

Welcome Home



By Allison Lawlor

WHEN ANNE TAYLOR* MOVED INTO HER NEW HALIFAX CONDOMINIUM, RIGHT AWAY she could see that decorating the entranceway would be a challenge. The expansive space—with its three curved walls and round overhead skylight—was inarguably bright and unique, but Taylor realized she'd need to think outside the box to make the circular space work. “Have you ever tried to hang pictures on a curved wall?” she asks with a laugh, shaking her head.

Weighing her options, Taylor decided on a non-traditional approach. Once she contacted Annemarie Johnson, a trompe l'oeil muralist based in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, it didn't take long to come up with a solution that would—almost literally—bring the entranceway alive.

On the curved facing wall, Johnson painted a lushly forested mountain pass complete with cascading waterfall. Ethereal clouds float up to the ceiling and around the skylight. “There's so much depth in the painting that it's made the space look even larger,” Taylor enthuses. “My husband says it's just like walking into a forest.” Potted trees flank the doorway, and fresh greenery carries

Ensure your home's entranceway is extending your warmest greeting

the effect into the rest of the home; the effect is stunning. Taylor acknowledges the wow factor. "When visitors come in for the first time, their jaws drop," she says. "But it's really more about us. We absolutely love it; we couldn't be happier with the results."

That's exactly what a foyer should do: make a statement. "It sets the tone for the rest of your home, so it needs to stand out," says Johnson. The entranceway—which serves as a transition from the outdoors to the indoors—is not only what greets you when you open the front door after a long day, but the first thing your guests see when they enter your home. If your entrance exudes richness and warmth, people will carry that impression into the rest of the house. And if it's shabby, no matter how well designed the rest of the home is, shabby will remain imprinted on people's minds.

"Your entryway should reflect your personality and décor," says Charlotte MacLean, an interior decorator with the Decorating Shoppe in Halifax. Despite its prominent location, homeowners often consider it last, long after their kitchens, dining rooms and master bedrooms. But improvements to an entranceway can be done on a significantly smaller budget.

Hands down, the simplest way to add lots of curb appeal and make your front entrance more inviting is to put planted cast-iron urns on either side of the door, says Peter Alyward, co-owner of Home on Water St., a décor shop in St. John's, Newfoundland. "As far as an entranceway, I don't like it to be really busy," says Alyward. "Keep it simple, like the rest of the house." The trend, he explains, is to avoid using the space as a catch-all spot where coats, boots and bags are simply dumped, and move to a cleaner, more organized and elegant space.

Pam Tower agrees. "Most people are renovating their entranceway because they want more space," explains the owner of Tower Interiors in Halifax. And since most older homes don't have large entranceways, space is usually limited. One way to keep things less cluttered is to add a closet where coats, shoes and bags can be hidden from view. Another option is to install an attractive bench, which acts both as place where people can sit, but also where hats, gloves and other belongings can be stored away neatly.

When renovating or redecorating, it's important to keep your lifestyle in mind. Is this the main entrance of the house or will it be used only by special guests? Are there young children or older residents who require a place to sit while putting on and taking off their boots? "It first has to be functional for the way you live," says Tower, "and then we can make it pretty."

Knock knock

Your exterior door is one of your home's major focal points, acting as a visual greeting to your guests, so it too should make a strong statement. MacLean says painting your front door is the easiest way to make a big impact on the look of your house with relatively little work and money, and recommends using a strong colour to draw the eye in. Keep in mind the house's exterior colour scheme—if it is beige or taupe, for example, then a chocolate-toned front door might be a nice choice. She adds that when you open the door those colours should be carried throughout the house.

Materials are also important when selecting an exterior door, and there is no lack of choice: metal, fiberglass, wood veneer or solid hardwood. The right material for you will depend on your budget, weather conditions where you live and your desired look. Steel is typically the top-selling material because it is sturdy, secure, cost-conscious and can be painted to match your home. On the down side, it can be susceptible to denting, rusting and corrosion in coastal areas.



PHOTO: WEISER LOCKS



TOP: Don't underestimate the effect that your hardware can make: the sleek lines and satin finish of this lever design from Weiser make it a perfect choice for enhancing your home's contemporary appearance.

ABOVE: Annemarie Johnston's waterfall mural makes this circular foyer appear even larger. Potted trees carry the theme through the rest of the house.

OPPOSITE PAGE: A clean-lined hanging lamp with a tinted glass shade will bathe your foyer with a warm glow, while a decorative side table, complete with mirror, offers a visual focus and a place to lay your keys.

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The second most popular door material tends to be solid wood. "People are going back to wood," says Richard Tolson, general manager of Bedford Windows and Doors in Bedford, Nova Scotia. "Wood doors are more warm and inviting." Douglas fir is Tolson's preference. He calls it is the most durable of the softwoods, and says, "It makes a nice strong entranceway that won't get any nicks."

With many modern homes now boasting two-storey foyers, there is often enough room for large doors that feature decorative glass accents along with complimentary sidelites and transoms on top. If you want to put in a transom you should keep in mind that you need a ceiling higher than eight feet.

