



NATALIE DEANE
Condo Diaries

Appliances: Do your homework to reap the most value

My dishwasher is so loud that whenever it's on, it's hard to have a conversation. I have to turn the volume up on the TV, and if I'm on the phone I have to go into my bedroom and close the door — it's *LOUD!*

So as you can imagine, one of the things I'm really looking forward to with the redesign of my kitchen is the opportunity to update my appliances, especially my dishwasher.

Most people wait until their appliances are obsolete or breakdown before they replace them. Manufacturers are continually creating newer, more energy-efficient appliances that can save you money in the long run. As a rule of thumb, you should be looking at purchasing new appliances every 10 years.

If you are like me and on a tight budget, you don't want to spend your money just anywhere. You need to make wise decisions and do your

research to get the most value for your money. Here are some of the things I did before making my final decision.

Every year J.D. Power and Associates surveys experts and buyers to find the best stores and products on the market. According to their research for best pricing and value, Best Buy (bestbuy.ca) is the place to go, as they either match or beat other big stores. Best Buy also has one of the largest selections of manufacturers to choose from. All you have to do is decide what you actually need. Here are some points to keep in mind:

Ranges/Cooktops/Ovens

Power: Gas or Electric?

Know your needs: Do you bake a lot? Do you need a double oven?

Set a budget: Set your budget from the beginning. You don't want to fall in love with a \$10,000 range if it is not in your budget.

Variety: Do you want a separate cooktop and a wall mounted oven, or a range that includes both cooktop and oven in one?

Special features: Do you want induction heat? Convection oven? Warming drawer?

J.D. Power rating: Currently, Samsung ranks highest in performance reliability, features and price.

Refrigerator

What style: There are four styles of refrigerator, including traditional-style top mount with freezer on top and fridge on bottom; bottom mount with fridge on top and freezer drawer below; side-by-side design with freezer on one side and fridge on the other; and the popular French-door fridge with freezer drawer on bottom.

How big: Do you have a big family? Do you entertain a lot?

Special features: Do you need compartmental climate control? How about a built-in rack for chilling your favourite wine?

Energy-efficiency: Go green and save money on your energy bill.

J.D. Power rating: Samsung, Whirlpool and LG rank the highest when it comes to French-door styles, with Samsung performing best in style, appearance and features.

Dishwasher

Know your needs: Do you have large family that goes through tons of dishes? Do you eat out a lot?

Technology: Do you want a touch screen? Sensor wash? Do you want a waterfall clean?

Energy-efficiency: Look for the Energy Star rating. If you buy an energy-efficient washer you

can save hundreds of dollars over just a few years.

Once you have decided on your brand it's time to negotiate the price — yes, negotiate. Appliances are big-ticket items and there is always room for a discount. Here are my tips:

1. Check for promos. Check store websites for online specials. You can even go to a manufacturers website and see if they are offering any rebates or promotions.

2. Get a package deal. Maybe like me, your dishwasher has to be replaced immediately but you have a few more months left on your stove and fridge. Rather than wait, you may be able to save anywhere from \$100 to \$1,000 if you buy them all together.

3. Check for 'as-is'. Maybe there is a floor model with a few scratches or a dishwasher with a little ding in it. If it can save you money, does it really matter?

4. Pay Cash. This oldie-but-goodie form of payment can usually save you at least the taxes.

I've decided to go with a package deal from Best Buy with Samsung appliances. A self-cleaning convection range, French-door fridge and an Energy Star-rated dishwasher with six noise-reduction layers (that was a must!), all in stainless steel. Luckily, I took advantage of an additional 10% off the already sale priced collection by buying online. Win-win-win!

From red carpets to design inspirations, runways, and food and party trends, lifestyle expert Natalie Deane has shared her passion for more than 10 years. She offers tips and stories for living life to the fullest and achieving chic, everyday style through newspapers, television, magazines and new media. @natalie_deane

Exterior Lighting:

4 steps to make your home and landscape glow



KATE DAVIDSON
Inspired Living

Give your home the attention it deserves by illuminating its architectural features through elegant landscape lighting.

Well-executed exterior lighting will transform your home from run-of-the-mill to upscale elegance well-deserved of any estate. Exterior lighting will allow for a smooth transition between the indoors and out once the sun goes down, while making it welcoming and safe. Highlight the old oak tree in your front yard or your beautiful winding walkway to your front door. Just like your interior, you want to highlight your exterior with several layers and levels.

In the realm of home renovations, landscape lighting is one of the least disruptive projects to take on. Work with a professional to determine the best features of your home to highlight. Lighting can be as minimal and inexpensive as a few well-placed spotlights, or can get complex and expensive with designed installations.

Whether you choose to spend a lot or a little, the smallest bit of light can go a long

way in the dark. Ensure when you are selecting lights you work with a designer like myself or a reliable, knowledgeable lighting store, like one of my favourites, Royal Lighting in Toronto (royallighting.com), to ensure the results are functional and spectacular. Start with these five tips for superior exterior lighting:

1. Starting with your home's façade, soffit lighting works wonders to create a "wow" effect. Installing a few LED soffit pot lights across your home's front façade may be all that is required. Place them a foot or so from each corner and then every four- to six-inches across your exterior as needed. You want to create balance and feature your roof line and peaks. It is not necessary to add as many soffits on the sides of your home unless you have features to highlight; two or four pot lights in the corners may be all that you need.

2. Highlight your front door or vestibule with statement sconces and possibly a hanging pendant. The light fixtures you select for your home, whether they are minimal and modern or ornate and elaborate, tell a story

and define the style of your home.

3. For landscape lighting, strategically place a floodlight at the base of a cluster of trees to up-light the tree branches and cast a glorious shadow at night. Add spotlights in plant beds on a few key plants. If you have a water feature, fire feature or a rock sculpture, these are key items that you definitely need to highlight properly.

4. Highlighting your walkways and steps not only makes for a chic statement in your landscaping, but it also adds safety and works as a way to reach the door for visitors. Add LED strip lights in your plant beds or behind each step. Alternatively, when steps are being installed, we like to use LED inset step lights for a sleek, custom look for our clients.



Overall, the key to getting your exterior lighting right is to create a balance. Illuminate your home's façade with soffit lighting, highlight its entrance with sconces, feature the walkway and steps with LED strips or stair lights as a way-finding tool for visitors and finally, show off your beautiful landscaping by lighting trees, plants and rock or water features for interest.

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