



Photo by Chicory Wild Creative, courtesy of Topsy Farms

# CANADIAN COZINESS

*Warm up to winter by making the interiors of your home light and inviting*

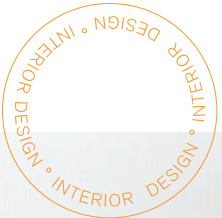
BY BARBARA MILNER

**MOST OF THE CUSTOMS**, symbols and rituals of this season are rooted in the winter solstice celebrations of ancient pagan cultures. The winter solstice, also known as Yule, signals a period of optimism. The shortest and darkest day of the year, typically December 21, simultaneously marks the rebirth of the sun, longer days and better weather for growing crops.

Today, we have largely lost this connection. Electric lighting and central heating buffer us against the changing seasons. The joy of dancing in the winter darkness has

been replaced with a melancholy mindset, and for many, an eagerness to escape from the season altogether.

To embrace “the most wonderful time of the year” is to go back to basics and celebrate elements of the natural world that are key to survival. Winter is a time when, like nature itself, we should stop, rest and look hopefully forward. In our homes, it is a time to be consciously cozy by celebrating the simplicity of elements such as fire, light and texture. Hibernate happily, practically, sustainably and stylishly with these Canadian-made winter essentials.



## KEEP THE EMBERS BURNING IN THE HEARTH

Winnipeg-based designer Thom Fougere returned home from work on a dark, frigid winter day and began his routine of decompressing by the warm crackling of his wood-burning fireplace. While working to keep the flames alive, Fougere came to realize that his fire tools lacked a certain sparkle factor.

That sparked his lengthy research process exploring fireplace tools of the past. “I began to realize that a lot of standard fire tools had not been addressed and updated in a modern way,” he says.



Photo by Juli Baker, Mjolk , courtesy of Thom Fougere Fire Tools



Photo by Thom Fougere , courtesy of Thom Fougere Fire Tools

Fougere’s Fire Tools are a modern interpretation of three essential fireside instruments: poker, shovel and brush. The fire tools come in two types of brass, raw brass and blackened brass. The raw brass darkens with use and the blackened brass starts to wear, allowing the gold tones of the natural metal to surface.

“The more they are used, the more they wear and improve. The patina adds character and beauty to the product. The tools look their worst when they are new and look their best when they are used,” says Fougere.

The handles are available in oak and walnut and all the materials are sourced in Canada.

Now in his 12th Winnipeg winter, Fougere has come to embrace the inevitability of the season. “I love winter. It’s unavoidable so I’ve consciously tried to appreciate it more,” he says. “I don’t have a fireplace anymore, which is unfortunate, so more candles are lit.” →



BANISH WINTER DARKNESS WITH SCENTED CANDLES

Hollow Tree founder Tobias Douglas was walking away from a 20-year career as a forester in British Columbia when she realized she could keep her cherished forest scents alive by launching Hollow Tree. It took Douglas three years to develop her line of scented candles, and no detail was overlooked.

Douglas perfected a sustainable coconut wax formula, ethically superior to formulas made from soy, which are heavily associated with deforestation. She sourced cotton wicks that produce a cleaner burn than the traditional lead wick. She worked with perfumers in France who produced 400 sample tree scents which she narrowed down to 15 for the Hollow Tree signature collection. During that time Douglas also perfected her packaging, developing a unique ceramic mason jar and adding such local details as a map of Whistler from 1928 to the inside of each candle box.

For Douglas, forests are libraries, and each Hollow Tree candle shares a story from that library. In fact, she shares the story of the scent on each box.

Hollow Tree’s The Lions is a bestseller year-round despite its balsam scent that is typically associated with the holiday season. Other scents range from Golden Spruce, a mix of wood-smoke and spruce, to the pine scent of Canoe and the smell of sandalwood in Lumberjack. A new holiday scent for 2020, Log & Hearth emits notes of balsam, clove and cedar.



Photos courtesy of Hollow Tree



Photos by Sarah Stevenson Photo, courtesy of The Muskoka Workshop



SPEND WARM TIME IN THE KITCHEN

The kitchen becomes the go-to warm place in the house during the winter, and having the right tools to cook a hearty meal is essential.

