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EIGHT TIPS for a front yard retreat

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This colourful outdoor oasis for the whole family was once a rundown eyesore. Check out designer Karen Sealy's eight tips for creating a front-of-the-house retreat to rival any backyard.

Apart from padding out to get the morning paper or let the dog do its business, people often don't spend much time on their front porches. If you ask Toronto-based designer Karen Sealy, that's a huge waste. "Canadian summers are always too short," says Karen, "so when the weather's warm, we ought to take advantage of every square inch of outdoor space."

1. SET THE TONE. "Decor starts well before you step through the front door," says Karen. "It begins on the sidewalk." The porch, what she calls a "half-way space," should give a taste of the interior - in this case, a bright and colourful family home. But it should also speak to its natural surroundings, hence the multitude of potted plants.

DESIGN, Sealy Design, sealydesigninc.com; **DOORS, WINDOWS,** Stone River Windows + Doors.

2. LEND A SENSE OF PRIVACY. A front porch can feel just as secluded as a backyard. Layers of lush greenery separate this little haven from the busy street beyond. "This kind of green 'fence' is a lovely way to cut down the noise in a manner that's cozy

for you and pretty for your neighbours," says Karen. The chunky spindles she chose for the railings (made to mimic the original juliet balcony above) also serve as a great privacy screen.

3. REFERENCE THE SURROUNDINGS IN YOUR DECOR CHOICES. The wicker furniture set echoes the home's white and butter yellow facade, and its lattice detail emulates the original stained glass windows. The connection between the indoors and out is heightened with accessories in green, purple and pink jewel tones - a palette from Mother Nature's handbook - and bold floral patterns.

ARMCHAIRS, OTTOMAN, The Muskoka Store; **SIDE TABLE,** IKEA; **TOSS CUSHIONS** (throughout), HomeSense.



4. DECORATE WITH FLOWERS FRESHLY PICKED FROM YOUR OWN GARDEN (WHERE ELSE?).

Windowsills, both interior and exterior, make for ideal display spots. Here, an array of blooms is showcased in a collection of glass vases, bottles and jars. "Half of them came from Value Village and some are old Mason jars," says Karen. Each vessel holds a different blossom, which amounts to a look that's charmingly eclectic, befitting the rustic setting.

5. MAKE A STRONG ENTRYWAY.

To create an entrance that beckons inward, Karen chose a classic black front door. “The dark shade grounds the light facade,” she says. Matching accessories, such as the pendant light, mailbox and tall planters overflowing with greenery, lend the desired gravitas. White cladding frames the doorway on one side to create the illusion that the entry is centred (it actually sits to the left from the viewpoint of the stairs).

MAILBOX, Upper Canada Specialty Hardware.

6. CREATE ZONES. A chalkboard easel can occupy little artists for hours. “With the kids busy, Mom and Dad can enjoy a glass of wine in the sitting area,” says the designer. Visual markers like the lattice partition wall, chunky corbel and border detailing on the herringbone brick floor are key for divvying up this small, high-traffic space. “Everything has its place, even a bike for shopping at the local market.”

Chalkboard **EASEL**, IKEA; small blue metal **BUCKET**, **WATERING CAN**, HomeSense.

7. ENHANCE THE MOOD WITH LIGHTING. Don’t let the setting sun mark the end of your evening – whether it’s a great friend or a good book that’s keeping you company. The sitting area gets a dose of ambiance from a rustic branch lantern. “Pop in a citronella candle like this one to ward off bugs,” says Karen, “or opt for a battery-powered LED version if you’re going to leave it unattended.”

Branch **LANTERN**, The Muskoka Store; white wooden **POT**, IKEA.



8. BRING THE (COMFORTS OF THE) INDOORS OUT. “The more comfy, cradling elements there are, the more likely we are to use a space,” says Karen, so don’t be afraid to incorporate items like toss cushions or throws. Corralled in a basket, they can be easily pulled under cover when it rains.

Wooden **BALCONY BOX**, **GLASS FLOATS**, The Muskoka Store; patchwork **RUG**, Modern Weave; **BASKET**, **THROW**, HomeSense.

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