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makeover

CHANGING SPACE WITH IDEAS

Wabi sabi

The art of
imperfection

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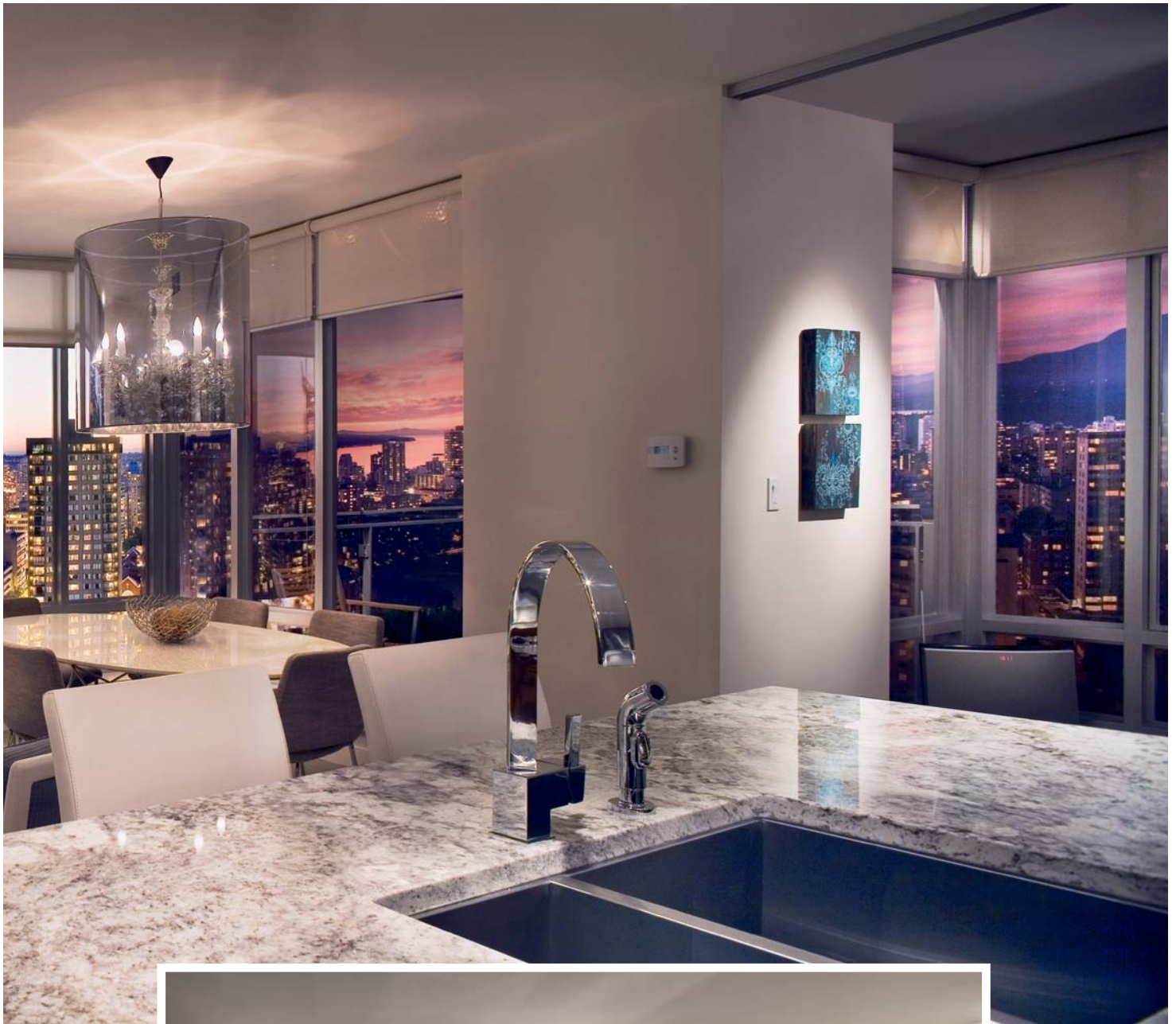
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Precise *imperfection*

*Wabi sabi is the new interior designer rage
– and ideally suited to home makeovers*



Juxtaposition of wood, metal and granite – seen in the Patina condominium show suite in downtown Vancouver – captures the Japanese wabi sabi aesthetic.

By Frank O'Brien

From million-dollar tower condominiums in downtown Vancouver to pampering resorts on the Pacific Rim, top interior designers and architects are redefining West Coast home design. As befits the multicultural mosaic of the most livable city on the planet, the best ideas appear lifted from contemporary Europe and ancient Asia. In all cases, the new homes provide a cue to those planning a large home makeover: what the ace design talent is choosing today likely will be the "it" look for a decade or more.

