

Many techniques to consider when decorating a home

There was a time when home decorating meant picking out a paint or wallpaper, and finding a good match for the trim color.

These days walls and trim, furniture and floors can take on any one of dozens of faux finishes and decorative painting techniques.

Colorwashing, woodwash, decoupage and crackle glaze are just some of the techniques that can turn an ordinary room into a nostalgic retreat or an exotic sanctuary. There's no great cost involved and the work can be carried out with a minimum of fuss.

If you've just moved into a new home, give yourself some time to settle in before you start experimenting with glazes and sponges, feathers and plastic bags - items which can all be used in inventive paint jobs.

Watch the light in the rooms during the day to see if a particular spot might highlight a faux finish. Maybe you'll discover the kitchen's too

dark for the colors you had planned, and you'll want to rethink your scheme.

For walls and ceilings, colorwashing adds depth and subtlety to paints with a pre-tinted, water based glaze. It can be applied straight to plaster, even rough plaster, which tends to take the look of the room back a century or two. You can buy ready mixed colorwashes, or make your own.

Woodwash gives an old look to new wood, and kitchen cabinets, plate rails, window frames and new and used furniture take the treatment well.

Verdigris creates a patinated bronze and copper effect and works well on lamps, picture and mirror frames, and other knickknacks. Faux marble and granite finishes can do wonders for fireplaces and mantelpieces, dresser and chest tops.

Create what looks like a cracked, worn sur-

face with crackle glaze. Small items like jewellery boxes can be given a novel new look, and decorating something that size lets you practice before you move on to bigger pieces like dressers.

In the 18th century, a popular pastime was decoupage, or cutting out motifs to decorate furniture. Today, pieces can be cut from leftover wallpaper, old borders and even magazines and picture books. These pieces can then be used to decorate everything from window frames and light fixtures to flowerpots and chests of drawers.

Vines and flowers can trail elegantly down a door frame, or individual figures cut from wallpaper designed for a child's room can become part of a mural.

Sponging adds depth to paint color through a layering process and gives a soft, attractive finish. The walls should be painted with latex if

you want to sponge on latex, or with an oil based matte eggshell if you want to sponge in a glaze or an oil based paint. Besides using sponges to put on or take off color, you can use soft cloths, plastic bags and stipple brushes, to name a few, for different effects.

Stencilling is another way to add decoration to a plain paint finish. You must use materials with the right consistency for a successful job. Anything too thick, thin or slow drying will tend to ooze under the stencil frame, or start to spread when the stencil is removed. Natural wood, wood finished with a water- or oil-based eggshell paint or matte varnish should take stencilling well.

Decorating options these days are as limitless as the imagination. There are many good books and magazines available in stores and libraries, and classes can give you hands on experience. Some home decorating stores also make video presentations of various techniques.

This information provided by local Realtors and the Ontario Real Estate Association.

A checklist for house hunting

Today, more and more Canadians are taking advantage of plummeting interest rates and more affordable housing prices to become homeowners for the first time. However, many first time buyers find it confusing to try and remember various details of the homes they've viewed; after a while, details can become hopelessly jumbled together as they strive to zero in on the home of their choice.

While it's a good idea to view any home you're really interested in more than once, you can save yourself a lot of time by making a comprehensive checklist of homes you like as you go through them. That way, you don't have to do a lot of backtracking; the data is at your fingertips, and you can ask much more specific questions during your second viewing.

Carry a clipboard and several sheets of paper with you when looking at homes. You may want to make up a detailed checklist ahead of time, or merely take notes as you go along. And if you have questions, ask the Realtor.

One of the most important items to take notes on is the roof. Many people overlook this when viewing a home. Check the type, condition and age of the roof and note any recent repairs. Also take a close look at the eavestroughs and downspouts. Note their condition and whether any repairs or upgrades have been made.

It's also a good idea to walk around the exterior of the home to check the foundation for visible cracks.

When viewing the interior, pay close attention to details. If the home is a duplex or semi-detached, check with the Realtor to see if there is any soundproofing between shared walls. Also pay attention to the general condition of the home's interior - does it look well cared for, or is it obvious that it's been neglected.

When you come to the heart of the home, the kitchen, note the general size and decor and whether it has an eat-in area. Is there adequate space for cooking and food preparation? Is there enough cupboard space? Take a good look at the sink, countertops and floor and find out if the appliances are being sold with the home.

Take extensive notes on the bathrooms as well, including their size, floor, condition, colors, fixtures and water pressure (turn on the faucets and flush toilets to check).

The basement is the next major interior area to check. Look for signs of moisture such as water marks, peeling paint and possible mildew. As well, look for cracks in the walls or floors and examine all storage and utility areas.

You'll be surprised at how well this checklist helps you recall details. However, it's important to keep in mind that this checklist is by no means a substitute for a thorough, professional home inspection.




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cnewell@globalserve.on.ca
cnewell@tor.hookup.net
cnewell@netcom.ca

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