Ryan Fleming, a carpenter for 20 years, channels his passion for wood craftsmanship into creating handmade home decor and kitchenware items from his 16-foot-square workshop in Muskoka, Ontario. “It’s not very big but I feel that I can do much more in a small shop with hand tools than a bigger shop with electrical tools,” says Fleming, the owner of The Muskoka Workshop.

Fleming handcrafts wooden spoons, cutting boards, charcuterie boards, bowls, pizza peels and canoe paddles using walnut, ash, maple and cherry wood. All the wood is locally sourced, some of it directly from his 10-acre property.

“I put a lot of time and effort into different ways to do products and I think you really notice it,” he says. “I try to incorporate different species of woods.” Interesting textures include burl wood and spaltd maple. The grains are unusual, giving each handmade item a sculptural feel.

“All the products can be used daily in the kitchen or as decor pieces—or both,” Fleming says. “When someone sees my products in my house, it puts a smile on their face. It contributes to a sense of comfort.” →







Photos by edb team, courtesy of Element de Base

**WARM UP THE LIVING ROOM WITH FAUX-FUR SLIPCOVERS**

Comfort and sustainability are critical to Montreal-based furniture designers Element De Base. Thien Ta Trung and his sister My Ta Trung founded the company four years ago with the desire to provide stylish, “renewable” furniture to conscientious consumers. Key to their design is offering a wide range of textured slipcovers for their furniture

items. “Our pieces can be renewed. Your sofa is never over with us; you can buy a new cover and it really comes back to life as a new couch,” Thien Ta Trung says. “Because we’re in Canada, we felt comfortable introducing a faux-fur line of slipcovers. It really makes things feel extra cozy.”

The faux-fur slipcovers are available in brown, cream and a bold blue. Other wonderfully wintry textures for a seasonal

swap include velvet and boucle. The boucle collection is expanding this year to include new colourways using sustainable yarn fabric made from recycled bottles, harvested from the ocean.

“We want to be creative, keep people happy, have fun but without destroying the planet,” says Trung. “Boucle is so popular because it’s nubby. It’s like having a little lamb in the living room; it’s really comfortable.”



Photo by Chicory Wild Creative, courtesy of Topsy Farms



Photos by Leydon Photography , courtesy of Topsy Farms

Photo by Kira Duheau , courtesy of Topsy Farms



**CUDDLE UP UNDER A WARM, WOOL BLANKET**

Topsy Farms began as a hippie commune in the early 1970s on Amherst Island, Ontario. The first sheep were purchased in 1974, and today the farm continues to operate with its eco-ethical farming philosophy intact. “Topsy raises happy sheep,” says Jacob Murray, son of one of the original founders and now a key member of the Topsy team.

Central to the Topsy approach to farming is that sheep should live in freedom and spend most of their time outdoors. The ability to roam freely allows the sheep to adapt to the elements with their wool. “The harder the

winter, the better the wool. Wool is really a celebration of winter,” says Murray.

Most commercial wools are subject to sulfur baths that remove the lanolin out of the wool. Topsy sheep wool is washed with soap that preserves the natural oils, producing a soft wool fibre with a subtle organic scent.

“It’s a superior, softer wool and has a lovely fragrance to it” says Murray. “It’s not your grandma’s itchy wool blanket but can still be passed down as an heirloom.”

Topsy wool blankets are made in small runs and as a result, no two blankets are alike. The company’s new Live Edge Collection of blankets blends sheep wool with local alpaca

wool. Only 400 are made at a time and each blanket is numbered like an art print.

“A wool blanket is a winter staple,” says Murray. “It should look good, feel good and appeal to all your senses. Soft, not scratchy.”

And it should smell like piles of autumn leaves, the morning on the ski lift, the wind over the waves; it should smell like Canada at its best. 🍂

*Columnist Barbara Milner is an interior designer and principal at South Hill Interiors, a design firm that serves the Greater Toronto Area and Kawartha Lakes region. The firm’s real estate arm offers realty services with Forest Hill Real Estate Inc.*