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Sensibly
sumptuous

Heirlooms cozy up to modern
in condo model **8**

DECORATING: LOOKING GOOD, EH? Canadian designers share their northern view **5**

GARDENING: BORDER BLOOMS Mexican flowers spice up your yard **16**



STYLISH DREAMS: From Quebec's Baronet, the "Champagne 14 Ambiance" collection features a leather-covered headboard, solid maple hardwoods and matte stainless hardware. Queen bed \$2,431, night stand \$827, seven-drawer chest \$1,818. Nest Ltd., Austin.

Crossing borders

Canada's designers inspire fresh thinking on home furnishings

By **CARLA JORDAN**
Special Contributor

Oh, Cana-duh. We should have known. There's much more to our northern neighbor than hockey, maple leaves and Mounties who get their man.

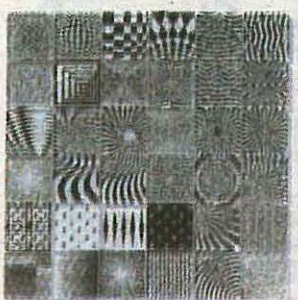
Across the border is a bubbling design incubator, positioning Canada as the next frontier for home. Channeling diversity as their muse, Canadian designers are creating spirited furnishings that are placing them in the forefront as never before. Canadian home furnishings are now available in the U.S., including a growing number of Texas retailers, and online to the world.

"Canada is a hotbed of design

right now, and its products are very appealing to consumers," says Candice Olson, one of Canada's leading interior designers and host of *Divine Design*, which airs on Canada's "W" network and HGTV in the U.S.

For much of the international retail community, Canada has evolved into a bridge between the U.S. and Europe. Nearly 320 international retail/service

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GLAZED LOOK: 2-by-2-inch glass tiles from Interstyle Ceramic & Glass Ltd. are \$7 each at Knottile, Dallas



NEW ANGLE: Martha Sturdy's "Zig-Zag"; from \$1,050, to the trade at Baker Knapp & Tubbs, Dallas

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CANDY BRIGHTS: From Vancouver's Martha Sturdy come resin vases and a tray; \$120-\$260, Baker Knapp & Tubbs, Forty Five Ten, Urban Flower. Bev Hisey's handmade wool-blend pillows are playfully modern; \$140 and up, www.bevhisey.com.

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chains operate there, many choosing Canada for its culturally diverse population that's receptive to international concepts and trends, writes Robert Boyle of Research Review, a Canadian retail trade industry report.

What's good for retailers is also good for Canadian designers who, by proximity, are privy to emerging trends. For American consumers, Canada is becoming the fastest path to hot European looks — just a hop across the border instead of half a world away.

"Canadian culture incorporates a lot of European and Western influences, and the mix of those really comes through in product that's designed there," says Pilar Hubbard, buyer for Forty Five Ten.

"Canadian designers create product with crisp lines, pristine and modern but with an Old World feel; a look that Americans like for their homes. Martha Sturdy products are a good example — they're contemporary but mix well with traditional decor; weighty and substantial-looking, yet airy because they're done in colors that are pure. It's a very artistic feel."

Trendy, urban feel

Despite Canada's vast size and wil-

derness regions, one-third of its population lives in three cities — Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver. More than half the population lives in the 10 largest cities, compared with 30 percent in the United States, according to a report by the International Conference of Shopping Centers.

The impact of urban life in design is most evident in Toronto, Canada's largest city (5 million-plus) and one of the fastest-growing in North America.

"Toronto is *the* place to be for home designers," says Wendy McIlquham, Norwalk Furniture director of brand development and a Toronto native. "It's the commercial center of Canada and has a large urban residential population. Toronto designers feed off the urban energy and constant exposure to lots of international trends, all of which is reflected in their work."

Norwalk is so bullish on Canadian design that later this month it will introduce a furniture collection by Toronto's Candice Olson at the International Home Furnishings Market in High Point, N.C.

Elements of style

NATURE AND THE ENVIRONMENT:

"This country has vast expanses of wilderness with a diverse landscape, abundant natural materials and a climate that



USE WISELY: The Non-Useless Furniture Studio's 61-inch-high accent storage piece; special order, \$4,700, www.nonuseless.com

affects both the practical and aesthetic side of design," says Ms. Olson. "Natural materials and textures such as stone, wood, leather and wool are elements we use to bring comfort to the severe, machined lines of contemporary design. Our climate also dictates many of our color choices with warmer earthy tones."

BRITISH WIT: Despite Canada's independent spirit, there is a nod to the mother country with designs that are oh-so-Brit. There's a bit of cheeky attitude with rug runners made of pierced leather; wool pillows with peek-a-boo die cuts; and vases and trays that sparkle like the crown jewels when made of richly colored cast resin. Like a throwback to the '60s, extreme fashion also pops up in op-art glass tile in black and white and in wacky furniture that's as relevant for a modern art gallery as a bedroom.

CLASSIC QUALITY: "Canadians are into producing timeless pieces with quality of design and materials," says Bev Hisey, Toronto designer. For example, Baronet, a Quebec furniture manufacturer, goes the extra mile by selecting wood and sawing it at its own mill to control quality from start to finish.

AFFORDABILITY: "Canadian-designed product, when it comes to price points, is totally giving the Euro a huge run for the money," adds Bev Hisey. "Under NAFTA (the North American Free Trade Agreement), any item produced in Canada using Canadian materials is duty- and tax-free when it goes to the States. Shipping charges are also far more manageable."

Carla Jordan is an Irving freelance writer.