



ADVISOR

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The evolution of man (chic)

Forget Barcaloungers and big-screen TVs: Decor traditionally regarded as masculine is more Don Draper than Don Cherry these days. And its biggest fans are women **BY DAVE MCGINN**

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hen Kara Ciccarelli, a 27-year-old who works in television marketing, moved from California to Toronto last year, she hired an interior-design

company, LUX Design, to help her with her new condo. The firm, which specializes in “unique, luxurious concepts for commercial and residential spaces” and offers such consultation services as “the condo quickie,” was given specific directives by its Canada-bound client: Ciccarelli wanted a black-and-white colour scheme and furniture with simple lines. Just as explicit was what she didn’t want: no pinks, reds or yellows, no frills or frippery.

According to many decorators, Ciccarelli’s list of design likes and dislikes is not an uncommon one. Anything that reads as overly girly or smacks of romance-novel opulence, they say, is so three years ago. Instead, streamlined, tailored looks that have traditionally been thought of as manly in appearance are appealing to more and more women.

“They just don’t want feminine places,” Ashley Reekie, the LUX designer who worked with Ciccarelli, says of her female clients. “This year especially, [the mania for a cleaner, more masculine aesthetic] has just gone crazy.”

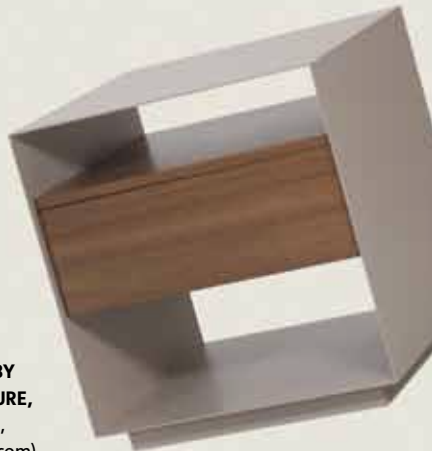
A note of clarification: Rooms with this newly hot masculinity shouldn’t be confused with man caves, those testosterone-driven spaces defined by big-screen TVs, Barcaloungers and framed hockey jerseys hanging on the walls. Rather, they are characterized by the prevalence of simple lines, an emphasis on functionalism over ornamentation and a preponderance of materials such as leather, metal and wood.

In short, it’s more Don Draper than Don Cherry, discreet patterns such as pinstripes instead of eye-popping plaids.

“When I see the fabrics [that furniture manufacturers are adopting in response to the trend], I think, ‘Wow, this would make a beautiful suit,’” Debbie Evans, the founder of Whistler Interior Ltd. in Vancouver, says. A recent case in point: The Montreal-based furniture maker G. Romano’s new and aptly named Draper sofa, which was unveiled at the Canadian Home Furnishings Market’s recent expo in Toronto, sports a pewter-hued linen-blend upholstery against which the Man in the Gray Flannel Suit could easily have disappeared.

The fabrics, however, aren’t all so “executive suite” in tone: Jane Lockhart, the TV personality and founder of Jane Lockhart Interior Design in Toronto, recently unveiled a sofa, also at TCHFM, called the Davis, which is outlined with a handsome nailhead trim and covered in a polyester/cotton weave that

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convincingly resembles denim.

While it recalls “classic 1960s design,” Lockhart says, it is also comfortable enough for people “who are actually in their 60s.”

In addition to the pinstripes, tweeds and denims, exotic woods such as wenge and teak, seen in a new raft of tables, chairs, cabinets and countertops, are also proving (or re-proving) popular.

“They’re very masculine-looking,” Evans says. “And they’re huge right now.”

How to account for this turn toward the manly? “It’s calm,” Alexis LaBonte, the owner of DesignLaB Interiors in Vancouver, says of the aesthetic as a whole. And in a hectic, stressful world, “women are appreciating calmness over more dramatic [styles]. We’re dramatic enough on our own,” she jokes.

Indeed, a lack of fussiness is what Ciccarelli cites as the primary reason for her preferences. “I definitely like clean, straight lines,” she says. “They’re simpler.”

And that simplicity is especially advantageous in the kind of compact urban spaces that are being built in great numbers in cities across Canada (and which women of all ages are occupying to a greater degree, often by themselves).

“There’s no more room in our smaller homes and apartments to have stuff that isn’t functional,” says Francois Caron, designer and owner of Montreal-based Trica Furniture, whose new bedroom line is a study in masculine design.

Composed largely of metal and wood, every piece, inspired by Caron’s belief in utility, is stripped down to its essentials.

Lockhart, for her part, points to another, attendant aspect of the way our living spaces are changing to explain the trend toward pared-down design – the slow death of the cloistered living room. “As a result of the living room’s demise, you’re seeing this very ornate, rather feminine style die with it,” she says.

Now that it’s decorated, Ciccarelli’s condo does include a few feminine touches, including a “very girly chandelier with dangly, sparkly things on it.”

Such elements, however, are exceptions, the bulk of the apartment boasting a neutral, decidedly un-feminine look. “It’s just the style I like,” she says.

And if Ciccarelli ever changes her mind, another benefit of the aesthetic is the fact that it’s easily adaptable.

“Starting with base materials that are tailored and neat and monochromatic gives people a good opportunity to customize their homes seasonally,” LaBonte says.

That could mean changing up the colours of pillows or adding new artwork to the walls.

“If you start with a floral couch, you’re kind of limited.”