

# Style file

## Tips from Toronto's top interior stylists



VICKY SANDERSON  
AROUND THE  
HOUSE

Ever feel a wistful pang that the rooms in your home don't look like those in décor magazines? Let it go, suggests designer/interior stylist Margot Austin [www.margotaustin.ca](http://www.margotaustin.ca), who explains that the magic made on the page takes a crack team poring over dozens of details for hours on end.

"We work very hard for a full work day — often longer — to get the shots," she says. "The photographer uses a mix of natural light and professional photo lights to get the lighting right. The stylist fine-tunes the decor: some items are removed, some moved, and some added. Pillows are fluffed, textiles are steamed, and flowers or greens are added."

"We can spend an hour tweaking the right amount of 'lived-in' lifestyle," says Tamara Robbins Griffith, who as PR and social media manager for HomeSense ([www.homesense.ca](http://www.homesense.ca)) oversees the brand's visual imagery.



Arren Williams: "I don't think anyone has ever gone to their grave wishing they'd been more conservative."



Hand painted terra cotta from Casa Cubista adds personality to any space.

There's a ton of work that happens before a picture gets snapped: measuring, sourcing, choosing colours and patterns, picking art and hauling shopping bags full of accessories — some fragile — that will all have to be returned to multiple retailers.

Arren Williams, designer and co-founder of Casa Cubista (in Canada through [www.saudadetoronto.com](http://www.saudadetoronto.com)), agrees with his peers that while it's hard to replicate a professional styling process, there are lots of tricks that are easy to steal.

His best tip for successfully recreating a look you like in a magazine is to resist "dulling it down" because it seems safer.

"It's a mistake. I don't think anyone has ever gone to their grave wishing they'd been more conservative. A great room demands some bold choices, and it should reflect the personality of the owner," he says.

To avoid static, showroom-like rooms, Austin shops vintage, calling it a "no-brainer way to get the best value and design integrity."

(It helps that her partner Kevin sells antique and vintage furniture, art and accessories through Vintage Fine Objects, [www.vintagefineobjects.com](http://www.vintagefineobjects.com)) "A thoroughly modern minimalist interior can come alive with a killer piece of vintage art glass, a single giant rustic bowl, or an exquisite Italian glass pendant light," she says.

Bold personal statements can also be made with colour, says Williams. The secret to not get hung up on everything matching.

"If the walls and sofa and accessories are all in the same shade, it will look flat. Bring the shade up a bit or down a bit or change from a flat wall to a velvet and add a high gloss accessory. That's when it gets interesting."

A similar effect can be achieved with "idiot proof" combos like black and white. "Think about all that Scandi and Nordic design — all white with hits of black," he says. "Not bold from a colour perspective but it really works and is very easy to pull together."

A good example are the highly graphic prints from Finnish design company Marimekko (through EQ3 [www.eq3.com](http://www.eq3.com)), which creates designs with strong curves and lines in cool, monochromatic patterns.

The trio also agrees on the importance of good lighting. "Often we settle for what



Not getting the same look you see in those home decor magazines? "Just let it go," says Margot Austin.

has been installed by a builder or previous homeowner," says Robbins Griffith. "But you can find beautiful statement pendants, it's pretty easy for an electrician to swap out fixtures, and it can really change the way a room looks through the style of the fixture and light output."

Books are another easy way to add interest in a room, she says. "I love styling with coffee table books because they double as decorative objects that are also entertaining to flip through."

Austin's pet peeve is empty bookshelves. "Bookshelves with no books make me sad. If you don't have books, tear the bookshelves down and hang interesting art. If you don't have art or books then there is no hope for your soul, let alone your décor," she says with a smile.

For bonus tips, go to [www.aroundthehouse.ca](http://www.aroundthehouse.ca)

— Vicky Sanderson is the editor of *Around the House* ([www.aroundthehouse.ca](http://www.aroundthehouse.ca)). Follow her on Instagram @athwithvicky, on Twitter @ATHwithVicky and on FB at [www.facebook.com/ATHWithVicky](http://www.facebook.com/ATHWithVicky).



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The right lighting hangs like jewelry.



Simple and striking Napoleonic Blue chalk paint with French Linen from Annie Sloan.

CHRISTOPHER DRAKE