

GREEN TECH THE SERIES COLUMN FOR FEBRUARY 3, 2016

HEADLINE: 2016 HOME TRENDS: SOME UNIQUE - SOME CUTE!

Every year around the end of the year and early into the New Year I get a steady stream of information on “What’s New for This Year” and 2016 is no exception. The majority are companies are taking an idea and giving it a new cover or “tweaking” their product a bit to call it new. Others are real changes and in the area of home design, once you get past the “new” paint colors, this year is seeing real changes, including some that have been slowly coming along and now are getting mainstream recognition.

Smartphones are here to stay, as is obvious. In regard to home benefits, with the use of apps, they are quickly changing management of lights and home comfort settings, along with security and video surveillance. Managing home energy use by means of smartphones has arrived and I am now seeing more such use.

While the open floor plan has been around for a number of years now, one innovation that kitchen designers are starting to use is what is called “double-island” service where one side of the island is for preparation and the other side for serving. One I saw recently in a new home was circular and utilized some excellent small energy efficient appliances. Unlike the open concept, the large formal entrances are now out of vogue. Main entrances that enter directly into the home allow an immediate welcome to family and friends. Wine drinking is also big in many circles. This has brought along a need for, at minimum, a wine fridge in the kitchen to complete wine bars. In fact, home bars, in general, are making a comeback.

It is no secret that we are coming to the realization that all work and no play is no way to live. It’s a balance that Europeans have known for years. If you follow this column, you will know we opened a boutique spa/B&B this fall and I am surprised at the number of guests who are finding us for a “getaway” time to relax. www.circa1894.ca. Recharge is a word I hear constantly. Recently, we have had young couples with growing families stay. Home designers have picked that concept up and quiet rooms, reading nooks and family games rooms, to allow recreation in smaller groups, are now becoming more popular. Home offices are almost a necessity today for any home. One US study stated that working from home is now the fastest growing segment in the business climate.

Another area that is blossoming is pet comforts. Admittedly, being a pet fan-Golden Retrievers in the past and now the resident boss, our Cat - this popularity made me chuckle. This growth in what one study called “barkitecture” ranges from more single women buying homes, with a large percentage having a dog, to young families who pamper their pets more than my generation did. Motion activated and insulated pet entrance doors, outdoor drinking bowls that refill automatically, feeding stations and even canine showers built-into the mud room, are popular feature in young family homes.

One home feature that has been growing for about 5-6 years now is the indoor-to-outdoor living area. Large glass walls, multiple sliding doors and extended decks with fireplaces and fire pits, arbours and fixed canopies are all features that are becoming what is called the extended living spaces. We are seeing this at the spa; we have close to 1000 sq. ft. of decks for relaxation and receive constant comments about how relaxing this is. Along with this outdoor living is the rapidly growing popularity of native plants and a reduction in lawn sizes, by using more shrubs and stone features. These reduce the level of watering and time cutting grass.

TINY HOMES

Probably the most talked about home innovation is the skyrocketing popularity in tiny homes. TV programs on HGTV now demonstrate how this small home evolution is evolving. I have had a couple of conversations with buyers who have wondered about these asking whether they are a fad. What makes them much different than a good RV, is one often asked question. I did some research on this and was surprised to uncover some interesting facts on RV's. The RV turned 100 years old in 2010; seems it was not long after Henry Ford made cars reasonably priced, someone built an RV to be towed behind the Model T. In fact, Pierce-Arrow debuted the first one in 1910. Camping trailers quickly hit production, Los Angeles Trailer Works started to mass produce them in 1910. By the Roaring 20's this was a major market. They were called auto campers and they resembled the RV trailers of today. The depression saw yet another rise in their popularity. For many it was their own “Tiny Home” and started the notion of full time living in an RV. You can thank the folks at Winnebago for mass producing motorhomes in 1967 at a reasonable price and the RV revolution was off and running. Fast forward to today and RV's are packed with technology and conveniences.

The argument between Tiny Homes and RV's is now a hot topic and there are pros and cons on both sides. Most RV's are assembly line manufactured with a specific list of options and features. The one knock is they are not as well built, but this is open for argument. They are more mobile than most tiny homes and the larger RV makers produce what is called a park model and these offer some competition to the tiny home revolution.

The one major catch right now for tiny homes is their acceptance for insurance, how are they regulated with respect to building codes for example. RV's are governed by recognized standards so these issues are not difficult for them. Tiny home builders argue that they look more like a home; they are usually more weather proofed, especially for northern climates. Because they are like a home, built one at a time, they can be designed to individual needs and personal taste.

This is one segment of the housing market that I feel is here to stay. Municipalities afraid of another "single wide trailer problem," that are sometimes attached to portable homes, may have to rethink their acceptance of these homes.

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