

Handy guy offers some dandy tips

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BY DEE GIBNEY

“I’m just a handy guy with style,” says Peter Fallico, host of HGTV’s *Home to Go*, a show conceived around the idea of portability but avidly followed by probably far more condo owners than renters for its wealth of inexpensive DIY ideas.

At least that’s the sense that the affable Fallico has from the kind of feedback he gets from viewers.

“What we’re finding is that a lot of condo people have questions about tiny spaces like studios and open concept floor plans,” Fallico says. He also produces regular “make-over” columns for *Style at Home* and *House and Home* magazines.

The first space that young people move into, be it an apartment, or increasingly more common, a small condo that gives them a foothold on the market, is where the biggest decorating mistakes are made Fallico warns. He recommends thinking ahead over the next five to ten years during which time people may move three or four times as new jobs, relationships or family create life changes.

So to avoid those costly mistakes in your first home here are five recommendations from Fallico:

KEEP FURNISHINGS VERSATILE

The biggest mistake that people make, he says, is that they get too specific. They buy custom pieces or have drapes fitted to a specific set of windows.

Instead, let drapes puddle, he says. Or hang them really high so the length will be there if needed for a different set of windows down the road. Go wider than you need with lots of extra fabric that will allow for adaptability.

Tension bars, spring loaded in the centre to fit snugly within window frames are a good way to provide versatility. Create a pocket sleeve in the fabric and more gathering than you need so that in the future you will be able to expand by going a little looser with the ruching.

“It doesn’t make sense to blow \$15,000 on window treatments if you are going to be in place for only five years,” he says. “Custom drapes are not an investment where you will get your money back. People tend to go overboard, especially in 650 square foot condos.”

REPLACE HARDWARE

Replacing standard issue knobs and pulls on humdrum cupboards makes a huge difference for very little cost. And it’s far cheaper than replacing the cabinetry.

Home Depot, Rona, Canadian Tire and other companies have a wide range of hardware choices at reasonable prices. More upscale pieces can be found at Summerhill Hardware and Restoration Hardware. You might even consider hunting for vintage hardware pieces.

REPLACE FIXTURES

Nothing says cheap like plain old bathroom fixtures. You can replace kitchen and bathroom faucets for around \$300, Fallico says, and again, this will make a huge difference. So will new towel bars.

And why not hang a chandelier in the bathroom instead of the standard globe fixture? You can also upgrade a tired or cheap fixture such as a vanity strip with something far more interesting for around \$150 Fallico says, and the result can be dramatic.

CREATE A BACKSPLASH

Some condos do not provide kitchen sink backsplashes which may be considered an upgrade. Nor may you be enamoured with the choice the builder offers. If you live in an older rental there is probably no backsplash. So why not create your own.

For a one-of-a-kind personalized look, consider framing a series of favorite themed coasters, maybe collected from your travels. A montage created with a dozen individually framed coasters, say from various French bistros, makes an artful personalized statement – and is a great conversation piece as well.

In fact you can frame or shadow box almost anything, but make sure you begin with a theme. It could be vintage bar instruments, antique silverware or antique tiles such as the Delft Blue from Holland. Showcasing individual pieces as one whole this way gives them presence, Fallico says. Or you can paint. Many DIY home decor books offer step-by-step techniques such as creating checkerboard, striped or diamond patterns, or treatments such as Venetian plaster.

ROOM DIVIDERS

One quarter inch coroplast (which looks like translucent corrugated cardboard) is an inexpensive alternative to the sandblasted look found in more expensive condos. It comes in two-by-four and four-by-eight sheets and is available at art supply stores and some building supply centers. It makes a quick and easy high tech room divider. It's also cheap – about \$12 for the large panel – and also comes in a variety of colors. It's a great window treatment as it creates privacy yet still diffuses light.

It can be scored for cutting or drilled into easily and hung from the ceiling with invisible wire and “S” hooks. Panels can be interconnected with wire to form a longer sheet for higher ceilings. Smaller pieces can be cut to size to create sliding doors to close off a kitchen pass through as needed.

Watch for more DIY tips from Toronto designers and DIY experts in upcoming issues of Condo Living.