"The inspiration now is from Europe, especially Italy and Austria," said interior designer Scott Trepp, who was entrusted with the interiors for Concert Properties' signature Patina condominium tower on Burrard Street. The influence is seen in the use of large-format Italian tile that covers virtually all of the floor space in the open-plan suites; the wood panels that sheath the Liebherr refrigerator; and the gooseneck Architek faucets arcing out of the straight edge granite island.

Still, Trepp explains, the ancient Japanese design aesthetic known as wabi sabi also comes into play. Wabi sabi could



Large-format Italian tiles cover nearly all the floors at the Patina. Hardwood was dismissed as possibly dating the luxury homes, which complete in 2010.



ABOVE: Rolling glass doors invite the light and soften the sound at a Patina den concept: such space separation techniques are natural for many home makeovers.

RIGHT: Flexible rooms – a den, a workspace or a guest bedroom – can also be worked into home renovations to maximize the use of space. Note the built-in wall storage.



be defined as a pristine beach with a broken log; a lovely face with a subtle scar; or as author Leonard Koren explains, “the beauty of things imperfect, impermanent and incomplete.”

In the Patina, wabi sabi is translated in the contrast of timeless wood with polished granite, steel and white glass.

Of course, when we are talking about \$700-per-square-foot spaces, pragmatism is close to the surface. Hardwood floors were dismissed for the Patina largely because of their current popularity, and the downtown location. “The homes won’t complete until 2010 or 2011,” Trepp explained, suggesting that by then, hardwood may be so yesterday, at least at the high end of the market. The Italian tiles speak of timeless luxury and low maintenance, he said. Trepp believes they will be the prime downtown urban flooring choice in the future.

So may the thin-track, German-made sliding glass door that separates a potential work station from the rest of the condo living space. The glass provides sound resistance, but allows light and a



Show suite at the edgy Jacobsen in East Vancouver illustrates the tatami-room-style sliding glass door concept that allows the owner to open up (or close off) different rooms. Also note the no-island kitchen, high-end faucets and polished concrete floors. Architecture by Christopher Bozyk.

“Wabi sabi ... is the beauty of things imperfect, impermanent and incomplete. It is a beauty of things modest and humble.”

Leonard Koren, author of *Wabi Sabi for Artists, Designers, Poets & Philosophers*



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city view, an idea easily transportable to many home makeovers.

Eleven Eleven Architecture of Calgary also embraced wabi sabi and flexible wall forms in its first West Coast commission: the luxury Shores waterfront resort in Tofino. "We define wabi sabi as purposeful imperfection," said project architect and Eleven Eleven partner Walker McKinley.

The Shore has many ideas worth stealing. A louvered shoji screen offers privacy but allows light into the ensuite bathtub, for example, and the kitchen countertops are all limestone, rather than ubiquitous granite. Limestone is easier to repair than granite, McKinley explained, and he believes it provides an upscale cachet.

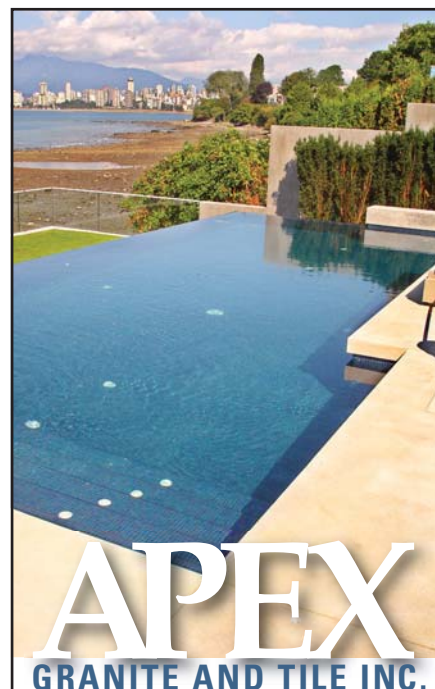
Back in Vancouver, the industrial-chic Jacobsen (the name comes from Arne Jacobsen, the Danish modernist architect and industrial designer) condo project in East Vancouver pushes some renovation design buttons. Its polished concrete floors could easily be duplicated in most basement makeovers, and the use of sliding glass doors shows a major trend may be opening. The functional one-wall kitchen is notable because of the lack of an island, which some new home designers now see as space greedy and superfluous. 

Moveable shoji screens are used to hide baths – and to separate home offices and living space – at the Shores condominiums in Tofino. "We define wabi sabi as purposeful imperfection," said project architect Walker McKinley.

Steal this idea

Top new home design trends to steal

- Large-format tile floors rather than hardwood
- Contrast materials and textures, with taste
- Spend big on kitchens and bathrooms
- Tuck large appliances behind wood panels
- Use sliding glass doors to separate rooms and extend light
- Use a consistent design theme throughout
- Rethink the kitchen island: ask if the space taken is worth it
- Smart-wire the makeover for future technology



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