

Tricks of the trade

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a porch

CREATE A WARM WELCOME

Just as a flickering flame adds welcome to a living room, so too can a portable, modern fireplace like the bowl shown here. This set-up runs on bio-ethanol to create a flame. You can use it indoors or out but, like all flames, it should not be placed close to flammable materials or left unattended. Find a large, outdoor glass bio-ethanol fire for £69.99 at www.safield.co.uk.

MIX OLD AND NEW

With a lick of paint and smart furnishings comes the possibility for space to seem too new and impersonal. To avoid this, mix old and new pieces – use elements that are lived-in and loved. Here, an old-framed stained glass section contrasts beautifully, adding heritage to this small space. Check out the antique village at Ruthven Mews in Glasgow's west end or the antiques warehouse on Lancefield St, Glasgow.



SOFTEN THE FLOW

Before you think about painting the outside of your home in spots, stripes or flashes, stop for a minute and think about how else you can create a style statement. Here, our soft blue and white colour scheme provides a beach-style cleanliness that's the perfect background for brightly-coloured floor and sofa cushions. Find stitch-striped cushions from £10 at www.johnlewis.com.

VENETIAN BLINDER

We're all familiar with the concept of using blinds indoors but they can be used outdoors, too. Relatively inexpensive, these ones provide a Balinese-style privacy option that can be used to shade strong sunlight. Don't spend too much on these as they're liable to degrade outdoors and may need replacing annually. All the big box stores carry affordable products so get shopping.

MAKE WEAVES

We installed a smart sofa to immediately identify the space as a summery lounge and found that the best configuration was to place the sofa against the largest wall and pop a table in front for a clean, balanced look. Plasticised rattan is popular and Lloyd Loom-style woven furnishings can remain outdoors in all weather. Find a great selection of sofa sets from £349 at www.gardenfurnitureScotland.co.uk.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS MATTER

You only get one chance to make a first impression, so make sure your front garden and door are up to the task – keep them clean and tidy and give them an identity that's both welcoming and stylish. This porch area had been used as a dumping ground, leaving people to assume the house beyond it was dirty and in disrepair. So clean up your act to create a good first impression.



Brush up on the best way to paint a room

It's the season to think about freshening up your décor.

When painting your house, start off in the early morning so paint doesn't dry too fast and leave streaks. Paint ceilings first, walls second and skirtings, window frames and doors last.

To ease the smell of oil-based paint, cut a few potatoes in half and dot these around your project room – these, believe it or not, will help absorb odours. Have a long lunch and then start again mid-afternoon when higher temperatures drop back.

Add some sunshine to your dining with Cozy Yellow dinnerware from Linea at House of Fraser. This fun and friendly chunky stoneware range has a high-gloss yellow exterior and contrasting white interior for a look that's colourful and clean. From £2.80 at www.houseoffraser.co.uk.



Step back to the 1950s with a marvellous wall phone from the vintage collection at The Attic. With a handy wall-hanging mechanism that frees up surfaces, not to mention cool looks, this phone may have heritage features, but it works just as well in the 21st century. Priced £59.95 from www.the-attic.co.uk.

Clean ruffled or pleated lampshades with a spare baby's hair brush. You'll find the soft bristles reach into the difficult parts without snagging or dragging, keeping your lamp shades dust-free and nicer for longer...



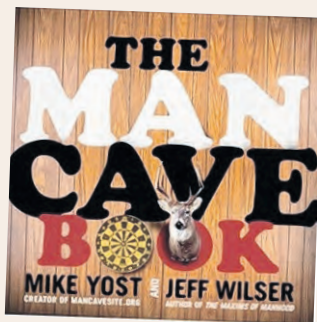
Here kitty, kitty... Donna Wilson won a British Design Award in 2010 and, looking at her range, we're not surprised. If you serve up your brekkie on a Mog's cat face, bone china plate you'll be grinning like a Cheshire Cat in no time. They cost £20.50 each, ref: CE-MOG-WHIT-20 from www.donnawilson.com.

STYLE BIBLE

what's hot in the shops

Style Bible: The Man Cave Book by Mike Yost & Jeff Wilser, £8.99 published by Harper Paperbacks available from Amazon.

Working, as we do, in Canada and the US we've become familiar with the concept of a man cave – a boys-only room, where guys get together to watch the game or have a few beers. This smart book showcases the man cave in all its glory from money-no-object-caves to caves on a budget. So, if massive TVs, state-of-the-art sound systems and home bars are your thing, then check out this inspirational book.



If you're renovating furniture or want to protect a timber door finish with varnish, here's an easy tip to ensure you achieve a smooth, glass-like finish. Use a soft brush for details and corners before applying varnish with a small, gloss foam-roller. Build up several light coats instead of one gloopy coat and the result will be perfect.

