

# STYLE at HOME

CANADA'S DECORATING MAGAZINE

get the **look** for less  
high style  
low budget

designers'  
challenge

bedrooms for under \$1,500

**furniture**  
save or splurge?

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accessories



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# special touches

WRITTEN BY MARTHA UNIACKE BREEN PHOTOGRAPHY BY DONNA GRIFFITH

save

IRON GARDEN GATE, \$160

In the hands of decorator Lara Neal, a mix of antiques, reworked finds and inexpensive pieces adds up to a look for less that's a success

urnished in an uncluttered mix of casual antiques, modern touches and a few real investments, the Toronto home of decorator Lara Neal and her family has a relaxed elegance that appears much more costly than it really is. But as you begin to look closer – or as Lara herself, with a conspiratorial grin, reveals her secrets – you realize that it's good taste and a good eye, rather than an excess of cash, that give the decor its luxe look.





save  
FLOOR LAMP, \$140

Imagination and creativity make the Neals' living room look much more luxe than it really is. A sleek modern floor lamp and curvy Louis XIV-style chairs (slipcovered in chartreuse quilted fabric) make a handsome pairing. A bit of restyling and ice blue and chocolate brown pillows rejuvenate the lived-in sofa. A rusted gate on the fireplace wall makes an artistic statement; the paintings over the mantel are by Ivo Stoyanov.





save

CHANDELIER SHADES AND RIBBON TRIM, \$78

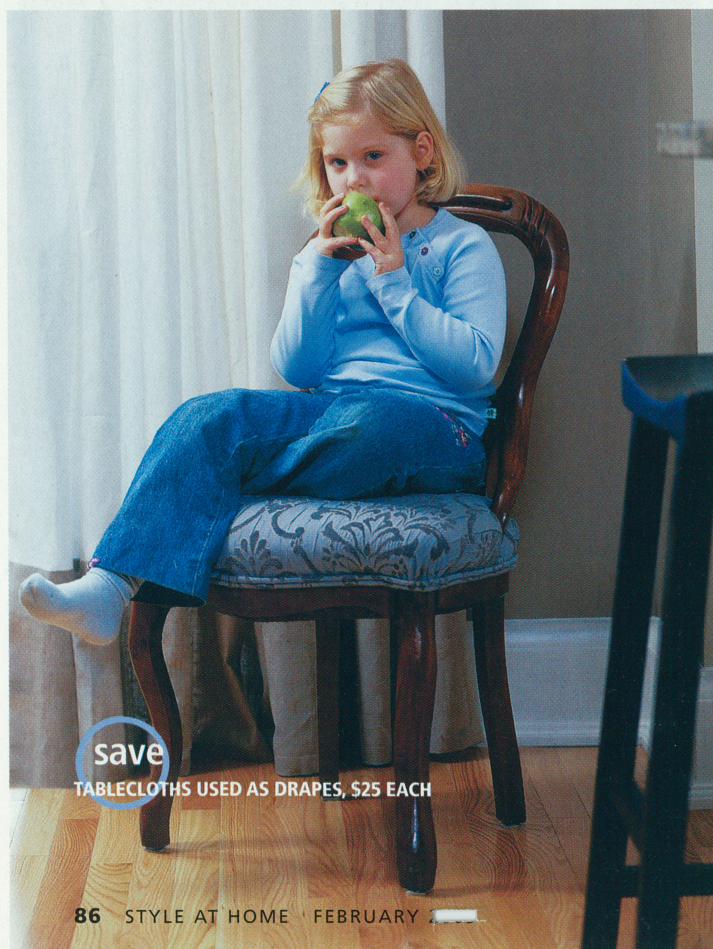
splurge

CONSOLE TABLE, FABRIC AND LABOUR, \$500



The Neals were able to concentrate on high-impact changes, such as opening up the main floor to light and views, and painting the entire house a calm taupe with crisp white trim. The neutral scheme visually enlarges the small space and creates a unified backdrop for a varied and unique collection of objects that ranges from the stellar (the Parsons chairs in the dining room, or the Louis XIV-style chairs in the living room, picked up for a steal when a movie-rental place went under) to the merely fabulous, like the rusted iron gate, leaning outside a funky shop on Toronto's Queen Street West and hauled home in the back of Lara's car.

