

You've done the reno on yours; perhaps its time to give kitty an updated loo, too

It's as pretty as a hatbox, and comes in shiny bright colours such as red, black and butter yellow. Meet ModKat, a litterbox from a New York-based design company that's so cool you'll wish you had a cat. (No wonder it won Best Accessory at the 2009 ICFF.) Unlike traditional litterboxes, this one has a modern vibe that complements today's interiors, while the enclosed base and rooftop access

A ROOM OF ITS OWN

allow your cat the privacy needed to do his or her business. Every detail has been considered, from the non-skid feet that keeps ModKat put, to the locking rooftop that keeps nosy pets and curious kids at bay. An ergonomic scoop with incorporated brush stores neatly on the side

and the reusable litter liner is friendly to your wallet and to the environment. ModKat is US\$180 and ships to Canada through modkat.com. *National Post*



The dining room as event space

It should satisfy both the tummy and the eye

BY JANE MARSHALL

Eating can be more than just sustenance. It can be an art, an event, an ambient evening in a beautiful space. But not if your guests' chairs are banging the walls, elbows are bumping and a harsh light glares down from above.

The dining room sets the stage for memorable events. And with homes evolving in many directions, the dining room often doubles as an everyday eating area. So when designing this room, it pays to consider a menu of choices.

"The most important thing is that the room should reflect personality," says Colleen Law, sales manager at Cottswood Interiors in Edmonton. "There are so many options, but you must be true to your character. If you are a casual person, it's unlikely you will feel comfortable at a formal table."

When designing a dining space, pay attention to:

■ How many people the dining table should seat. What is the minimum and the maximum?

■ Will the dining room be only for special occasions, or also for every day?

■ Do you need storage for special collections or china and silverware?

■ How do you serve — from the kitchen, or buffet-style in the dining room?

"If people like to entertain often, they probably want a separate dining room," Ms. Law says.

There are many styles of tables, but Ms. Law sees most of her customers choosing wood tables that can expand with leaves, making it easy to add a few extra people to the guest list.

"One way to make a dining room unique is to have unusual hostess chairs at each end. This separates the table ends from the others and really punctuates the room. It is also a more formal design feature."

She also likes a circular table, though this requires either a larger room or a square room. "The beauty of the circular shape is that everyone is in the same position. It's great for conversation and makes things more even."

You can even get round tables with pie-shaped leaves to expand the table but maintain the circle.

"People tend to do something special in their dining rooms, even if they are typically 'beige' people," says Jason Morris, a design consultant at McElheran's Fine Furniture. "It's slightly disconnected from the rest of the home, so [they] can do something unique without causing discord."

He tells his clients to envision what kind of entertaining they want to do: more formal, intimate, sit-down dinners with low lighting or cheerful, buffet-style dinners where there's a lot of movement between rooms.

"Buffet-style serving requires more space, so people can move about to get their meals," he says.

"For more intimate entertaining, it's OK to have a bit less space, as only the host and hostess will be serving while guests remain seated."

Mr. Morris sees long rectangular tables as more formal, with squares and circles being casual. "The shape of the table affects conversation, and it tends to be more casual without a head of the table."

And don't forget about dressing the table and the room: have two extra chairs, and a buffet for extra storage; use dark luxe colours and dim lighting; add art, vases and sculptural pieces.

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BRETT GUNDLOCK / NATIONAL POST

Elaine Cecconi in the Nicholas sales office: "A Rat Pack meets Michael Bublé vibe."

SHADES OF MAD MEN

The Nicholas sales office riffs on a hot trend *By Olivia Stren*

If plotlines on AMC's megahit TV series *Mad Men* (martini-fuelled propositions, office seductions, corporate blackmail) are long on intrigue, the show's backdrop may well be nearly as seductive. Amy Wells' moody mid-century modern set — from the blade-grey chill of the Sterling Cooper advertising offices, dressed with abstract expressionist art and as many brandy snifters as typewriters, to the confession-teasing, tobacco-infused Manhattan bars — serves as another debauchery-ready character. Even the lighting on the show claims the naughty, tie-loosening hue of well-aged whisky. Toronto's Nicholas Residences, from Alit Development and Urban Capital and slated for completion in 2013, is cleverly cashing in on the *Mad Men* mystique; its highball-chic design, courtesy of top Canadian design shop Cecconi Simone, promises to make you want to don Betty Draper's red lipstick, acquire a cinched-waist dress and a smoking habit.

About her vision for the project, head designer Elaine Cecconi offers: "I wanted an *Ocean's Eleven*, Frank Sinatra and Jackie-O kind of style. But modern, too! A Rat Pack meets Michael Bublé vibe." And, by grace of Core Architects, Nicholas's exteriors also reflect this balance between the new and the nostalgic. Situated on Nicholas Street, the project will neighbour a string of heritage brick row-houses, and

Core resolved to preserve the façade of an adjacent 1880s planing mill and integrate it with the brand-new tower.

