



BY JASMINE MILLER

Designer Digs

Keeping up on the latest trends may not be your thing, but it is for many clients. Here's a primer on what's hot now »



Clients might say they're all about structure, more concerned with function than form, but they're lying.

You and your colleagues are the only ones who wax poetic about plumbing couplings and vapour barriers; clients are like teenaged boys – they're all about eye candy.

No one wants to pay for shoddy work, but no one wants to live through the hell of a kitchen or bath

reno and not earn bragging rights either. The problem is that design trends follow fashion, and that means they're fleeting. "You don't want to time-stamp a house with design choices," says Susie Hardy of Everyday Living Design in Toronto. "The waterfall countertop in the kitchen, for example, might scream 2010 very shortly."

Here's your cheat sheet of design trends that are hot and some that are hot messes.

Colour

Paint colours are neutral, typically in the grey family. "We're seeing muddier tones, earth tones with a clay influence, so there's more colour in neutrals," says Hardy. "Light and airy is still big," she says. "Soft blues, greens, yellows, and even pinks. But these are soft hints of colour, not to be confused with a baby's nursery."

Paint companies announce their "colour of the year" with the fanfare of Oscar nominations.

Pantone's 2012 colour was Tangerine Tango and it's still widely used. "Orange is one of those colours that with a north-facing room is fabulous," says Lois North of Lois Interiors in Comox, B.C. "But if you face south, it's too hot, too bright, too much." Make sure you bring a compass to the jobsite.

Tile

Bigger is better, and rectangles rule. "If you have to go square, the smallest it should be is 8x8," says

Photo by Johnny Lam



We call it avocado, Kohler calls it Greenwich Green.

Hardy, but 18x18 or 24x24 is more contemporary. Beware: you need a perfectly level subfloor to pull this off.

Those tiny 1x1 glass tiles in showers and on backsplashes are totally last year, by the way. “The trend is toward a single sheet of glass that’s back painted, so it looks completely seamless,” says Hardy. “People have had enough of glass tile; now it’s used mostly as an inset in ceramic and porcelain,” adds North. “Tiles that look like wood and linen are very rich and are gaining traction.”

Warning: you need mad skill or access to sub-trades who specialize, because

cutting-edge tiles are popping up with a fancy lay. “Herringbone is trendy now,” says Hardy, “but it’s mucho dinero because it involves a lot of cutting.” So if your client is asking for Moroccan tile, or a stripe effect in the application (both are hot right now), be honest. It’s going to cost more than another choice and it may take longer, too.

Vanities

Floating vanities with open and closed storage are on trend now. According to Hardy, every room has a focal point – in the bathroom, that’s the vanity, “and they’re very

expensive,” says Hardy. Suggest that your clients repurpose a big-box piece by painting it and changing the hardware, or that they opt for vintage (that’s designer speak for “used”) furniture, such as a dresser that gets painted and covered in a marble top. “In a standard bathroom, you can make an old piece look new for \$600 to \$800,” Hardy says.

Bathroom sink

If a client is salivating about a green sink, you’re not having a flashback. “Avocado, yellow, orange, blue.... Colours are big in enamel sinks now,” says Hardy. And they’re being

paired with black or white enamel faucets. This is probably not destined to be a classic, but if your client is hell bent on installing one anyway, “make sure the rest of the room is monochromatic,” says Hardy. And remind them they’ll be shelling out for a new fixture in a year or so when this fad passes, as it should.

And pass this along to clients: “Vessel sinks will go out of style very soon – they’re not practical to clean or use, and they take up a lot of counter space,” says Cat Hackman, owner of Calgary-based design firm Room4Refinement. The under-mount oval or rectangle is a classic for a reason.

Hardware

Gold is back. “Not gold faucets, like in the ‘80s,” says North, “but gold-coloured accents on light fixtures, and deepened, darker brass is making its way back to hardware.” It’s Gramma-ish, so why the replay? “As people are choosing neutrals, they’re leaning toward browns, and gold adds a beautiful richness to that. It’s not contemporary, though.”

Kitchen cabinets

“Honey maple is out,” says Hardy. A classic kitchen is painted off-white, but a



The Big Chill family of appliances may look vintage, but it comes with modern functionality, efficiency, and dependability.

people that wood needs to be treated regularly and cleaned meticulously: if dinner used to run, fly, bray, or squawk, butcher it on a cutting board, not the counter.

