

DID YOU KNOW?

A DESIGNER GOES BEYOND THE PRETTY

By Jo Alcorn

THE MAJOR MISCONCEPTION clients have is that a designer's main focus is making things "pretty." Sure that's an element we focus on, but more importantly, we want to make sure a home is safe and efficient so the homeowner can enjoy it – visually but also structurally sound. Here are the top things a designer can help homeowners with that might not have crossed your mind (but should!) when hiring a designer.

INSULATION – Ensuring proper materials are used from the inside out should be a priority, especially if you've had to remove mould. It's often a problem revealed when we get behind the walls – commonly spots where there is moisture. For small amounts of mould removal I use Concrobium Mold Control (concrobium.com). It's a bleach-free, Health Canada-registered non-toxic solution that's safe – even with kids and pets. You want to ensure mould does not return, so I like materials that help ensure a mould-free home. Certainteed (certainteed.com) offers a great product called Membrain. It prevents moisture and air, and is designed to help wall cavities breathe and stay dry. I love that their products are sustainable; insulation is made with recycled and renewable content including a plant-based binder that is formaldehyde-free and contains no harsh acrylics, dyes or unnecessary chemicals.

WINDOWS AND DOORS – A key factor is choosing windows and doors that fit both style and functionality. Are there small children? Should the windows open inward or outward? Are there cleaning concerns? I discovered a Canadian company that manufactures, delivers and installs windows and doors in sometimes as little as a two-week turnaround time (this is fantastic when working on tight

designer deadlines). Total Home Window and Doors (thwindowsdoors.com) is one of the largest window and door companies in Canada and, as an added bonus, they offer a lifetime warranty on their products. This is a company I can stand behind.

FLOORING – Colours, styles, textures, patterns, materials, the list goes on. Flooring is essential to get input from a designer. It's labour intensive to install and not something you can (or want to) switch up every couple years. While hardwood or laminate is perfect for some projects, one of my favourites is natural stone. It's environmentally friendly, easy to care for, durable, and adds a unique feature to any space. On a recent project I worked with ErthCOVERINGS (erthcoverings.com). They offer natural stone flooring and wall coverings. A new trend in feature walls is to add a stone veneer to a wall. I love that I can mix and match the floor and wall options to create a sharp design with a feature wall that is truly unique.

HEAT – I get asked all the time about heating options, especially for older homes: What is most economical? How can I cut down on heating bills? What's the right option within the room? One luxurious option I love is in-floor heating. Surprisingly, it's much more economical than most people think. You can install electric radiant floor heating under tile, stone and laminate/engineered wood floors; Nuheat (nuheat.com) makes custom mats, like an electric blanket, that perfectly fits the areas you would like to heat. They offer a WiFi-enabled thermostat allowing you to control your heating from a free app on your smartphone so that you can adjust it remotely.

While you may feel you can tackle any or all of these areas on your own, a designer's input can be invaluable. Designers are educated on all your options, know of recent developments and new product introductions, and have more than just the final look in mind. Work with a designer to get the practicalities right – and then we'll make it look pretty too!

Jo Alcorn is a design specialist and designer on HGTV's *Home to Win*, out this spring. She has her own furniture collection, signature pillow and dog bed line and is known for her savvy design concepts. Visit Jo at www.whitewashco.ca.

