



sarah richardson

Designer and TV personality Sarah Richardson offers advice on creating fabulous summer decor and outdoor style. By Kathleen Dore

Sarah Richardson is so Canadian. She's really nice, as well as talented and ambitious. The self-taught designer is host and producer of the popular *Design Inc.* (HGTV), a fun "day in the life of a design firm" reality-type show (designinc.ca). Now with a line of furniture (sarahrichardsondesign.com), Sarah brings her design sense to a wider audience, who love her soft contemporary style. Her casual look works as well in the city as it does in the country, where she's decorated cottages, farmhouses and cabins.

S@H: What's the difference between decorating a country versus a city home?

SR: Country for me is just fun. Every year the show does more sophisticated and streamlined homes in the city, but there's nothing we love more than rummaging through outdoor markets, junk stores and thrift shops because it's whimsical and fun. Country should never be serious or expensive. It's easygoing, breezy, laid back and casual, and for some reason country homes have this ability to tug at the heartstrings. Maybe it's nostalgia: by reminding you of a family getaway you once had or a great beach vacation, it allows you to go to a different place and dream.

S@H: How do you get that look?

SR: Try to avoid buying new stuff. If you want wicker, buy great antique wicker and put vintage fabric on it. Choose simple, inexpensive textiles like cotton and linen, then layer prints on top of one another. We'll use a whole collection of prints and mix a stripe, check, ticking stripe, herringbone and a couple of different solids and a floral – about 10 fabrics for any room scheme. We use at least six fabrics just for a pillowscape. A key element for me is antique quilts – I love them.

S@H: What about the furniture?

SR: Slipcovers. A country house might be closed

inside design

up for a portion of the year, so you never know what's going to happen. You can wash slipcovers – there's nothing easier to maintain. Plus, you can also get great pieces at garage sales or estate auctions. We picked up two wing chairs at auction for \$25 – they're so comfortable and have a great line – then we bought pure linen for \$10 a yard for slipcovers, and now the chairs look amazing (see photo, far right). It's about stretching the budget and being realistic and clever.

S@H: Is your decor different for summer?

SR: I don't do a huge change in schemes. I don't add slipcovers, but I go for a lighter palette. Come spring, I move toward pale blue and acid green tones and hits of pink; I change my accessories, and I may move the artwork around. In my house, the furniture is such a neutral backdrop that just by changing the accessories I get a different look. That's why the show's signature approach, no matter what style we're doing, is to choose light fabrics for the furniture, and then introduce colour through accent pillows, rugs and artwork for a bold statement. That also gives you longevity: you're not stuck with a scheme that never allows you to adapt or be inspired.

S@H: Do your rugs stay in summer?

SR: Some, yes. In a smaller space, I would take them up, but in my house, I've got so much natural light and floor space it doesn't really matter. The walls are cream and the furniture is oyster, so the decor has that light, breezy feel.

S@H: What about country style in the city?

SR: You can use all these elements we've discussed, but in the city I'd do old furniture but put



on slipcovers. Furniture can still be rustic, but just a little more polished. Mix textures together and stay away from anything that's too dressy. Try to avoid things like highly polished mahogany; you can have more streamlined furniture, but go with solid woods with an oiled finish.

S@H: Any ideas for colour and country style?

SR: With country style, people are often tempted to put a lot of different colours together, but we usually simplify the palette in a single room; for instance, green and white, or pink and lavender. If you collect ceramics, like Hagerware or McCoy, choose one colour scheme; if it's green, choose different shades of green. That keeps it from looking like a hand-me-down garage sale. Even with something whimsical, it's important to edit. ■



OUTDOOR STYLE

Designer Sarah Richardson's easy tips for beautiful living outdoors.

Go low maintenance. "Don't be a slave to maintaining decorative elements," says Sarah. **Create impact with large-scale container plantings.** Focus on low-maintenance plant material that suits your space. Go for big visual hits, especially on a terrace or small patio: choose oversize pots rather than combos of little pots. **Buy all-season furniture.** "All-weather wicker is ingenious," Sarah says. "And I love powder-coated steel furniture, too." **Introduce a loungelike feel.** Pick comfy pieces like an outdoor three-seater sofa. **Don't overlook good lighting.** Lighting trees and the perimeter helps visually expand an outdoor space. Candles are nice but can be impractical. Look for new table lamps and chandeliers designed to stay outside (use a dimmer). Big gas torches are also beautiful. **Decorate with outdoor fabric.** "I'd use a solid-colour fabric and let the plantings and the character of everything else give the space the zing," says Sarah.