Appliances

“Coloured appliances are fun, but clients have to be courageous to use them,” says Hardy. That ‘50s look is back again, but “because they’re an investment piece, I don’t generally recommend them.”

If stainless isn’t to your client’s taste, white is seeing a resurgence and you’ve got to think it’ll have more staying power than baby blue. Remind clients not to get blinded by pretty colours; the functionality of equipment takes precedence and there are more choices than ever.

“The next big thing is the steam oven, which at this point is only available from high-end manufacturers such as Miele,” says Hackman. “The health benefits of steaming and the speed of cooking are an attractive feature. In fact, people are turning away from microwaves because of health concerns [whether they’re valid or not].”

lighter “stained wood on a flat door is a modern, Scandinavian [meaning, plain] look.”

“Limed oak is an old-fashioned technique seeing a resurgence in furniture and cabinetry,” says North. “It’s a specific application for a specific client and a more traditional home.”

Counters

“It’s all about solid colours with very little movement –

patterns are out,” says Hardy. “The trend is quartz.” It’s the most durable stone surface, doesn’t absorb bacteria, and if it pits, “it’s easy to repair with a resin injection, the way a dentist fills a cavity,” she adds. Bonus: quartz is recycled material – and going green is a trend that’s here to stay.

“People are looking at tile again because it lasts forever,” says North. “A

good install makes a huge difference.” Reconstituted, crushed marble is also popular. “It has no grains, but has a white-stone look. The advantage is that it’s more solid than open, porous marble taken from the ground, and it will stain less,” she says.

For a less modern room, “wood countertops have made a comeback and can really warm up a kitchen,” says Hackman. Remind



Floors

"I recommend extending the wood floor all through the main level of a house, including the kitchen and powder room," says Hackman. "This gives the home a seamless

flow." Translation: it all looks the same. They should be neutral floors "that don't scream 'look at me!'" And while many homeowners jumped on the eco-friendly wood floor, "there have

been issues with bamboo [it buckles] in a dry climate such as Alberta. It's not as popular as it was," says Hackman.

Still, wood is a classic, but those thin oak strips

common in century homes aren't getting any love. "Planks are getting wider," says Hardy. Specifically: 4.25 inches or larger.

North prefers tile in the kitchen, though. "We're seeing a lot of porcelain in mixed, soft hues of grey and beige," she says. It's easy to care for and works with other colours, so if your client changes the wall colour later, they don't have to change the floor, too. "Grout lines are getting smaller. Like really small, even in floors," says North. An exception: "For a shower floor, you need something grippy. Texture and more-difficult-to-clean go hand-in-hand, but smaller tiles with thicker grout lines should still be the choice there."

Every fixture and feature in Toronto-based writer Jasmine Miller's home is retro-trendy. Or will be soon enough.

Photos by Johnny Lam

The Kitchen & Bath Collection

Here are *Renovation Contractor's* picks of the five funkiest fixtures for renovating the two busiest rooms in the house »



If you need to ask how much...

What do you order for the client who has it all? You could do worse than suggest they invest in Gaggenau appliances. Their “modular” refrigerators can be customized at the push of a button, their induction cooktop surfaces actually sense the diameter of pots and pans – heating only those areas and automatically shutting down when removed, and their dishwashers clean and dry a load in less than an hour.

Gaggenau.com



» MATERIAL MATTERS «

The future is now

Ever wished your life was a bit more like a sci-fi movie? You know, with a videophone in your pocket and music and lighting that followed you from room-to-room throughout the house? Already ticked off those two boxes? Then why not add a bathroom mirror that can give you traffic updates or display last night's sports highlights in HD while you shave? Posh View is a Calgary-based company that's developed WiFi-connected touchscreens, including household mirrors, that do just that.

PoshView.com

3.



Hands off

You would have to have your head buried in your work to not notice that hands-free faucets have migrated from public restrooms to private kitchens. With clients ranging from paranoid germaphobes to the elderly who can't operate manual fixtures, it's a pretty ingenious innovation. And the competition is booming, with numerous kitchen and bath models available from American Standard, Delta, Moen, and others.

2.



Inspecting things

Before renovating a home, it's worth taking a look down the drain

Cameras have become part of our daily lives. They are everywhere – security cameras, traffic cameras, dashboard cameras; they're even built into our phones and computers. And cameras have also become one of the most valuable tools in the plumbing business, designed to travel through pipes and identify damage and obstructions.

