

Solariums provide unique view on life

This article is provided by local realtors and the Ontario Real Estate Association (OREA) for the benefit of consumers in the real estate market.

Do you have a natural love of plants and the great outdoors and would like to enjoy both all year round - regardless of the weather? If so, you'd probably enjoy a solarium. These unique glass rooms are added right onto your home, extending your living space. They can be enjoyed right through any season - rain or shine - and tend to be far more flexible than the conservatories, and sunrooms of Victorian and Edwardian times.

Designed for comfort - for people as well as plants - a solarium can be as flamboyant or as simple as you want to make it. Solariums can double as sitting or reading rooms, or provide a unique setting for gracious entertaining. They also provide excellent recreation areas for plant enthusiasts.

Even if you don't have a green thumb, you can still fill your solarium with lots of greenery simply by buying life-like artificial plants. Unlike their live counterparts, these "plants" require minimal care - merely occasional cleaning.

EXTENSION OF THE HOME

In most solariums, one entire wall and part or all of the ceiling, are generally constructed of thick, thermal glass. Frames can be made of wood or aluminum.

They are usually constructed at the rear of a home, but can also be added to the front or side. If you decide to have one installed, be sure to check your municipal bylaws to see what permits you require.

DESIGNED TO BLEND IN

Modern solariums are designed to blend in with the style and mood of a home - whether it's contemporary or old-fashioned, wood frame or brick. A solarium should be aesthetically pleasing from both the outside as well as the inside of the home.

And since this type of room usually ends up as a major focal feature of a home, it should be strategically located near the dining, living or family room - perhaps even the kitchen.

PLANNING

The key to designing and installing a successful solarium lies in the planning stages. Keep in mind that a solarium must be large enough to allow air to circulate. It should also be situated so that it receives several hours of sunlight each day. A steady

flow of light will help your plants flourish. In the winter, sunlight is an excellent source of additional heat.

BASIC FEATURES

A solarium should have the following, basic features:

- a floor that can withstand water;
- a ceiling that will admit enough natural light;
- adequate ventilation;
- outlets for electricity and possibly one for water;
- enough space for furniture; and
- drainage facilities for water runoff.

Prices will vary according to the type of ceiling and floor you choose. Floors can be made from concrete, tile, brick, paving blocks or marble. Pick one that will best suit your intended use. To help create some warmth in winter and protect sensitive feet from constant exposure to cold surfaces, consider purchasing some small scatter mats.

DECORATING

When decorating, try to choose colors that are bright and warm to the eye. Also keep in mind that if you intend to put a lot of plants and flowers in your solarium, it will probably become humid. So be sure to pick furniture that can withstand this type of atmosphere. Some experts recommend using wicker furniture, since it performs well in tropical climates.

If you're planning a solarium that's large and dramatic, it's a good idea to choose giant plants, trees and shrubs to fill it. Consult your local greenhouse or an indoor gardening expert to see which varieties would be best. Plants like the umbrella tree or weeping fig can grow to substantial heights and fill space very effectively and elegantly. A large cactus can also be attractive and doesn't require as much watering.

If the solarium you are planning is small, warm and cozy, choose smaller varieties of houseplants, trees or shrubs. Spider plants and philodendrons, for instance, fit well into small spaces and help to naturally reduce air pollutants. Peace lilies also fit well into most corners and open spaces, without being too overpowering - and this variety helps to clean the air as well.

Also be sure to pick furniture that fits well in a small room. Bold, overpowering patterns can make a small room seem even smaller. The overall effect should be bright, airy and clutter-free.

INSTALLATION

Designing and building a solarium can be a do-it-yourself project or one that's done profes-

sionally. Many people opt to hire contractors. However, if you decide to build one yourself, it's a good idea to consult experts for advice and product information.

If you decide to get professionals to install it, make sure you specify exactly what you want done and be sure to get at least two to three quotes on the

job before choosing a contractor.

A well-constructed solarium will give you years of pleasure and will enhance the overall beauty of your home.