Often, Lara will take an otherwise humble item and add her own touches to turn it into something special. One of the loveliest examples is the dining room chandelier – though it looks custom-made, it's actually off the shelf



save

TABLECLOTHS USED AS DRAPES, \$25 EACH





CABINETRY REFINISHING, \$1,500 TO \$2,000



To update the IKEA kitchen, installed by the previous owners, the Neals had the cupboards relacquered in a creamy white and added a generous island in a similar IKEA cabinet style, just in a different colour. The Tibetan-style stools are from Pottery Barn. Many of the most glamorous pieces in the dining room were crafted by Lara: the side mirror was built out of pine one-by-fours painted glossy black, and the unfinished console table below is from IKEA and is dressed up with a length of silk and trimmed in grosgrain ribbon from Mokuba. Rebecca, 4, relaxes on a beautiful old dining chair from Lara's husband's family. It was slipcovered in blue-grey damask chenille. The rich-looking draperies are actually a pair of linen IKEA tablecloths in contrasting colours.





from a lighting store and was given new ribbon-trimmed linen shades. And the Shaker-style headboard in the master bedroom is simply a junk shop five-panel door, trimmed with crown moulding and painted off-white.

The kitchen is a perfect example of how a few judicious details can have a powerful, transformative effect. The previous owner had installed an IKEA kitchen that Lara felt was functional but lacking in character. The Neals had the cabinets lacquered in elegant off-white, installed an island in a modern dark walnut, and splurged on granite countertops, elegant stainless-steel pulls and a frosted-glass mosaic backsplash, making the room's look seem far more expensive than it really is.

But what ultimately makes the decor most attractive really has nothing to do with how much or how little it cost; as Lara says, it's about the affection with which her home has been put together over the years. "Your home should be a reflection of who you are and how you've evolved," she says. "And this is who we are – everything in our home has a story and a memory." **WHERE TO FIND IT, PAGE 116**

## LOOKS FOR LESS

By taking on a number of surprisingly simple decorating tasks herself, Lara Neal turned many a junk shop (or ordinary department store) special into an elegant piece. Here are just a few of her secrets.

**Reuse, recycle, rejig.** The living room coffee table was a junk shop harvest table still wearing its old paint; spying its possibilities, Lara cut the legs down. **Add your own touch.** Sometimes, all an ordinary item needs is a coat of paint, new fabric or hardware to give it a fresh start. **Keep your eyes peeled.** This is as true at department stores as it is at flea markets and junk shops. If you have patience and a discerning design eye, everyday stores like IKEA, Winners and even supermarket chain Loblaws can offer great design bargains. **Don't be afraid to fake it.** Get the look of an expensive wool sisal rug by having a broadloom remnant trimmed in twill binding. For wonderful luxe-looking draperies, try IKEA tablecloths. **Fill in with the real thing.** Add a few expensive touches – remnants of high-end fabric made into pillow covers, granite countertops, one or two investment pieces.







save

DIY MEMORY BOARD, \$20

save

FRAMED KIDS' ART, \$10 FOR FRAME

Hannah, 6, relaxes on an antique found at a flea market in Penetanguishene, Ont. The other bed is a modern reproduction, painted white to match. The toile quilts were originally queen-size duvet covers from Pottery Barn that Lara cut down and resewed, while the pink striped blankets are from supermarket chain Loblaws. The wooden headboard in the master bedroom is an old door topped with Home Depot crown moulding and painted off-white. The rug is made from wool broadloom cut to size. Three-year-old Bridget gets a warm towel and a kiss from Mom after a bath. Despite its small size, the bathroom is light and uncluttered. White fixtures and cabinets, and warm tan walls and tile give it a restful feeling. On the wall outside the door hangs Tracy Kendall's silkscreen Airhead scroll.