

DESIGN



The high life at low cost

Danny Sinopoli visits this year's National Home Show for big-impact, recession-friendly decorating tips

There is no reason why interior style should suffer during a recession. In fact, many of the most glamorous looks are born during tough economic times, when people desire escapist fare. During the Great Depression, style became more ornate, metallic finishes glistened, Lucite was introduced to the furniture market and Hollywood glamour entranced the masses.

Plus ça change. Last week, the 2009 National Home Show kicked off in Toronto with a tongue-in-cheek Dirty Thirties theme; a highlight of the event is the CityLine Dream Home designed by style maven Janette Ewen. Featuring elements such as shiny black ceilings and DIY glam-rock throw pillows, the space is a 2,700-square-foot example of how to achieve a glossy "haute bohemian" look without breaking the bank.

Seeing timely lessons there, Globe Style asked Ewen for a few of her tips on getting a luxe feel for less.

GO FOR GOLD

Nothing says luxury like a little gilt. In the Dream Home's study, Ewen spray-painted the basic crown mouldings a high-

gloss gold tone, transforming them from pedestrian to Parisian in just a few minutes. Paired with soft blue Graham & Brown wallpaper from Lowe's (www.lowes.ca), "the look is worthy of Grace Kelly," she says.

BET ON BLACK

As interior designer Dorothy Draper showed with aplomb in the 1930s, high-gloss ceilings – especially black ones – add instant drama to rooms. Skeptics, Ewen says, may argue that a dark ceiling is a style don't, but one with shine reflects light beautifully. Draper, in any case, wasn't swayed by convention. "If it looks right, it is right," she famously said.

LET THERE BE LIGHTS

A single lighting fixture illuminates a space, but a grouping of fixtures enhances and enlivens it, Ewen says. She added wow factor to both the living room and a bedroom by hanging inexpensive chandeliers from Rona (www.rona.ca) in groupings of three or more. The results are more akin to high-end lighting installations than simple overhead light sources.

ROCK ON

Ultra-luxe rock 'n' roll interiors are hot right now, says Ewen, who gave a heavy-metal edge to the Dream Home by artfully scattering a selection of Ozzy Osbourne-inspired DIY toss cushions around the place. To approximate the look at home, cut the fronts of bargain-basement T-shirts sporting glam-rock designs into squares and pin them to plain white pillow forms. Affix a second square – made from the back of the T-shirt – to the other side of the pillow. Use gold mini safety pins for authentic rock-star élan.

DRESS UP YOUR ROOM

Looking for a high-impact, low-cost sculptural element? Ewen dolled up a couple of inexpensive dress forms (\$99 each) for the corners of different bedrooms. One, she says, was spray-painted gold at the neck and legs and dressed in a sparkly tank top and tutu, while the other got the high-glam treatment with a long evening gown and fur stole. The outcome: a pair of unique, fanciful conversation pieces.

COLOUR INSIDE THE LINES

To give the Dream Home's kitchen some verve, Ewen painted the insides of the open wood cabinetry a vibrant emerald green, creating effective show boxes for china, glassware and books. She likens the effect to lining a high-end jacket with sumptuous material: a touch of sophistication in an otherwise neglected space.

SHOP CANADIAN

When you do splurge on furnishings, think local. These days, many homegrown companies are turning to Canadian designers and manufacturers to create their furniture and accessories, says Ewen, who pulled many of the items for the Dream Home from De-Boer's (www.deboers.com), an Ontario-based chain that manufactures a lot of its furniture at home. For the consumer, buying Canadian isn't just patriotic; it can also eliminate hundreds of dollars in shipping and customs charges.

» Janette Ewen will be among the CityLine guest experts speaking onstage at 6 p.m. today at the National Home Show (www.nationalhomeshow.com). The event concludes at Toronto's Direct Energy Centre tomorrow.



Top left: A trio of inexpensive chandeliers lends economical sparkle to a high-glam Dream Home bedroom at this year's National Home Show in Toronto.

Top right: Looking for a low-cost sculptural element? Design expert Janette Ewen dolled up a \$99 dress form to create a striking and original boudoir vignette.

Above: Painting the inside of the Dream Home's open kitchen cabinets a sumptuous shade of emerald transformed them from mere functional spaces into gallery-like show boxes for china and books.

BOUQUET MAKING 101

Creating caprice in a vase

During a crash course in flower arranging, Deirdre Kelly finds out what's hot (scent, soft greens) and not (wild abandon)

Some women buy Prada. I buy peonies by the arm full, a habit I developed when, in the bloom of youth, I lived in Paris. There, the streets are full of flowers for sale and the citizens buy them daily.

