

Decorating

Bold first impressions

Your first home may not be the castle you dreamed of. But it's your castle and you can paint it pink with a neon green draw-bridge if that's what floats your boat.

Most first-time homebuyers opt for something a little more conservative, though, says Fern Waxman, retail sales manager at Ontario Paint and Wallpaper on Queen St. E.

"The first-time buyers I see are in their 20s and early 30s, and they're very well educated," she says. They do their homework, they're well-read and they enjoy decorating their homes.

"The biggest crunch is that the condos they're buying are often very small. I'm talking about spaces that are 500 or 600 square feet," says Waxman.

"They bring me the plans and I can't believe it, they're so small. "But I've been to a few of them, doing colour consultations, and it's amazing what people do with the space."

Most use bright colour sparingly, Waxman says. "Many use a splash of colour on an accent wall. They don't want too much colour because that's going to enclose it, but if they have a splash of colour somewhere, that gives the room some focus and character."

Dark colour can work well in a small room, says Gregg Ernst, interior design manager at Ikea.

"It blurs the edges of the space and visually enlarges it," he says.

Using the same principal, "a lot of people are painting the ceiling and the walls the same colour, especially in bathrooms," says Waxman.

"That way, you don't know where the wall ends and the ceiling begins. It gives height, width, and you can add colour in the accessories."

If a room has a chair rail - a wooden moulding on a wall at the level of a chair back - Waxman cautions against using different colours above and below the rail.

"When you separate the spaces in a small room, that would make the room look smaller," she says.

Wallpaper is enjoying a big comeback, she adds. Believe it or not, the most popular are retro-looking flocked, graphic design, foil, metallic and grass-cloth papers.

For those buying older homes, wallpaper can work wonders, Waxman says. "If the walls are not in great condition, go for textured paper called Anaglypta, which comes in many patterns and can be painted on or not."

Furnishing a first home can be a challenge, both in terms of budget and deciding on questions of taste and style.

"First, you need somewhere good to sleep," says Ernst. "A sound night's sleep is going to make you feel good about yourself. You have to have a good bed and a good mattress, a chest of drawers to keep your clothes, curtains and bed linens."

Another important focus is the living/dining and kitchen area, he says.

"People think, 'I've finally got my own home, and I want to have friends over and socialize.' They also want to entertain and to show off their new homes."

"The two main areas are the bedroom and the living room," he says. "Sex and people."

Ernst advises young buyers to be patient.

"You can't do everything at once. You are smarter to buy a

Think bright colour for accents and start out with a few good pieces, new homeowners are advised. Vintage and second-hand items can add flash for less cash in smaller spaces, *by Catherine Patch*



A gently used leaf-green microfiber sofa (\$325) and ottoman (\$75), orange wool rug (\$85) and raspberry tub chairs (\$110 each) would add bold colour to any space and are compact enough for a condo.

All are from Eclectisaurus, a new vintage décor store on Gerrard St. E.



few good pieces and add to them."

At the same time, he says, furniture is now fashion.

"With all the design shows on television, decorating is one step behind the fashion runway in colour and trend," he says.

"It's different from 50 years ago. Back then, you bought your sofa and when you moved to the old folks' home, you gave that sofa away."

Ernst offers some tips on how to make small rooms look bigger:

★ Look for sofa, chairs or end tables that have legs because they create open space.

★ If you have a small room, don't fill it with small things, which will give it a cluttered look. Instead, place one generously sized piece of furniture in the room.

★ Stay with neutral patterns



and simple textures.

★ Keep paintings, lights, flower arrangements and bookcases low. That helps keep the space at eye level clear.

★ Choose one type of flooring and continue it throughout. Don't chop up the space; keep it uniform and uncluttered.

★ Let there be lots of light. It opens up the space.

★ Use bright colour in accent pieces.

★ Glass accent pieces are great because they're not heavy-looking and clunky. Another way to feather your new nest without overspending is to take up treasure hunting

and hit the antiques stores, flea markets, and second-hand and vintage shops.

Yesterday's basement exiles are enjoying new status because of their high quality and low prices.

"If you walk into a new furniture store, there is a certain look to it," says Lynda Francis of The Storeroom on Sherbourne St.

"But when you put old pieces with new, you create an eclectic look that lends character and warmth to a room. By mixing things from another era or another country or using things out of their original context, you personalize your space."

And the quality of older pieces is hard to match without spending a lot of money.

"The woods used were almost always solid," says Francis.

"And older wood furniture often has a patina you just can't replicate."

The thrill of the hunt draws many people to vintage, retro and antiques stores.

"Especially if you're living in a smaller space, you don't need whole sets of things. Just one piece from a high-end line or a hand-crafted collection stands as a piece of art."