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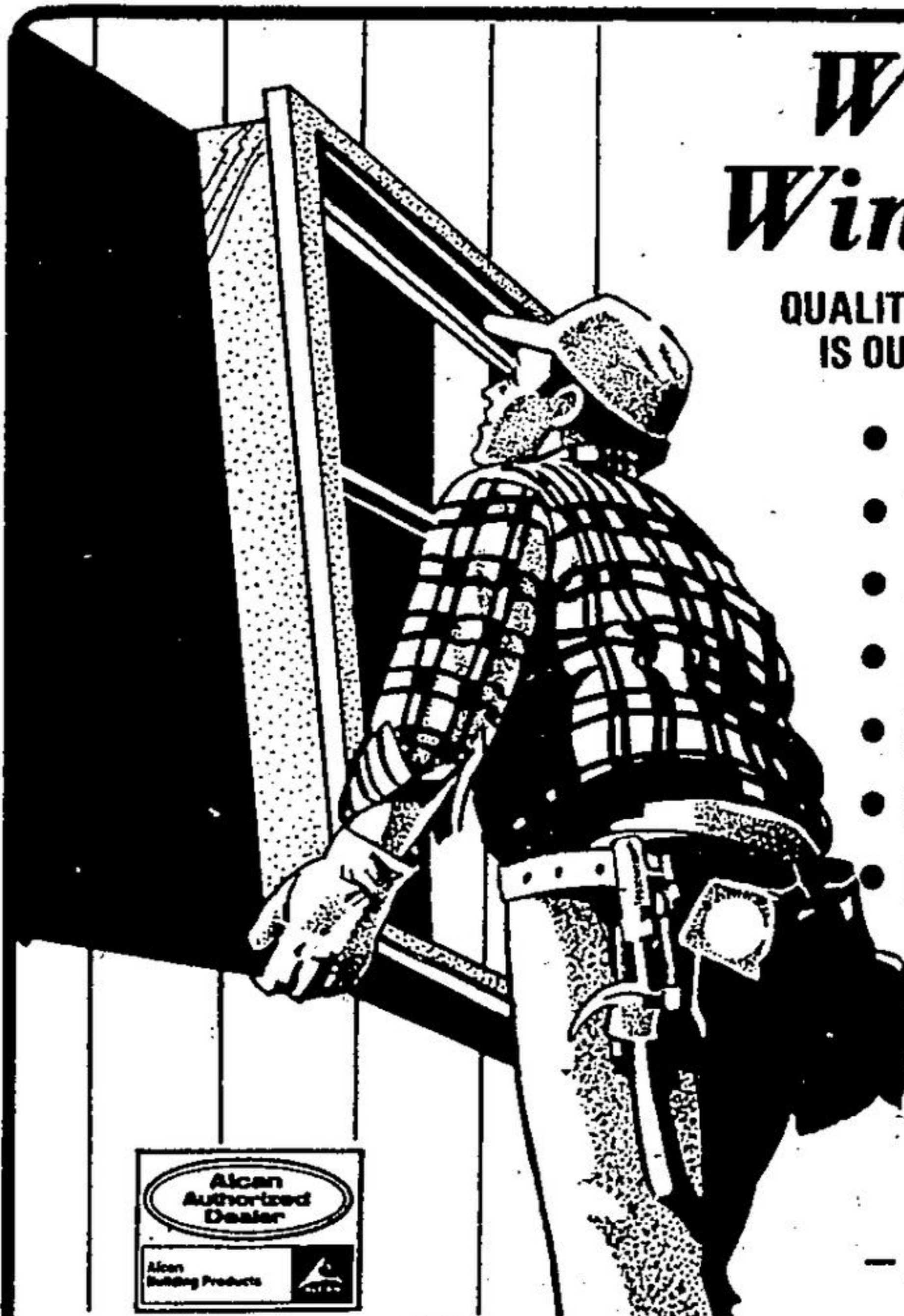


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