



LIFE AT HOME

DECOR • DOMESTIC ARTS • RENOVATIONS • RENTALS • RESALE

EDITOR: LISA MONFORTON 235-7428 FAX: 235-7379

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AROUND THE HOUSE

Just for the kiddies

OUTDOOR TOYS • It's easy to tempt the smaller set to spend time outside when toys like the Little Tikes Fold Away Play-ground are waiting. The toy company has launched a line of multi-functional toys, and the Playground is no exception — it unfolds into a climbing wall, slide, adjustable basketball hoop and a soccer/hockey net, ideally suited to kids aged 18 months to five years old (it's \$129.99 at Toys "R" Us, Wal-Mart and Sears).

The rest of the products are equally versatile, with a 6-in-1 Town Centre Playhouse, Sand & Water Fun Factory and Island Adventure Water Table.

For age suitabilities and prices, check Toys "R" Us (which is carrying the full line) or littletikes.com.

—Calgary Herald

A sorted affair: Cleaning up your clutter

TIPS • Clutter, like some invasive weed, seems to constantly grow and multiply. But fear not, it can be controlled. Woman's Day has your biggest organizing problems solved, room by room, with ideas that you can stick to. Among them are:

Bedroom

■ **The mess:** Molehill-like heaps of clothing on the verge of becoming mountains scattered across the floor on furniture.

■ **Clean it up:** Having a 'Clothing Chair,' a spot where you toss the not-quite-dirty but not-quite clean pair of jeans or shirt is perfectly acceptable, and better than the floor. Also, install an over-the-door valet hook, which is handy for hanging dry cleaning before you get time to put it away.

Family room

■ **The mess:** Abandoned car rallies and Barbie tea parties strewn haphazardly across the floor.

■ **Clean it up:** Instead of piling toys in a chest, which kids have to dig through, divide them up by type among open bins on low shelves. And because cardboard game boxes get broken and their pieces lost, put small items like dice and cards in clearly labelled resealable bags along with the directions and a cut out picture of the game from the box.

Kitchen

■ **The mess:** Countertops with a blanket of papers, the contents of everyone's pockets and who-knows-what-else.

■ **Clean it up:** Manage the daily influx of what your family drags in by creating homes for the items that pile up. Keep labelled folders in a metal file sorter on the counter to use for mail, takeout menus, children's schoolwork, etc. Keep a relatively small attractive bowl or basket on the counter for odds and ends like sunglasses and keys.

—Calgary Herald

Sustainable community to rise near Okotoks

HGTV star Mike Holmes launches eco-friendly home designs in Alberta

YVONNE JEFFERY
CALGARY HERALD

Mike Holmes has a hankering for life as it used to be. And life as it could be.

"I'm sick and tired of six-foot fences and the homeowners not wanting to talk to each other," says the host of Holmes on Homes, the HGTV show that introduced the tell-it-like-is contractor to millions of viewers. "I want to bring life back to the old school, to neighbourhoods that you can walk around, where the people are happy to talk to each other — just better living."

It sounds impossibly perfect, but it gets better.

"We can build a home that's fireproof, that's mould-proof, that's energy-efficient and environmentally friendly," he says, adding the technology exists to do exactly that — for a premium of about 15 per cent over a conventional house's cost. "And that extra cost is nowhere near close to the payback that you'll get in terms of health and the environment."

The vision

Holmes has been talking about this for years — about the right way to build, and choosing the least toxic and most sustainable products — hoping that someone would start making wholesale changes to the

way we build our homes.

Well, he's tired of waiting, and the result is a quarter-section of land immediately south of Okotoks where he wants to build the first Holmes Homes. The designs aren't finalized, but he's thinking bungalows with flat roofs that will offer living and growing space. Stacked apartments, single- and multi-family dwellings and those that combine retail or work and living space are all under discussion.

Inside the homes, solar thermal technology will pre-heat hot water, while rainwater will flush toilets, wash laundry and water plants.