Prior to beginning any major renovation project, it's a good idea to recommend a video inspection of sewer lines and other piping to determine their condition. A high-resolution camera mounted onto the end of flexible rods can be snaked down drains to inspect for:

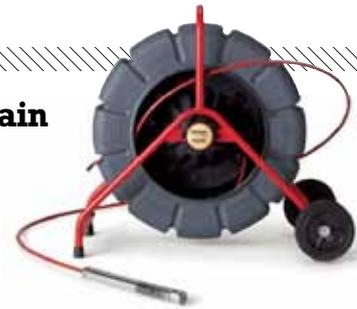
- Broken, cracked, corroded, or collapsed pipes requiring repair or replacement.
- Offset sewer pipes that have become misaligned due to shifting soil, frozen ground, settling, et cetera.
- Grease buildup or foreign objects that restrict proper flow and/or line cleaning.
- Sections of pipe that have sunk (or "bellied") due to ground or soil conditions, creating a valley that collects paper and waste.

- Seals between pipe joints that have failed, allowing water to escape into the area surrounding the pipe.
- Tree or shrub roots that have invaded the sewer line, preventing normal cleaning and/or have damaged the line.
- Off-grade pipes constructed of substandard material that may have deteriorated or corroded.

Too often we have seen sewers and drains back-up and flood new renovations or additions. *Renovation Contractor's* managing editor Allan Britnell knows this first-hand. Just weeks after laying a flagstone patio at the front of his house, he had to dig it up so plumbers could excavate a clogged trap.

Stan Collini is owner and operator of Roto-Rooter Plumbing, Drain, and Waterproofing, servicing the Toronto area.

Larry Rothman is director of engineering services at Roto-Rooter Services Company, headquartered in Cincinnati, Ohio.



» MATERIAL MATTERS «

4.



It's the little things that count

If you ever find yourself working on condos or converting basements into rental units and granny suites, you might want to recommend your client check out MicroFridge. As the name implies, it's a single-unit fridge, freezer, and microwave. But the really cool micro part is the power-management system that limits power draw to 11 amps, meaning the whole thing can plug into a single outlet.

MicroFridge.ca

This seat's the bomb

A potentially explosive bathroom situation

Regular readers will know that we usually compile our recall notices in a recurring Hot Off the Toolpress item we call "Recall Roundup." But this is one we just couldn't, ahem, sit on.



Health Canada and the U.S. Product Safety Commission have issued a recall for the Flushmate III pressure-assisted flushing system. A weak weld has led to pressure escaping and shattering tanks, with at least 14 people suffering laceration injuries.

Some 9,400 of the affected units were sold in Canada (two million-plus in the U.S.) at Home Depot, Lowe's, and to toilet manufacturers including American Standard, Crane, Eljer, and Kohler.



Vibrate your booty

Jacuzzi tubs are so '80s. This year, clients will want to dip into Kohler's VibrAcoustic tub. Once they connect their smartphone or MP3 player to the tub's audio system, they not only get surround-sound, but by playing off the beats, the "VibrAcoustic panels broadcast sound waves that travel through the water and gently resound in the body." Sounds relaxing to us.

Kohler.com

5.



Plumbers' Helper

Industry specific tools from Milwaukee

Milwaukee Tools is working hard at making a name for itself in the plumbing world. If you're working with copper or steel press fittings, you'll want to check out their ForceLogic press tool line that can make 40,000 crimps before servicing.

And all you guys getting your Uponor certified-installer certificates (see, "Get your working papers," page 16) will want to pick up the manual Propex tubing cutter and cordless installation tools, both developed with input from Uponor. The installation tools come with heads ranging from 1/2" to 1 1/2" that automatically rotate - saving you the hassle of having to twist the pipe with every expansion - and enable you to make connections in seconds. The power tools all operate on Milwaukee's M12 and M18 line of lithium-ion batteries. For more info, visit MilwaukeeTool.com



BY ALLAN BRITNELL, SCOTT COCKS, PAT O'REILLY, AND NATE SMITH

Testing Tile Saws

Our team of industry vets from Conestoga College compared three 10" wet saws in a head-to-head-to-head challenge. Here are the results »

Having the right tools at hand makes all the difference.

