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styleathome.com

Blogger, designer and savvy DIYer Sarah Swanson decorates her sophisticated transitional Calgary home with smart solutions.

TEXT IRIS BENAROA
PHOTOGRAPHY TRACEY AYTON

Homeowner and designer Sarah Swanson devised a smart solution for an under-used closet off the kitchen by turning it into an office by using kitchen cabinetry and a countertop from IKEA. She carried the wainscoting from the living room into the nook for cohesion. Pink accessories and a whimsical African headdress round out the charming space.

DESIGN, Sarah Swanson Design, sarahswansondesign.com; **TOSS CUSHION**, Caitlin Wilson Textiles.



MODERN CLASSIC ON A SHOESTRING

A modern aesthetic pervades the living room, where varying shades of taupe feel warm and tranquil. To keep costs down – and because DIY projects are just plain fun – Sarah did the wainscoting herself with the help of family.

SOFA, OTTOMAN, Crate and Barrel; Dupioni silk **DRAPERY**, Pottery Barn; white leather **POUFFES**, Bohemia; **BENCH**, Restoration Hardware; **LIGHTING** (throughout), Carrington Lighting; **ARTWORK** by Maurie Hartel, M.S. Hartel; **THROW**, Hermès; deco **TOSS CUSHIONS**, Caitlin Wilson Textiles; chevron **TOSS CUSHIONS**, CC DeuxVie.



W

hen it comes to new construction, it's easy to go wild with tantalizing upgrades: granite, stainless steel, marble, oh my! It's all so inviting. And expensive. But as a blogger, painter and designer with a few tricks in her tool belt, Sarah Swanson of the blog Flourish Design and Style declined to go overly deluxe when she and her husband, Kevin, bought their house off the blueprint in a suburb of Calgary five years ago.

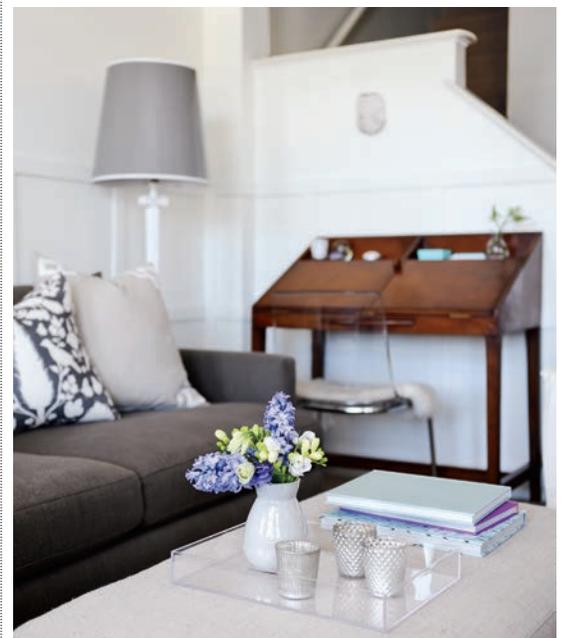
The three-bedroom 1,400-square-foot abode – where they live with their daughters, Calleigh, 8, and Lauren, 6, as well as a cotton-white puffball of a dog named Denver – was builder basic, but Sarah felt up to the task of making it feel like home. “We hadn't really decorated or renovated our previous place,” says Sarah. “And this house really allowed us to do our own thing in terms of design.”

Which turned out to be quite a lot. Sarah's DIY projects and pretty personal aesthetic – mellow, modern, uncluttered – are evident from the moment you step through the front door. On the first floor, for example, homemade panelled wainscoting in lieu of pricier architectural moulding gives the walls panache.

RIGHT A shapely bud vase and simple greenery signal spring on the secretaire.

FAR RIGHT Sarah made the most of an odd half-wall by adding a secretaire to create a cozy mail-sorting spot. The old-school-style desk feels updated next to the transparent chair.

SECRETAIRE, Crate and Barrel; custom Schumacher Chenonceau **TOSS CUSHION** in Charcoal, Modern Thread.



DECORATING / blogger style

As sharp-looking as a tuxedo and top hat, Sarah's kitchen sports a black backsplash and matching laminate countertops, a welcome change from the all-white look. For bling, the original builder-basic black handles were replaced with polished nickel knobs and pulls.