The Holmes on Homes "Lien on Me" special this season highlighted the large project that helped formulate the designs. But that took two years — Holmes isn't taking so long with the community he's proposing for the Municipal District of Foothills: The first homes could be available in spring 2009, and he's sticking to three sizes, from 1,450 to 2,000 square feet, to focus on better rather than bigger homes.

"All we have to do is go back to simple technology. If we were to build with simple cinder blocks and slab floors and ceilings, you're reducing structural costs and you could take the money you're saving and put it towards the greener features," he explains.

SEE HOLMES, PAGE G2

Courtesy, Mike Holmes

Mike Holmes plans to build an environmentally friendly housing project on land near Okotoks.



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HOUSE OF REAL ESTATE

Springbank Hill, \$459,000

42 Spring Crescent, SW - 1118 SF 3 bedroom bungalow with main floor master, hardwood floors & large rear deck. Kitchen with classic white cabinetry & large, bright dining nook. Close to bird sanctuary, Griffiths Woods, West Side Rec. Centre & minutes to DIT.

Discovery, \$499,000

#302, 10 Discovery Ridge Hill SW - Stylish, spacious townhouse, double garage, 1700+ SF of luxurious living space, kit w/ granite counters, 3 bedrooms/2 baths, convenient location steps to coffee shop, wine & convenience stores, but siding onto tranquil greenbelt.

West Springs - \$565,000

9033 Wenworth Avenue, SW - 2002 SqFt, 5 level split backing ravine in desirable Wenworth! Contemporary 3 bedroom, 2.5 bath feat. 2 storey great room with dramatic window-wall & centre fireplace, hardwood floors, granite counters & stainless steel appliances.

Strathcona, \$749,000

1634 Strathcona Drive, SW - Wonderful location, backing directly onto a large park area! Bungalow with developed walk-out basement, over 2700 SF of living space, 2+2 bedrooms, soaring ceilings, hardwood, granite counters, beautifully landscaped south backyard!

Crescent Heights, \$875,000

1412 - 2A Street NW - Walk to work! Exceptional heritage-inspired newer home on quiet street, almost 2900 SF incl. bsmt, dbl garage, 3 bdrms, den, huge vaulted master suite (22 x 20), hardwood & slate floors, granite counters, custom kitchen, river-rock f/p.

Strathcona, \$895,000

39 Strathridge Gardens, SW - On the ravine! Ideal location-quiet crescent with south backyard! Bungalow with developed walkout, 1782 + 1407 sf, 1+2 bedroom bungalow with soaring ceilings, hardwood floors, granite, den with Murphy bed.

Bridgeland, \$899,000

228 - 6A Street NE - Large home on a 44-ft lot, in an excellent location facing onto a park with wonderful city views from both levels, 3040 sf + dev'd bsmt, 5 bedrooms upstairs, renovated kitchen & baths, granite counters, steam shower, jetted tub.

Richmond Hill, \$995,000

119 Sierra Morena Court, SW - Over 10,600 SF pie lot - one of the best in Richmond Hill! Over 3600 SF featuring incredible mountain views, hardwood floors, granite counters, stainless steel appliances, 4 bedrooms, 3.5 baths, & developed walk-out! Absolutely amazing!

Montreux - \$995,000

160 Tremblant Way, SW - Huge 9900 sf lot, wonderful views of mountains & Glenmore reservoir, 2509 SF, + walkout bsmt, open plan, soaring ceilings and high windows to enjoy the views, maple kitchen, cherry hardwood, master with sitting room.

Patterson, \$1,050,000

198 Patterson Boulevard, SW - 2021 + 1663 SF, 4 bedroom bungalow with STUNNING VIEWS & developed walk-out! Granite counters, 3-sided fireplace in nook/great room. Master suite w/ fireplace, gorgeous view of river, His & Her walk-in closets & 5pc jet-tub ensuite.