In welcome contrast to the excessively sleek, minimalist design du jour, Nicholas interiors will claim a warmer feel, with a layering of textures, tactile materials and a toasty palette (lots of copper and walnut). Nicholas's lobby, emanating a '60s' sex appeal, will be outfitted with square-patterned flagstone flooring, walnut panelling and a curvaceous couch, while a global light fixture will serve as the suave stand-in for the prosaic chandelier. Most important, the lobby will also abound in lounge-ready pods. "There will be lots of nooks for cocktailing," Ms. Ceccone says. "Yes, it's a verb!"

In clement weather, should you prefer to do your cocktailing en plein air, Nicholas will boast a south-facing terrace — landscaped with a two-sided fireplace, an infinity-edge reflecting pool (fashioned for its soothing sound — not for early-morning laps), a lilac-dressed trellis and cushy seating. The 255 suites, ranging in price from \$260,000 to more than \$1-million, also pay subtle homage to the '60s. Cozy, casserole-chic kitchens will have stone countertops and walnut veneer backsplashes will match framed wooden cabinetry styled to look more articulated than sleek. (In one such cookspot, you could imagine a be-aproned and ennuied Betty Draper blowing

smoke rings above an overcooked pot-roast.) Even black fridges will be accented with walnut-veneer frames. "There will be more of a furniture feeling than a kitchen feeling," Ms. Cecconi says. "It'll feel more like a woodshop made it, not a mill shop. More handcrafted and less fabricated." Wood even makes its way into the bathrooms, where sinks will be set against walnut-veneer panels.

But Ms. Cecconi is careful to point out that Nicholas will be more of a nod to the decade, not a simulation of it; the project, in other words, won't feel like a kitschy television set. Nicholas's Urban Capitol developer Mark Reeve agrees: "These will be comfortable homes. It won't be a movie set. It's not going to be Disneyland." Rather, Ms. Cecconi is striving to capture the ease of that time: "We have a yearning for a time that was simpler. And things did seem more innocent, then. There was a carefreeness, a breeziness to that era," she says. Whether or not the '60s was, in fact, a simpler, more desirable era is debatable. But that we need to believe it was a simpler time — that there was a simpler time — may be more to the point. What is inarguable about the decade is that it was terribly stylish.

"We've gotten away from formality and style. But in this project, we're harking back to a more elegant era," Ms. Cecconi says. Betty and Don Draper would surely drink to that.

National Post

CONDO CULTURE

Condo fees as costly as your mortgage?

Examine reserve fund study for adjustments

BY MARILYN LINCOLN

Q The board recently received our updated reserve fund study and we are not happy with the results. According to the study, our condo fees must be increased by 25%. Is there room for any adjustments to these studies? Before you know it, our condo fees will be the same price as our mortgage payments. We are almost at the point where we are terrified of the next study and may decide to skip it.

A Let me give you a first-hand answer. When I heard that reserve fund studies would become mandatory in May 2001, I thought it was a great idea. After all, our condo board had been completing these studies for more than 10 years. We felt we were ahead of the game. However, I didn't count on the future timeline of these studies and what type of additional components would be considered.

The engineers completed a professional reserve fund study of our complex in 2004. This resulted in a \$2.80 fee hike per unit. Not bad for a complex that completed their own studies for the previous 10 years. Fast-forward to 2007 and our condo fees had not yet increased substantially. However, the numbers in our updated reserve fund study cash flow tables had increased significantly. This was alarming and we decided to go through each common area component to see if there was room for adjustment.

We found the engineers had projected our windows to be replaced in 25 to 30 years. Our windows have a lifetime warranty and last 50 years or more. We also found items that would never need replacement in the year calculated. There was lots of room for change. We pointed this out to the engineers so our study could be adjusted.

We were very fortunate to be able to watch our condominium community being built in 1978, so we know exactly how long each component has lasted and the approximate year it will need replacement. Not everyone is as fortunate, but directors do have the opportunity to read their reserve fund study very carefully. One size does not fit all, and if you take the time to go through the study component by component, there could be room for legitimate adjustments.

Board members should also sift through contracts and receipts to see what year each component was replaced and how long the warranty lasts. For some components, you have to give or take a couple of years because warranties fall short. For instance, your shingles may have a 35-year warranty, but may only last 30 years due to weather or problems with workmanship.

A board should never skip a reserve fund study or an update. Who is going to care if you do? Prospective buyers will. When someone puts in an offer on a condo, their lawyer will request a status certificate. That must be accompanied by the most recent reserve fund study. It could hurt resale values if one has not been completed in several years. Directors could be sued for not following the Condominium Act of Ontario.

Instead of dreading the reserve fund study, do something about it. Learn how to read it, and I am sure you will find room for improvements.

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