I recall trying to do a DIY kitchen reno at my first house on a tight budget. For the subway tile backsplash, I started off with a manual tile cutter and some hand-held nippers. I could hide the frayed

edges of snap-cut tiles at the end of each row with caulking, but trying to nip tiles to fit around electrical outlets just looked like crap. Eventually, I broke down and rented a decent tile saw to finish the job.

If you're cutting tile for a living – or at least part of your income – you

need a quality tile saw, a.k.a. a "wet saw," and for good reason. We put 10" models by Bosch, DeWalt, and Ridgid in the hands of three seasoned pros – Scott Cocks, Pat O'Reilly, and Nate Smith – who all worked as contractors prior to landing gigs teaching the trades

at Conestoga College in Waterloo, Ont. (See, "The Testing Team," at right.) They compared each for ease of set-up and use, quality and accuracy of cut, and the design of the water-delivery system. Here are their thoughts on how each performed.
—Allan Britnell

* The Testing Team



Nate Smith

Prior to joining the Conestoga College faculty, Nate Smith was a general contractor in Stratford, Ont. He got his start in high school as a labourer for a framing company. After earning a business degree from Lakehead University, he apprenticed with a custom homebuilder, then ran his own company, Nateve Design & Build, for 12 years.



Scott Cocks

Scott Cocks has 32 years in the trades under his toolbelt. Beginning as an apprentice in the lumber industry, he's worked in both residential and commercial construction (including work on the Royal Ontario Museum and Toronto's Pearson International Airport), with stints doing framing, formwork, interior finishes, siding, dock building, and as a site supervisor.



Pat O'Reilly

Pat O'Reilly started working in construction right out of high school, earning his carpentry license in 1981 from Mohawk College in Hamilton, Ont. His experience includes commercial, industrial, and residential carpentry. He has been a professor in carpentry trades and apprenticeship programs at Conestoga College for six years.



Conestoga College's School of Trade and Apprenticeship campus in Waterloo, Ont., offers programs in a variety of fields, including general construction, electrical, welding, and cabinetmaking. For more info on the school, visit ConestogaC.on.ca/trades.



Bosch TC10-07: The well-designed and easy-to-use accessories all lock to the table, the multiple-setting mitre gauge was the best of the three saws tested, and the GFCI built into the cord is a smart added touch.



Photos by Jay Parson

Bosch TC10-07

Bosch TC10-07

When cutting pricey tiles, accuracy is key. The smooth and accurate glide of this saw's rail/sled system earned top grades from all three testers. The large rubberized tray also really gripped the underside of the tiles.

That said, the blade that the saw shipped with left something to be desired, leaving some chipped edges. But it's very easy

to change blades on the Bosch saw and, with a quick upgrade, you get porcelain-smooth cuts every time.

The well-designed and easy-to-use accessories all lock to the table, the multiple-setting mitre gauge was the best of the three saws tested, and the GFCI built into the cord is a smart added touch. (The DeWalt saw also has a built-in GFCI.)

With the total package weighting in at 79 lbs, Pat

O'Reilly liked how easy this one was to set up and tear down. You can remove and clean the pans without having to disassemble the entire unit. There's also a wheeled stand available that would come in handy for carting it around.

The biggest drawback is that this model really lived up to its wet-saw name, with lots of spray coming back onto the user. "I call it the Maid of the Mist!" says Scott

Cocks. And Nate Smith says he "wished the pan were a little wider to catch more of the water running off the tiles and sled."



» TOOL TALK «



DeWalt D24000S: While most tile saws apply water to the blade somewhere hidden within the housing, this model has two water nozzles on either side of the blade. Both are adjustable, as is the water-flow itself, letting the user fine tune the spray.



Photos by Jay Parson

DeWalt D24000S

Our testers found that this saw took a bit longer to set up than the others, but

once up and running, Smith says “the saw cut beautifully with the blade provided.” Cocks agrees, saying, “I cannot say enough how impressed I was” by the quality of the cut.

While most tile saws apply water to the blade somewhere hidden within the housing, this model

has two water nozzles on either side of the blade. Both are adjustable, as is the water flow itself, letting the user fine tune the spray. And the wide drip pans did a good job catching most of the water.

At 69 lbs, this was the lightest of the lot, but it only comes with a fixed-base stand. (The Ridgid comes with a wheeled stand and Bosch has one available as an upgrade.)

The biggest problem here was that the tool sits right in the pan and you have to remove the saw to clean out the pan. On a big job, you could end up with some downtime disassembling the setup to clear out excess slurry.