West Springs, \$1,295,000

11 Westpark Crescent, SW - 3200 SF new home with developed basement, almost 4500 SF of living space with 3 + 2 bedrooms, main floor den, huge island & walk-thru pantry in kitchen. Master w/ 6 pc ensuite, jet tub, steam shower & large dressing room, open bonus room.

Coulee Park - \$1,295,000

32 Coulee Park, SW - 2585 SF home with developed walkout basement, stunning river valley views, backing a park. Quality built-ins, granite counters, 3 bedroom + nanny suite developed down includes a 4th bedroom with jet tub ensuite.

Parkdale, \$1,295,000

111 - 34A Street, SW - Custom-home steps from the Bow River on a prime 60' lot! Wrap-around windows, vaulted ceilings, chic granite counters, 6 element gas range & stove, built-in wine rack & hardwood floors. Master retreat w/ large walk-in closet & huge 5pc ensuite!

Discovery Ridge, \$1,495,000

30 Discovery Vista Point, SW - Panoramic views! Griffiths Woods & the Rockies can be seen from nearly every room of this stunning 4 bdrm home situated atop the ridge in Discovery. Granite counters, stainless steel appliances, hardwood floors, huge master & walk-out basement!

Heritage Pointe, \$1,695,000

184 Heritage Isle - 3404 + 1518 SF, 5 bedroom estate home with beautifully developed walk-out, backing a ravine in the prestigious community "The Lake at Heritage Pointe". Granite counters, hardwood floors, 9' ceilings, walk-in closets in all bedrooms, wine cellar & much more!

ARTFUL SHOPPER

Inspiration indoors and out

This month's bookshelf tackles country decoration, downsizing, apartments and gardens

JANE HARRISON
FOR THE CALGARY HERALD

Country Living: 500 Quick & Easy Decorating Projects & Ideas

By Dominique DeVito
Hearst Books
\$32.95, 480 pages

If you're a fan of country style, you'll enjoy this charming collection of ideas culled from the pages of Country Living magazine. Although ideas are organized on a room-by-room basis, many of them could be applied to any room in the house. Each pretty photo is accompanied by a numbered decorating tip (or two or three).

Glossy white trim, for example, makes bold citron and melon colours pop in a fresh country update (#32). Antique glass bottles are artfully arranged on a hallway console table (#1) and lined up along the ledge of a stairway (#20). Oversized faux roses and enamelled red pots add dramatic punch to a traditional white kitchen (#47).

Part of the pleasure of the book is its landscape format, which allows for easy browsing. It concludes with chapters on outdoor spaces and seasonal decorating.

Drawing as it does on a style that combines the old with the new, the book is packed with many budget- and family-friendly decorating ideas.

Downsizing Your Home With Style: Living Well in a Smaller Space

By Lauri Ward
Collins
\$27.50, 181 pages

Nothing reveals our wanton addiction to possessions like the exercise of downsizing.

Ward, a New York City decorator, is an expert in making small spaces elegant and functional. Here, she provides a game plan for anyone engaged in the downsizing process.



There's a checklist for assessing the new home, which includes creating a floor plan with actual measurements of available wall space and any obstructions they contain.

Next are tips on evaluating possessions in order to decide what to keep. When the existing furniture simply won't work, there are guidelines for new purchases.

A chapter on repurposing furnishings offers further ideas for reusing existing pieces, and there's a wealth of storage ideas. Ward demonstrates good furniture arrangement for tight quarters as well as camouflage and sleight of hand that make small digs look bigger.

She concludes with small-space housekeeping tips and a reassessment of the whole arrangement after a year. This is a very practical book for any-



red and grey furnishings against bright white walls.

In the same city, another light-filled apartment employs familiar IKEA shelving to subdivide the space. A platform topped with mattress and colourful cushions provides both seating and sleeping arrangements. An antique door on industrial casters creates a funky coffee table. Throughout, large plants invoke an inviting tropical ambience.

Modern style flavours most of the decor, which is typically pared down, but the interpretation is varied and inspired.

