reach of children.

More Roomy Tips

1. The cardinal rule of living in a small space is to reduce clutter. Tackle your overflowing closet, bookshelves and other problem areas and sell, recycle or donate any items you haven't used in the past two years. It's far easier to keep things looking neat by adopting a minimalist approach. Easier said than done but it can be done!
2. If you wish to display decorative items such as vases or personal collections, try putting them on high, glass shelves. A shelf that is two metres off the floor or higher, tends to be out of the normal line of vision, which tends to make the room look less cluttered.
3. Another shelf tip: Paint wall-mounted shelves the same colour as the wall to make them less noticeable.

4. Small spaces usually benefit from plenty of windows, which provide natural light and a sense of connection to the outside environment. If it is not feasible to enlarge existing windows or install additional windows, you can help to maximize the light by choosing sheer and/or light-coloured draperies. Blinds beneath the draperies can be lowered to provide privacy in the evening. Use task lighting and small pendant lamps to light dark corners and work areas economically.

Fitting a size eight foot into a size six shoe rarely works. The same is true when trying to fit large home furniture and belongings into a smaller dwelling! A whole new approach is required. Creative use of functional furniture and multi-purpose floor plans can help you enjoy a small space with great taste!

THE "HOME HUNTERS"

Grant & Steve Hunter