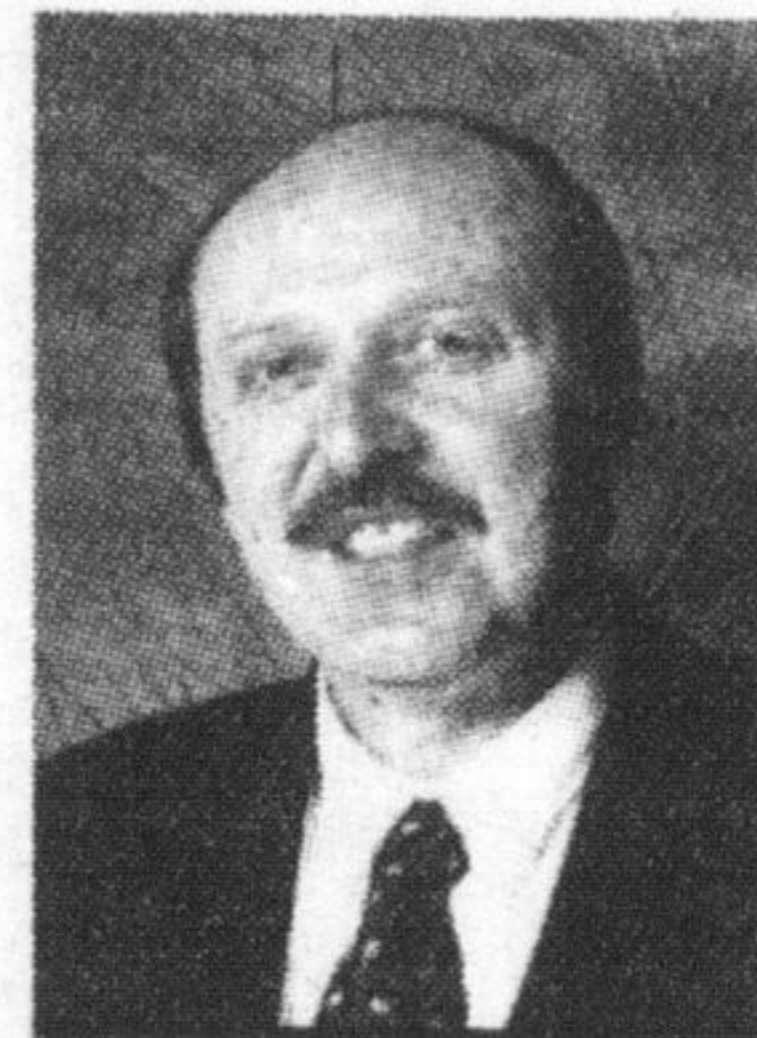


How much home could your rent buy?



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Ask your local mortgage planner

Buying a home is a big financial step, and it's hard to know when you're really ready to buy. No wonder that many Canadian renters are still sitting on the white picket fence when it comes to home ownership.

The exciting news is that it could be time to make your move. There are a few reasons why. To begin, it's pretty simple math: if you can afford to rent, chances are that you can afford to buy your own home. Your monthly mortgage payments may be similar to your rent! That monthly rent cheque doesn't need to be money out the window; it could be money that's building you equity in your very own home.

Let's take a look at how rent and mortgage payments might compare. If you're paying \$1,250 in rent each month, for example, you could be carrying a mortgage of \$202,936. If you're paying \$1,500, that's potentially a mortgage of \$255,510. Forging over \$1,750 each month? You could be paying off a mortgage of \$308,085!

How are the mortgage payments so affordable? Firstly, right now you're benefiting from historically low mortgage rates. Secondly, you now have access to longer-amortization mortgages that lower your monthly mortgage payment. (The examples above were based on that combination: a 4% rate and 30-year amortization, 5% downpayment and 2.95% insurance premium, property taxes and heat of \$285 per month). Many first-time buyers opt for the longer 30-year amortization mortgage to start, but then down the road, when cash flow and incomes increase, they know they can ramp up their payments to pay off their mortgages faster!

Think you can't buy a house because you haven't saved up a downpayment? You can buy a home with 5% down and use some of the flexible options to obtain the downpayment, for example from gifts, through borrowing, or cash back incentives. Mortgage insurers and innovative lenders believe that Canadians benefit from homeownership – and they're helping to make it more accessible. Even if you've had past credit problems, new credit repair mortgages can help transition you to a brighter future. That's more good news for renters!

One more hurdle that some renters worry about is showing enough income to qualify for a mortgage. If you're self-employed, for example, there are mortgage options available that don't require you to verify your income. If you have a good credit history and reliable income-earning capacity, then you may qualify for a no-income verification mortgage loan.

Still sitting on the fence? Think about this: every

time you sign a rental or lease agreement, you are signing a long-lasting contract that has no profit potential whatever – at least, not for you. When you sign a mortgage loan agreement, not only do you sign onto homeownership, but you also sign up for a great equitymaking opportunity too.