Dream Gardens: 100 Inspirational Gardens

By Tania Compton, with photography by Andrew Lawson
Merrell Publishers
\$43.95, 352 pages

As the title suggests, this is an international armchair tour of fabulous gardens by leading garden designers. However, the author presents not just manors and estates; the book also celebrates vision and quirky concepts in the horticultural world.

James Ursell's Love Garden weaves a massive hammock of twigs, fringed by a canopy of trees, with a fire pit at its heart. The constellation in the sky above was mapped onto the structure with pots of evening-scented tobacco plants.

The book is seasonally divided into three sections: winter into spring, spring into summer and summer into autumn. Lavish photographs capture these beautiful places in sweeping vistas, quiet corners and charming foliage detail.

Small city gardens offer inspiration to the average homeowner — like Dan Pearson's London garden, which reveals a small copper lily pond on the edge of a deck. A broken slate path leads the eye into a garden overgrown with daylilies and willow, studded with pots of geranium.

A good rainy-day read for the damp June month ahead of us.

one downsizing for any reason.

150 Best Apartment Ideas

By Ana G. Canizares
Collins Group
\$31.95, 600 pages

If moving to an apartment is part of the downsizing plan, here's the book to jumpstart exciting design ideas. It features an international selection of apartments showcasing the work of prominent artists and designers.

In Barcelona, a loft-style apartment makes use of vertical space with an elevated bed above a cosy sitting area with club chair and shelves. An unusual colour scheme bounces violet,

AT HOME WITH MARNI

Lowdown on down



MARNI JAMESON

I trundle down the stairs buried beneath a boatload of every piece of down bedding I can get my hands on. I must look like the abominable snowman.

This is what happens when you're a home columnist. One minute you're in your office peacefully writing the next week's column, in this case on the glories of down bedding. And the next minute you're catapulted out of your chair when your research reveals that you should wash down bedding twice a year, once at the minimum! Somehow, because my down fillers stay under wraps beneath duvet covers and pillow cases, I blissfully and ignorantly assumed they remained pristine.

I'm not going to confess how long it's been since I washed my down bedding, but trust me — I'm way behind. Outside, I strip the duvet cover from the down filler, and give both a good shake. "Dust mites, dead skin cells, stale odours, be gone!" Feathers fly.

I hang the down comforter over the deck railing to air out. Then, I take two down pillows and put them in the washing machine like it said in my online research. Moments later, feeling virtuous and back in charge of my life, I return to my column.

Where was I? Oh, yes, down. Although it's expensive, down is good stuff. That light fluffy foof found beneath the feathers of ducks and geese is the world's best insulator — not counting good parents, friends and pets. Given a choice between down and anything else, choose down. I like it in jackets, furniture cushions, pillows and especially in beds. It's warm. It's soft. It's cuddly. It's 100 per cent natural. It lasts. It breathes and makes me feel pampered.

Rat-tat-tat-tat! What the...? There's machine-gun fire in the laundry room! I dash in and arrive too late. Our 20-year-old washing machine had gotten so agitated while spinning those down pillows around — bam, bam, bam, bam, bam — it just, well, gave up the goose.

What's up with down?

Before you jump into bed with any chick, know your down from your feathers. Down comes from ducks and geese. (Other fowl don't spend enough time in the water to have plumage that insulates.) The Federal Trade Commission says that to be called down, fill must have at least 75 per cent down clusters; the rest can be down and feather fibres and small feathers.

One down comforter provides the warmth of a dozen wool blankets, but because down draws moisture away from your skin, you don't overheat. The colour of down ranges from pure white to black speckled. Some people prefer all white for looks, but colour doesn't affect the down's loft or warmth. If down feels or sounds crunchy, it has too many quill feathers.