DINING TABLE, Crate and Barrel;
DINING CHAIRS, STOOLS,
Restoration Hardware.



Sarah, her dad and her husband easily installed them together: "We used inexpensive square baseboard with carpenter's glue and just painted it all out – it was actually super simple!" she explains. Elsewhere, Sarah turned an underused closet into an office nook (that's both out of the way and central) with basic big box store pieces.

The house, which Sarah describes as "traditional with a twist, in a palette of white with tonal browns and hints of purple," is also adorned with clusters of her own artwork: Abstract smudges in watery hues recall orchid petals and lavender buds in the rain. She sells the mini creations through her website for \$10 each – an outrageously low price that fits with Sarah's philosophy that not every piece of decor has to be precious. "Gallery walls need a lot of artwork, and it's expensive to fill all those frames," she says.

That same artistic interest also extends to Lauren and Calleigh, who've inherited their mom's creativity. "Sunlight floods in through those big front windows in the living room, and the girls and I do a ton of drawing there. We unspool big rolls of paper across the floor and draw all afternoon," she says. "It's always a warm, happy spot, even in the dead of winter."

The family has since moved to a brand new home – a place for fresh DIY projects and art days for the family to tackle. After all, living spaces are never really about the glamorous upgrades, they're about making memories. Because sometimes – actually, often! – it's the simple pleasures that are most rewarding.

FOR SOURCES, SEE OUR WORKBOOK

RIGHT The elegant gold glasses from Italy on the sideboard bar station were a wedding gift from Sarah's grandparents, while the artwork above got a cheap DIY treatment. "I taped out the frame and painted the corners gold, campaign style," she says.

Surf Glove ARTWORK, Jenny Andrews-Anderson; **turned-wood TABLE LAMPS,** HomeSense.

FAR RIGHT Sarah, Calleigh, Lauren, Kevin (and Denver the dog) enjoy a cuddly family moment in the inviting master bedroom.



TIMELESS & TRENDY

Nature-inspired colours, textured fabrics, warm woods and a mix of formal and informal pieces bring the family room to new heights of style.

DESIGN, Purity Designs, puritydesigns.ca; Natural Linen CC-90 WALL PAINT, Benjamin Moore; **FLOORING** (throughout), Goodfellow; **WINGBACK CHAIRS**, Restoration Hardware; **SLIPPER CHAIR**, **COFFEE TABLE**, **RUG**, **ARTWORK** (above fireplace), silver twig **CANDLE HOLDER**, HomeSense; **CHANDELIER**,

Purity Designs; shell-shaped **BOWL**, Chintz & Company; faux fur **TOSS CUSHION**, The Cross Decor & Design.

OPPOSITE Combining high and low accessories is one of homeowner and designer Sydney Carlaw's favourite decorating tricks. On the coffee table in the family room, she paired a boutique-shop find (the shell-shaped bowl) with a big box store score (the silver twig candle holder).



Designer Sydney Carlaw plays with tension to make her neutral family retreat both interesting and relaxing.

COMPARE & CONTRAST

TEXT KATHLEEN DORE | PHOTOGRAPHY TRACEY AYTON
STYLING DARCI ILICH





BOTTOM LINE IS OFTEN TOP OF MIND FOR SYDNEY CARLAW.

Whether the designer is renovating for a homeowner, finishing a custom build for a contractor or decorating her own family home, she's got one eye on design and the other on dollars.

It sounds calculated, but at the end of the day, Sydney's goal is to make an interior feel welcoming. Take her 4,200-square-foot house in Fort Langley, B.C., for instance – it exudes warmth. "My home is my refuge and a place where my family can relax," she says.

Creating a comfortable home for herself, her husband, Vance, and their two daughters, Jessica-Rae, 10, and Jolene, 7, required a careful balancing act: splurge-worthy pieces paired with inexpensive finds, rustic textures set against a polished neutral backdrop and a timeless aesthetic jazzed up with a few of the latest trends. "I'm always thinking about where I can create tension when I design," says Sydney.

The family room, with its warm beige walls and blonde-toned wood floors, best exemplifies her design sensibility. The space's soaring ceiling gives it the airy feel Sydney loves, but its dramatic height needed some grounding. "A huge chandelier brings the eye down, and the drapes close in the room, making it feel cozy," she says. In the informal seating arrangement,

OPPOSITE "The family room is a retreat for my husband and me," says Sydney. The TV is in a separate media room, so there are no distractions. "It's an awesome place to sit and read a book, or enjoy a coffee and talk."

