

Make your best opening statement

Leave a good impression by sprucing up your front hall



Vicky Sanderson

Having worked on numerous HGTV design shows and steered a multidisciplinary firm handling projects from concept to build throughout Canada and the U.S. for more than a decade, Toronto-based designer Dvira Ovadia (dvira.com) has seen a lot of entranceways.

Most of them, she says, simply don't get the design respect they deserve.

"A front hall should make a statement for the rest of your home. But many people don't consider it important. They don't think about how it flows into the rest of the house or about the process of how it will come together," she says.

That, insists Ovadia, is a pity, since the entranceway is a homeowner's one and only chance to make a first impression.

A poorly planned front hall is more than just a decor misstep, she adds, because a well-designed foyer will maximize storage space, especially important in condos or narrow homes.

"A lot of homes I have worked on with builders are semi-detached, and are 15- to 18-feet wide. That can mean limited space for storage; but there are clever ways to go about it. If you can't afford to put in a 24-inch standard depth closet, use a 12-inch depth and instead of using hangers use hooks inside."

Even in spaces too small for a cabinet, a row of hooks on the wall can keep coats, jackets and purses organized. Hooks that will be visible, though, says Ovadia, need to be chosen with care.

"Don't just go to the big box store and pick up the \$2 hooks. If you only need four, it's not a big deal to spend \$15 each. They will be more interesting and all those little details become design components."

Defining the entryway with a carpet or runner, she says, "is a good way to add some pattern, colour and texture, especially in very open concept spaces."

In cramped entryways, every surface should be considered usable space, says Ovadia. "You need to look for every opportunity to make the most of storage."

A free-standing cabinet — perhaps a pretty antique or salvaged piece — is an essential element to an entry, she says. Equally important, she adds, is insisting that family members use it.

"A front hall needs to be maintained. You need to put things away. It's easy to throw your shoes on the front mat or a jacket on the sofa, but the entryway should not be a dumping ground."

To keep the space uncluttered, some items, such as shoes, demand closed space storage, she says. "People



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ple go to big box stores and they buy shoe racks and they put them in the front hall. But they're not meant to be (on display) in your front hall. That's a pet peeve of mine: nobody



A well-designed foyer will maximize storage space, says Ovadia, a designer based in Toronto.

wants to see 30 pairs of shoes, with different sizes, colours and, well, smells, especially if you have a small space or an open concept."

In homes with children, closed storage that goes right to the ceiling can help keep seasonal items out of sight without gobbling up space.

Keys, mail, cellphones and other paraphernalia commonly left near the front door can be hidden in a beautiful bowl or handsome carved box that can sit on a shelf or a skinny console table, suggests Ovadia.

A place to sit — even if it's just a tiny stool — should be incorporated into hallway design wherever possible, says Ovadia. "It's one of those practical elements that you can also use to make a decorative statement," she explains.

Good lighting is essential to a functional foyer, says Ovadia. "Those corners need proper lighting, which is another chance to add a bit of

personality. So choose sconces that will make it feel bright and clean, or maybe go with a chandelier if you want a sense of glamour."

Just because an entryway is small doesn't mean decor must be blandly homogenous, says Ovadia. She likes to mix "eclectic" pieces: perhaps an ornate scrolled-edged mirror with a modern, clean-lined console.

If the space lends itself, Ovadia likes to bring in an interesting paint colour or wallpaper. For paper, she tends toward stripes, but she also likes papers that have a washed feel or a modern take on a traditional trellis pattern.

"Doing something interesting that stands out a little has the same effect as putting a beautiful necklace on a simple black dress."

Every entryway, small or large, makes a statement about the taste, personality and lifestyle of its owner, says Ovadia. "You want it to say that the home is inviting and aesthetically pleasing. It's the very first way you welcome someone into your home, so it counts!"

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