Here are more tips to keep you warm (and cool) under down:

- **Know your fill power.** The higher the fill power, the warmer you'll stay. Products with a higher fill power will also be loftier. As a gauge, light comforters have a 600 fill power; warmer ones can exceed 800. Some people change comforters with the season.
- **Avoid allergies.** Properly processed down is thoroughly washed and sanitized, so it should be free of 99 per cent of natural allergens, say the folks at Downlite, a leading maker of down bedding based in Mason, Ohio. Tightly woven casings add another barrier of protection. But for the super sensitive, a down alternative, such as PrimaLoft, makes a good second choice.
- **Put it under wraps.** Anything down filled should have a casing made of tightly woven fabric, so feathers don't poke through. Finely woven cotton is ideal because it keeps tiny quills in, but still feels soft and gives. Adding duvet covers and pillow cases over casings adds style and keeps down clean longer and protected. But you still need to wash them occasionally.
- **Keep feathers in their place.** Down blankets and comforters should have boxes sewn through the garment (baffling) so down doesn't shift. Some down pillows are dual wrapped so they hold their shape better.
- **Handle with care.** The folks at Downlite say the best way to clean down products is by machine washing with a small spoonful of dishwashing detergent. (Be sure your washer is up to it.) Don't dry clean, and don't use regular laundry detergent. Dry bedding on low heat. Shake it during the dry cycle so it dries evenly and completely. Between washings, hang down bedding outside on nice days to freshen it.
- **Know when down is dead.** Though down lasts longer than synthetic fillers, well-used down pillows do break down over time.

SYNDICATED COLUMNIST MARNI JAMESON IS THE AUTHOR OF THE HOUSE ALWAYS WINS (DA CAPO), AVAILABLE THROUGH AMAZON AND BARNES & NOBLE. FOR A CHANCE TO WIN A COPY, SEND HER YOUR HOME IMPROVEMENT HORROR STORY. DETAILS AT MARNIJAMESON.COM.

FROM GI

HOLMES: Water an issue

So now I'm skeptical — I lived in a cinder block house in the Mediterranean for almost two years, and although I loved the rooftop solar thermal technology, that house ran hot and cold with the outside temperature.

Holmes just smiles. "The cinder block that I'm using has an R-value of 20 and I will increase it... and then add thermal break technology over a thermal barrier," he says. "Everything about this is more than minimum code — I'd like to call it maximum code. I believe in building things once — that's longevity."

Even the homeowner's life cycle has been considered. "You should be able to be born and die in the same house," he explains. "Every single door should be a minimum 36 inches wide and it should be an open concept, so that you can get around in a wheelchair if you need to."

The process

Holmes isn't doing this in isolation. While his Holmes Group is designing the green homes, it's working in partnership with T-Six Urbanists Inc., Oko Properties Ltd. and acting design consultants Baird Sampson Neuert to develop the community.

So, why Okotoks? "It's just the perfect area — they're already in the right thought processes. I love Calgary, I love the southern area of the foothills — I thought it was the perfect launch for what I want to do, to show that this community can be put anywhere," he says, adding that it's critical to involve the community in the planning.

To help with that process and with the community design, Calgary-based T-Six recently held a week-long, open-to-the-public series of charettes, or design meetings.

T-Six principal and urban designer Geoff Dyer says that they started the week with a blank slate (even the final number of houses isn't yet set), explaining the vision and giving people a chance to voice concerns and ask questions, and then drawing in the plan.

"We believe that sustainable urbanism has three main components — high performance infrastructure (such as water, sewage and roads), walkable neighbourhoods and green buildings," Dyer says. "If you look at how they've been building for centuries in places like Italy, we know this can be done. At this point in Canada, we need to start thinking in those 1,000-year increments."

That's why the design incorporates public spaces and a mixed use retail area, for example, rather than straight housing. And, as a result of the charrette — which more than 100 people attended last Tuesday afternoon alone — he says they'll have a good idea of the design and how the community feels about it before the area

structure plan goes to elected officials for consideration.

"The biggest issue in the Okotoks area is water — it's not our intention to impact on their water services plan. We're going to be drawing from wells that are not connected to that system," he notes.

