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*surround yourself with things you love*

Adene Lucas of Calgary, owner of Accent on Design, couldn't agree more. Her clients — who range from young, first-time owners to empty nest, boomer types — like “transitional” styles, which mix traditional with contemporary approaches. Blending classic pieces and neutral palettes (sage greens, creams and light greys are replacing beiges) with more modern textures (dark cabinets with a glass backsplash, for example, or an heirloom banquette alongside a funky director's chair) will result in a perfectly balanced look of creative edge and symmetry.

It won't be like your grandmother's place, nor will it feel cold or industrial. It will be about great design, which incorporates comfort, function and durability.

Forget about going to a big-box store and buying a matching sofa and chairs, advises Lucas. Instead, take a look at furnishings manufactured for condos. In your smaller unit, you will want pieces which are tailored for a more contained space.

Consider spending your money on permanent fixtures like countertops and cabinets, then fine-tune with upgrades, such as dimmer lighting or brushed nickel faucets, says Lucas. Pick and choose a few pieces rather than going full bore; if you overdo it, you'll risk “looking like a woman who is too made up.”

Don't feel like you must have all the answers before you move in. Get the basics in order, then live in your space for a while. See how you function and what your needs are. Think vertical. If you have a low-profile stereo unit, place floor-to-ceiling bookshelves on both sides.

Use floating shelves, which can store fancy soaps in the bathroom or a well-loved book collection in the office, without sacrificing crucial space. **CX**