SOFA, knitted **TOSS CUSHION**, Restoration Hardware; **MIRROR**, **TABLE LAMP**, **VASE**, ikat **TOSS CUSHIONS**, HomeSense; spiky **SCULPTURE**, The Cross Decor & Design.

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AFFORDABLE ACCESSORIES LIKE TOSS CUSHIONS EASILY FRESHEN UP INVESTMENT PIECES.



LEFT, BOTTOM The polished chrome table lamp and rough wooden side table make an unexpected pairing in the entryway, where an oversized wingback chair creates a welcoming and convenient perch.

WINGBACK CHAIR, Restoration Hardware; **SIDE TABLE**, **TABLE LAMP**, HomeSense; **TOSS CUSHION**, The Cross Decor & Design.

BOTTOM LEFT "I thought, Why not make a big splash in the master bath?" says Sydney, who loves to get ready in the spa-like space.

Wickham Gray HC-171 **WALL PAINT**, Benjamin Moore; **SIDE TABLE**, **BATH MATS**, The Cross Decor & Design; **CHANDELIER**, Ocean Pacific Lighting.

BOTTOM RIGHT Soft hues and subtle patterns in the master bedroom provide a soothing yet inviting escape.

Stonington Gray HC-170 **WALL PAINT**, Benjamin Moore; upholstered **BED FRAME**, Restoration Hardware; **BEDDING**, The Cross Decor & Design; mirrored **NIGHT-STAND**, **TABLE LAMP**, faux coral **SCULPTURE**, HomeSense.



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“FAMILY IS REALLY IMPORTANT. I ALWAYS LOOK FOR WAYS TO FACILITATE TOGETHERNESS IN MY DESIGNS.”

a casual down-filled Restoration Hardware sofa lives happily next to a tailored slipper chair from a big box store, while a sleek coffee table sits atop a plush shag rug.

A similar blending continues in the kitchen. The room isn't large, so Sydney opted for cream-coloured cabinets rather than pure white, which might have read as stark. And though she hankered after marble countertops, she chose more economical and practical quartz for the busy family kitchen. The glass and stone mosaic backsplash was also a budget-friendly choice, but Sydney didn't scrimp on the lighting. "You can create 'wow' in a room with lighting," she says. "It's like jewellery." Last but not least, the burlap-covered stools add the perfect dose of rusticity, tempering all the polished materials.

Ultimately, it's the home's warm, soothing palette that brings cohesion to the multitude of juxtapositions. "A lot of people shy away from beige because they think it can be blah, but I love it," says Sydney. Far from boring, the neutral scheme plays host to a dynamic layering of textures and styles that serves this family's relaxed lifestyle. "I'm always looking for how I can bring meaning to the home — on any budget."

OPPOSITE Gleaming quartz countertops gave Sydney the look of crema marfil marble without the worry of grape juice or coffee stains. The pretty turned legs on the stools are made less precious with burlap-covered seats and nailhead trim.

White Dove OC-17 **CABINETRY PAINT**, Benjamin Moore; **COUNTERTOPS**, Silestone; **BACKSPLASH TILES**, Ames Tile & Stone; **STOOLS**, Chintz & Company; **PENDANT LIGHTS**, Restoration Hardware.

FOR SOURCES, SEE OUR WORKBOOK



ABOVE & TOP LEFT Rusticity and elegance complement each other in the kitchen's eat-in area. The pairing of the woven rattan chairs and a shiny lantern-style pendant light is a case in point. "I think it's important that you don't go too trendy and you do what works for your family," says Sydney, shown here with her daughters, Jolene (left) and Jessica-Rae.

DINING TABLE, DINING CHAIRS, Restoration Hardware; **RUNNER, SHELL** (on stand), The Cross Decor & Design; **PENDANT LIGHT**, Ocean Pacific Lighting.



LEFT, TOP "Your kitchen is a gathering place for family and guests," says Sydney. If there's room, she recommends incorporating a desk area to store mail, car keys and even your purse. "That's where people end up dropping stuff, so if you have somewhere to put it, it stays organized," she says.