This still offers Nancy Ginzer, spokeswoman for Citizens for a Sustainable Okotoks Sustainability, some pause.

"Just roughly, looking at the overall plan, it looks great — the passive solar, the community garden, the alternative technologies, keeping the houses close together... I have no problems with any of that. The problem that politicians need to address is the growth issue in the Calgary region — for me as an environmentalist, the issue that I'm most concerned about is the water... if we head into drought, those people are going to be up a creek for water, literally."

Municipal District of Foothills councillor Ron Chase says that the public has already shown a very impressive level of excitement, interest and participation.

"The biggest concern is water — how it's handled and how it's dispersed. As long as that can be done in a sustainable, environmentally friendly manner, it's a win-win," he notes. "Now, we wait and see what decisions are made by the group as a result of the charrette. With that will come an application and an area structure plan, and the community will have their say from there."

Some have taken advantage of the charrette to have their say already. Lindsay Boucher and Michele Harshenin attended to investigate opportunities for an Okotoks social agency, currently costing the non-profit organization significant outlays in repairs.

"We thought why not approach Mike, who knows what will happen?" explains Harshenin.

Maureen Nelson, who owns property in Turner Valley and Okotoks, wanted to see the proposal's approach, particularly to water. "I've looked at the (display) boards from Saturday to today, and you can see the difference," she says. "When people asked about how they're going to get people across the main road, and what about schools, for example — those are things (the developers) really took seriously."

She's reassured, but still watching carefully. "We need to do it right, because we can't undo it."

For more information and to add your input, visit holmesonhomes.com.

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Val Larocke of Okotoks speaks to home renovation TV star Mike Holmes at an open house on a new sustainable housing development.

Holmes on home inspections

New book highlights what could be wrong with your home

You don't want to make Mike Holmes angry. The last time Canada's favourite fixer put pen to paper, he took on contractors; this time around, it's home inspectors, and he figures they come in about the same proportions: 20 per cent good, 70 per cent bad, and 10 per cent just plain ugly.

"It's the number one complaint on the website — people buying homes and being hosed," he says.

To be fair, he adds that inspectors tend to have their hands tied by the rules under which they operate: They can't open up the walls, they don't have the proper tools and they can't even move furniture to get at what's behind it.

Which is why Holmes wrote The Holmes Inspection (HarperCollins; \$29.95). The recently released guide bills itself as everything you need to know before you buy or sell your home, and he's not kidding. In fact, it makes an excellent guide for any homeowner who wants to get to know their house a little better.

The bottom line, Holmes says, is that today's home inspection process should be just the beginning, and that licensed professionals such as electricians, plumbers and fireplace specialists should also be called in if there's any doubt raised during the initial inspection.

"We need a better system, and that better system is available," he says, adding that such a nationwide system may be in the works for his company, The Holmes Group.

"How much is it worth to you to make sure that you have all the facts on that house... an ironclad system to figure out the house, its history, what it's gone through, and the permit history on its renovations?"

The meat of the book guides homebuyers and homesellers through the exterior and interior of a home, listing each component along with red flags. Along the way, clear diagrams of house elements such as roofs allow you to "see" the construction beneath the finishes — because once you understand how it all goes together, it's much easier to understand what can go wrong.

The book also provides excellent photos of different building materials such as metal roofs, cedar shakes and asphalt shingles. It finishes up with four case studies that cover a range of situations, from old to new homes and from bad inspections to good ones. Checklists include very handy rough costs for repairs, plus even handier questions to ask real estate agents, inspectors, vendors and yourself about your own home or the one you want to buy.

"I wrote the book to help homeowners buy wisely, sell wisely and hire wisely — to provide a little more knowledge on what to look for, and not to be afraid to say no," Holmes says.

A home inspection will cost you \$400 to \$500, but has the potential to save you thousands if it reveals a problem. For \$30, this book substantially increases your chances of getting that good inspection.

