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Don't overlook design details like crown moulding and wainscoting.



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Give each room a unique look in choosing colours, Richardson advises, but adhere to a harmonious palette throughout the house.

Avoid trends in vision for new home

Know your own tastes and your family's lifestyle, advises TV designer

In last week's *New Homes* section, celebrity designer Karl Lohnes offered tips for transforming the builder's shell of your new house into a dream home. This week, Sarah Richardson offers an abridged version of decorating a new home from A to Z.

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kitchen finish and floor finishes. It is important to consider what you already have because most people don't have the luxury of tossing out everything that's coming with them. So as much as you may think the newest trend is to have a super dark floor, whatever the kitchen palette is, the reality of it is that you are bringing your old eat-in kitchen suite — your table and chairs — and it has to be compatible with your new kitchen. You do need to be aware of what you're bringing with you to make sure that you're creating a cohesive finished statement when it's all said and done.

With a new home, people are spending a lot on building the house. Is it all right to leave some rooms empty if they find that their budget is being stretched too tight?

Richardson: What I like to see in a house, in any house, is consistency from top to bottom, front to back, that it's all finished to the same level. That may mean that you may have to shop at flea markets and garage sales or it may mean that you're buying the best of everything but I don't like the idea of a new home sitting with unfurnished rooms for years to come while you wait for the budget to recover. Your home should be a place where you're able to enjoy all of the principal spaces all of the time and I think that's really important.

Should trends be considered when it comes to decorating that new home?

Richardson: I find one of the biggest mistakes is people just jumping headlong into a trend-based room that doesn't suit them, that doesn't suit their lifestyle and in the long run won't make them happy.

So I say kind of avoid the trends, know what you like, familiarize yourself with what you like, and really listen to the architecture of the house. If you've bought a traditional arts-and-crafts-style house, I don't want to see a really contemporary interior. I like the vision to work all together, so everything from the trim to the lighting fixtures, the furnishings to the exterior of the house — it should be one total vision, one total package.

Is there a major faux pas that you see new homeowners making?

Passionate about style and design, Sarah Richardson is another excellent source for decorating advice. She may have begun in lifestyle television as a prop stylist and set decorator but she went on to co-create and host *Room Service*, her first show on HGTV, and now has a second show, *Design Inc.*, which takes viewers through all the elements of the interior design process.

The youngest designer to be named one of Canada's foremost style-makers by *Canadian House & Home* magazine, Richardson also runs her own successful design firm, Sarah Richardson Design. She has well-defined thoughts on how to transform a builder's new home into that special sanctuary.

What should people consider when they turn their attention to decorating the brand new home that they've just purchased?

Sarah Richardson: For decorating and furniture purposes, I think first and most importantly is that they should take a good look at the floor plan and evaluate what they can put into the house. Make a list of what it is that you're going to be bringing with you. What are the pieces you have already that you like and you're attached to that you want to be able to reuse? Make sure that those (pieces) are going to be able to fit into the spaces of the new home and then really examine the floor plan and spend some time doing your homework. Usually, they'll offer a scaled floor-plan layout and you can do furniture cut-outs, which allows you to envision the rooms. **A new home essentially presents the buyer with a blank slate; what should they consider first?**

Richardson: There are decisions you have to make while the home is still being built, so those are kind of first on your priority list such as committing to a



Sarah Richardson, host of *Design Inc.* on HGTV Canada



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Think of layering colours, like this kitchen where silver metallic paint complements the blue and ties in with the brushed steel appliances.

Space is always at a premium

RICHARDSON

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Richardson: One of them is that there is an assumption of "oh, we'll fix that later. We really don't like that but we'll fix it later."

By the time you get through the process — the process of moving is difficult and it's exhausting — and by the time you get settled, it's highly unlikely that you'll have the energy, the time or the finances to change those things later. So, I would say try and get it right from the beginning, try and get it right from the get go and you'll end up with something that you'll be happier living with in the long run.

Are there any other decorating gaffes that can be avoided?

Richardson: One of the things I find most common is that people buy a new home anticipating that everything they have is going to fit and they're going to be able to add new pieces, only to find out at the end that these spaces are actually much smaller than they anticipated.

Space is always at a premium. It's really important to familiarize yourself, if you're buying a new home based on the model suite or the model home, to be very aware of what is standard and what is an upgrade. Know what your unit will actually look like and evaluate the price point that they're offering it at to make sure that it's not going to be far beyond your budget in order to be able to make it what you want it to look like.

How can a buyer add some zest or zing to their new home?

Richardson: Pizzazz is great. I think one of the things that are usually underscaled in most new homes is trim. So crown mouldings, and trim, and baseboards — window casings, baseboards, crown mouldings, wainscoting —

that's a great use of your resources and a great way to make a big change in the overall look and the quality and the feel of the house.

Lots of people watch you and see your design work on television. How can they achieve a Sarah Richardson look in their own home?

Richardson: My approach to a new home is to treat each room as unique. ... I like every room to feel different and I like every room to flow from one on to the next but I like each room to be treated separately.

Each one should have its own character and I think that is the most important thing in a new home. That's something that you would always find that I would have done: on the main floor you would probably see at least eight paint colours — the front entrance, hallway, powder room, living room, dining room, kitchen, family room and back-hall stair, all of those are going to be a different colour.

And it's always a very harmonious palette. It's always layering one colour on to the next. What I like is that when you stand at the front door, you can see how the layers stack up one on to the next throughout the home.

What else would give a new home that Sarah Richardson feel?

Richardson: A new home has to have drapes. That's one of the things that adds immediate softness to it.

Blank windows with nothing on them, that's one of the real stumbling blocks for people. They want to move forward but they don't know what to do about their window treatments. So, getting beautiful full-length drapes — they don't have to be expensive; you can buy inexpensive fabrics. You need to start living in the house and you have to take it away from being a shell. You have to personalize it and get some life happening inside of it.