Buying a home makes both financial and emotional sense. There are the intangible pleasures that homeownership offers: increased freedom, privacy, and a sense of community, for example. Then there are the more tangible rewards: for decades, Canadian homeowners have been able to leverage their property purchase into a large financial return. You're at a moment of real opportunity right now: this may be the perfect time for you to get on the right side of that picket fence!

John Cavan is an Approved Mortgage Planner with Mortgage Architects. Mortgage questions and concerns can be directed to John Cavan's office, located at 14 Martin St., Milton. John can be reached by phone: 905-878-7213 or by email: john.cavan@mtgarc.ca. John Cavan's website is www.stressfreemortgage.ca. Contact John today about your stressfree mortgage opportunities.

Decorating basics: some rules you don't want to break

Some rules we were never taught. When it comes to home décor, there are decorating basics that many of us are not aware of. How high do you hang artwork on the wall and what about the new plasma TVs? How big a sofa should you purchase? Should you match your window treatments to the wall colour and what if you really like that fire engine red?

Décor expert Karl Lohnes and Sue Rainville, director of marketing for Hunter Douglas, Canada's leading window fashions manufacturer, offer the following input.

Artwork and TVs:

"Never hang artwork in relationship to the height of the ceiling," says Lohnes. "It should be hung in relation to the anchor you're hanging it above or the floor. In a low-ceilinged room, this means you should hang your artwork about 8 inches above the anchor. In a room with high ceilings, hang pieces 12 inches above the anchor."

According to Lohnes, when hanging artwork without an anchor, the basic rule is to measure 66 inches from the floor – the middle of your artwork should be at this height. This brings the artwork at approximate "eye level" – the normal qualification for hanging art.

What about the plasma televisions? Advises Lohnes: They should be hung about 40 to 42 inches from the floor to the television's center. When hanging art or a flat-screen television over a mantel, it should be placed three to six inches above the top of the mantel.

The sofa

The rule for purchasing a sofa, says Lohnes, is that it should be no longer than two thirds of the width of the room. This means that your sofa will be easy to move around and you'll have room for tables alongside of it. He also suggests that tight-back sofas are the most space-efficient as opposed to deeper sofas which take up extra space because of their large cushions.

To make the room seem larger, consider purchasing a sofa with exposed decorative

legs that lets you see underneath it as opposed to one with a skirted base. What about for a very small space? "Make a small space feel as large as possible with a sofa under 38-inches deep and 80-inches long," concludes Lohnes.

The window treatments and colour

"First, look at the window space itself, then the area surrounding it and, finally, the room in its entirety," says Rainville. "If you coordinate the window fashions with the wall colour it will help visually expand the room because low contrasts keep the eye moving around the room. To make the window or room appear smaller and cozier, use dark, warm colours and high contrast between the window and wall."

She also notes that it is good to remember that colour intensifies as you increase areas of coverage – so some brights might work best as an accent color. When combining colours in a room a good rule of thumb, she advises, is that the primary colour should be featured in up to 75 percent of the room, the secondary colour about 15 to 20 percent and the third colour about 10 percent.

With these simple rules, ruling your rooms and your décor should be easier than

ever.

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

www.newscanada.com

Following decorating basics can lead to great design. Pleasing proportions and a harmonious blend of colour as well as the soft, but highly functional Silhouette window shadings from Hunter Douglas make the living room at left a decorating success.



Light up your outdoor nightlife

When the stars come out, you don't have to head indoors. With the right lighting, your backyard can become the perfect spot to entertain long after the sun goes down. Take the same approach to lighting your exterior as you would your interior. Combine several types – ambient, accent, task and decorative – to set an intimate or dramatic mood. Lighting should serve both functional and aesthetic purposes – ensuring safety and

beautifying your landscape. Below are some tips from The Home Depot on how to create an enchanted outdoor space:

Spotlight please: By illuminating objects from below, such as a tree or fountain, you can create dramatic focal points. The effect you achieve depends on the angle of the light. For instance, if you want to emphasize the texture of a tree trunk, install lights near its base. If you want to illuminate the leaves, place lighting further away. To

maximize visual impact, choose only one or two focal points.

Keep it gentle: Similar to ambient light indoors, area light is general floodlighting that washes larger spaces in a soft glow. Use it to gently illuminate sections of lawn, hedges, patios or conversation corners.

That's entertainment: Solar lights that look like patio lanterns or are encased within stepping stones, are creative and decorative ways to light your yard for outdoor entertaining.

Consider adding lights to a patio umbrella or string fairy lights along the sides and top of your gazebo to simulate a starry night.

Time it: Low-voltage and energy-efficient lights like LEDs on a timer are a great way to illuminate your yard at night and keep costs in check.

For more outdoor lighting tips visit www.homedepot.ca or your local The Home Depot store.

www.newscanada.com