The mitre gauge was also a bit of a letdown on this model. “It only gives you 45- and 90-degree options,” says O’Reilly. He much preferred the

multiple-settings on the gauge that comes with the Bosch saw.



» TOOL TALK «



Ridgid R4010: The Ridgid saw is the cheapest of the three, retailing exclusively at Home Depot for \$799.



Photos by Jay Parson

Ridgid R4010

“I have to take my hat off to Ridgid, they really put some thought and effort into this tool,” says Cocks.

The water delivery system in particular is what impressed all three. From the handy removable bucket and built-in nozzle to connect a garden hose directly to the unit, to the handy spray-nozzle attachment for cleaning the tool when you're done, this wet saw got the water system all right. Another

nice touch: the small ridge inside the pan that collects slurry and debris before the water recirculates.

The saw is securely mounted to the wheeled stand, which is easy to set up and break-down. Though at 125 lbs total weight for the combined unit, those wheels are almost a necessity.

The Ridgid saw is the cheapest of the three, retailing exclusively at Home Depot for \$799. (The other two saws each averaged

out at about \$1,200 in online comparison shopping conducted in October.)

As with Bosch, accessing the blade is a tool-free task. While Cocks tends to shy away from such bells-and-whistles, O'Reilly felt the built-in laser guide was a handy feature when the slurry of wet tile dust obscures your cut line.

But when it comes to cutting, the Ridgid fell behind the competition. The factory-supplied blade left jagged edges on the

cut tile. And even when used with an upgraded blade, the testers agreed that the sliding action of the sled had the most play of the three models.



*Best of the bunch

The real winner of this tool test would be a hybrid of all three saws:

one that combines the cut quality of the DeWalt, the smooth gliding sled and top-grade accessories of the Bosch, and the thoughtful design of the Ridgid water-delivery system.

In the end, it came down to a split decision with the testers leaning toward the DeWalt and Bosch tools. When pressed, the tie-breaking vote went to Bosch. After all, a little water never hurt anyone if it means you're getting the job done.



Good things in a small package

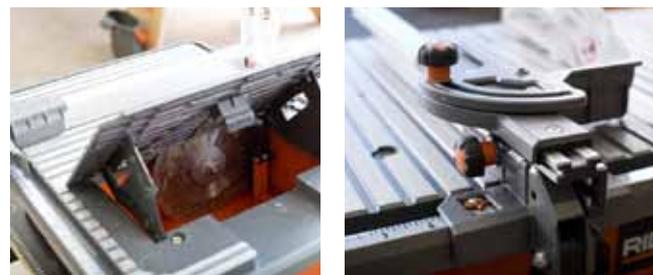
If you're cutting tile on a regular basis, you really need the power and precision of a 10" wet saw. But for

those of us who may only stumble across the odd powder room reno or backsplash patch job here and there, it's hard to justify the cost and space on the truck for a large saw and stand. Most of the smaller 7" saws on the market are designed for the DIY market. But when our team of testers at Conestoga College got their hands on the Ridgid 7" tabletop wet saw, they were impressed with some of the features that were packed into the 30-pound, \$200 piece of equipment.

While a customer might rightly be leery if they saw their high-end kitchen contractor pull this little unit off the truck, Scott Cocks says that "Ridgid may be onto something here. It does not take much to set up, it's easy to pick up and go, and with a better quality blade [than the one it ships with], this saw could do the trick" for occasional tile work.

Nate Smith points out a few nice features such as the clear plastic guard "that allows you to see the cut you're making and contains a lot of the water spray," and that the accessories clamp securely to the rail, helping keep your cuts on course. And with no obstructions on either side of the blade, you could cut tiles of virtually any width. (The 10" models each have a support arm to the left of the blade, restricting capacity to some degree.)

That said, you can't do plunge cuts for electrical boxes with a tabletop model like this, and the system for making bevel cuts - angling the table surface - isn't ideal.



Ridgid 7" Table Top Tile Saw: Allows for 12" diagonal cuts, 18" rip, and 1-1/4" max depth of cut and a 6.5-amp induction motor that powers through ceramic, porcelain, and stone tile.

Overall, this saw is in a different league than the 10" saws, but well worth a look for the price, particularly when you factor in Ridgid's lifetime warranty. **RC**

Photos by Jay Parson