Hardware is another essential detail—functional, yes, but also another opportunity to compliment the décor. Tolson says knockers and handles in black wrought iron or an oil-rubbed bronze finish—which convey a vintage look—have replaced the standard brass or chrome as the popular choices. Finally, don't forget to lock the door, Tolson says. For security purposes he recommends the multi-point locking system, which engages the frame in three points as opposed to just one.

Underfoot

If your entranceway is your primary thoroughfare, those floors will have to gracefully withstand a lot of wear. Choose a durable and easy-to-clean flooring material such as ceramic tile or stone. If you prefer a formal entryway and have the budget, a marble floor is a beautiful alternative. Nova Scotia's MacLeod Resources, for example, offers an exclusive collection of red marble quarried in Cape Breton in hues ranging from "Pynk Floyd" to "Cape Breton Bordeaux."

Whatever the material, remember that your floor is opportunity to introduce colour to the décor scheme. Let your imagination free and get creative with tiles—incorporate patterns, borders or even a mosaic centred on the floor, suggests Pam Tower. To prevent skidding in a high-traffic area, she recommends choosing tile with a rough as opposed to glazed finish. A low-pile rug in a complimentary tone is also a great choice.

Lighten up

Lighting is a key element in any entranceway. While larger hanging lights are attractive, smaller foyers often don't provide sufficient space to allow them to be properly admired, says MacLean. She suggests using halogen pot



PHOTO: GENTEK SIDING

lights or semi-flush lights that provide bright illumination but won't take up vertical space or draw attention to the ceiling.

On the other hand, a chandelier can look gorgeous if you have cathedral ceilings. Remember to balance the proportions of the lamp to the room, and don't feel you must stick with traditional crystal fixtures. Venture out into the world of rod iron, a material that won't require the same extensive cleaning as crystal. If you're trying to achieve a soft, warm ambience, try installing translucent shades in different colours, such as a frosted amber glass.

Skylights are another great way to brighten up an entranceway, says Mike Kline of Velux Canada, a leader in the skylight industry. Compared to a traditional window, a skylight "disperses more natural light," he says, and opens up the space, making the room look larger than it actually is.

Skylights can also provide a good source of ventilation and, Kline says, they work just as well with an eight-foot ceiling as they do with 22-foot ceiling. Another option for a dark hallway is a smaller sun tunnel, available in diameters from 10 to 22 inches.

Paint job

If you're not looking to make quite as dramatic a statement as Taylor was with her waterfall mural, why not consider doing something with the room's ceiling? A faux finish can add interest and elegance, Johnson suggests. Other options include dropping the ceiling's crown moulding down, or placing rope lighting around the mouldings to light up the space.

If you decide to keep it simple and stick with regular paint or wallpaper there are a few things to keep in mind. Stay away from stark whites, which attract dirt and are difficult to clean, says Tower. Don't assume you have to stay away from richer colours in an entranceway, even if the space is dark, says MacLean. Instead of going with a pale colour try fixing the problem with better lighting.

Flights of fancy

For centuries, staircases have been the centerpieces of grand, old homes. Whether traditional or contemporary, the staircase "should be a focal point," says Ingrid Dunsworth, vice-president of Europa Stairways in Hubbards, Nova Scotia.



PHOTO: SCHLAGE ACCENTS



PHOTO: EUROPA STAIRWAYS

TOP LEFT: Enhance your home's curb appeal with landscaping that draws the eye in and provides pleasant contrast with the exterior cladding.

TOP RIGHT: Two-storey foyers are perfect in scale for doors with decorative glass sidelites and transoms. Painting the door in a strong accent colour that compliments the exterior brickwork or cladding is an easy way to make a big impact. Coordinate flowers or planter boxes with the door colour.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Whether it's traditional or modern, make your staircase a focal point of the space.



PHOTO: JAMES INGRAM/VIIVE PHOTOGRAPHIC
ABOVE: Don't overlook details—the right accents can make a strong visual impact on your welcome.

Stairways are far more than a functional means of getting from one storey of the house to another. Elegant spiral staircases like those available at Europa, for example, not only provide a visual focal point with simple lines in stainless steel and wood, but they are great space savers as well. “We are trying to create a piece of furniture,” says Dunsworth. “It lightens the whole room up.”

Design details

Just as in any home renovation, sometimes the smallest changes can make the biggest impact. In other words, don't overlook the details. For example, the value of adding a mirror in an entranceway shouldn't be underestimated. It not only serves a functional element for double-checking that hair is in place and crumbs are brushed from a coat lapel, but it can also brighten the space by reflecting light.

Hanging a lovely painting or placing a large tree or other plant in a corner can add instant ambience, says MacLean. Stationing a decorative table or dresser in the entranceway creates both a visual focus for the space and a place to lay your keys.

Regardless of what you choose to do with your entranceway, remember the old saying, “A first impression is a lasting impression.” ■

* Anne's last name has been changed to protect her privacy.

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