I used to marvel at the extravagance. After all, flowers die, so there is always a need to replace them. Therein, though, lies their beauty; they are caprice in a vase.

Back in Toronto, I tried to recreate my *vie en rose* by buying buds weekly at the flower shops along Avenue Road. It was, however, short-lived, as my posies inevitably looked pooped. No amount of bending, plucking or spritzing could save them from wilting. I felt like nature's freak, the tulips bowing their heads in shame.

That's why I jumped at local florist Karina Lemke's recent invitation to attend a kind of Bouquet Boot Camp for not-so-green-thumbs like me.

Lemke is the genial host of *Petal Pushers*, the HGTV show that follows the florist and her team of designers as they complete all sorts of projects. As owner of the popular Posies flower store on trendy King Street West, she has created arrangements for clients that include Elton John, Bill Clinton, Justin Timberlake and Cher.

On the day of my crash course, I make a beeline over to where she is holding court in a downtown restaurant, buckets of spring blooms at her feet.

When it comes to flower arranging, she has one basic rule: "Make sure that the imperfect flowers Mother Nature hands you look perfect when you put them into a vase." In other words, make art, not mess.

To get us going, Lemke hands out a brown paper bag filled

Pointers for building the perfect bouquet

» When purchasing flowers, pick out those with the brightest tones, as these are usually the freshest, florist Karina Lemke advises. Also, she says, give their stems a sniff. "If they stink, it means that they have been sitting in murky water. Put them back and try another bucket."

» Once you get the flowers home, cut their stems on the diagonal to the desired height and remove any leaves that may fall under the waterline. Use the powdered floral food that you get with the flowers, as it helps to kill the bacteria that cause them to age prematurely. A drop of bleach or a dash of gin or ginger ale will also do.

» Keep arrangements away from heat sources and direct sunlight to prevent them from wilting. Replenish the water frequently, as flowers such as tulips and hyacinths can drink a lot over a single day.

» Keep flowers away from fresh fruit, Lemke stresses. Fruit produces ethylene gas, which causes blooms to perish quicker.

» D.K.



Florist and TV host Karina Lemke sorts through blooms at a recent Bouquet Boot Camp in Toronto. JENNIFER ROBERTS FOR THE GLOBE AND MAIL

with basic tools of the trade, including a small, sharp knife, hand-sized pruners and a roll of skinny florist tape that we have to cut into strips for placing lengthwise and crosswise at the mouth of the vase, creating a grid that keeps the flowers from flopping over.

To camouflage this grid, she urges us to "green it up" – that is, fill our vases with foliage that has been stripped of leaves that fall below the waterline (where they rot and form bacteria) and trimmed to an appropriate length (about five to seven inches above the lip of the vase).

Colour follows in the form of odd-numbered blooms (mostly threes and fives) chosen for

their vibrancy and pretty scents. According to Lemke, "the trend right now is away from multi-hued, multi-floral arrangements. Using large, bountiful amounts of one type or shade is hip at the moment."

As accompaniments to the colourful flowers, green-hued blooms like green tea roses or mint-toned cymbidium orchids add texture without being overwhelming, she says. Green snowball viburnum and mini green hydrangeas are also fresh and mix well with the white, yellow and orange flowers that rank among her favourites.

Although expensive floral arrangements are one of the first treats that homeowners give up during tough times, Lemke

says people need not forego the luxury of flowers, even now. For a recession-friendly option, she advises going minimalist with one striking bloom in a bud vase: "Make it a statement flower, such as an orchid bloom or a single perfect tulip."

Now that spring is near, she also cites "flowering branches such as forsythia, apple, peach, cherry or quince" as handsome and economical seasonal picks. "Many people have these species in their gardens or can purchase them inexpensively from florists and garden centres."

All of this conversation flows as discarded leaves hit the floor. On the subject of greenery, Lemke likes salal and gar-

denia leaves for the depth of their colour. Both are on hand during our class, as is aspadestra, which we pin into curls for a modernist touch.

Having made her arrangement – a posy comprising pink roses, purple lysianthus and gold cymbidium orchids – earlier, Lemke walks around the room examining ours. Apparently, structured is also in these days, because she frowns when she comes to mine. "Yours is wilder, not as contained," she says diplomatically.

Maybe, but I am still pleased. My hyacinths are perky, my aspadestra is proud. Finally, my cut flowers aren't bowing their heads in shame any more, but raising them in triumph.