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FIRST FURNITURE

A guide to buying your first dining table

Designer Aly Velji shares tips on how to choose a piece that will make you and your guests happy

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I've moved to a different Toronto apartment four times in the past five years, and each time, as the space got smaller, having a dining table felt more irrelevant. It's a common feeling, apparently, with research showing that fewer of us are gathering around the dinner table at mealtimes. I don't currently own a table, but as we enter holiday party season, I'm rethinking my couch meals.

To find out how to make the right investment, I spoke with Aly Velji, principal designer at Alykhan Velji, a full-service interior-design firm based in Calgary.

HOW DO I CHOOSE THE RIGHT SIZE TABLE? "The last thing you want is for it to be too big," says Velji. "We often have to tell clients: We're not magicians, we can't create

more space. It is always good to have a minimum of 30"-36" from the wall to the table to ensure there is ample room to walk around when chairs are pulled out. Otherwise, it is super awkward when you have guests and they're hitting the wall because there's not enough room. It ruins the experience."

WHAT IF I HAVE A SMALL SPACE? "Round tables are great in small spaces, and glass tabletops will not take up a lot of visual room. It could be grey glass, frosted, anything that reflects a lot of light. You can get away with doing something more unique in small spaces, so a beautiful sculptural base will stand out," says Velji. A unique structural base can mean a single pedestal or cylindrical column, geometrically shaped or angled legs, or a trestle at each end.

Here are Velji's picks for three price points

Prices do not include delivery costs.



THE BARGAIN
Odense, \$599 for 6.6'X3.2',
Structube (structube.com)
Seats: up to 10 people

"I love the warm wood of the sculptural table base and its midcentury-inspired look," says Velji. "The glass top and oval shape is perfect for small spaces, creating ease of traffic flow. I would love to see this table paired with chairs that have a gorgeous pop of colour for interest."



BEST BANG FOR YOUR BUCK
London, \$1,699 for 6.6'X3.2',
Urban Barn (urbanbarn.com)
Seats: up to six people

"The monolithic angled table base gives this dining table a great presence," says Velji. "The lighter wood tone gives it a gorgeous modern feel. Pairing with upholstered dining chairs could add some softness."



THE SPLURGE
Providence Round Black Ebonized Oak
Wood, \$1,999 for 5'X5', CB2, (cb2.ca)
Seats: up to six people

"This table is a mix of styles, traditional and modern," says Velji. "With its fluted edging detail, dark stained finish and tapered leg this table would be perfect paired with a sleek modern chair to create even more of a juxtaposition in its look."

London calling

At the city's annual design festival, Odessa Paloma Parker discovers work that shows how sustainability is influencing our living spaces

An ever-crackling hub of creativity and innovation, London recently played host to hundreds of local and international exhibitors as part of the London Design Festival. Vast in size (programming stretched from Tottenham in the north to Brixton in the south and included districts from Chelsea to Shoreditch) as well as scope, the festival, which ran from Sept. 16-24, offered an extraordinary array of clever concepts including products and spaces that highlighted sustainability measures and new takes on traditional techniques.

The festival kicked off with an awards ceremony. Among the four recipients was the ceramic artist Dame Magdalene Odundo, who will be the subject of a solo exhibition – her first in Canada – opening Oct. 19 at Toronto's Gardiner Museum. She received the festival's Lifetime Achievement Medal for her oeuvre, elements of which will be on show in Magdalene Odundo: A Dialogue with Objects.

While there was reverence paid to design icons such as Eileen Gray and Charlotte Perriand (their practices were highlighted in new rug collections with Aram and CC Tapis, respectively), there was also ample opportunity for emerging creatives and companies to showcase modern ingenuity.

BRIGHT IDEAS

The unofficial theme of LDF seemed to be "let there be light." Silvera, a decor boutique located in the borough of Chelsea, showcased the new Pale Rose collection from Louis Poulsen comprised of sultry iterations of the brand's coveted styles that resemble the delicate petals of a romantic bloom. In tony Marylebone, Mud Australia – which opened an outpost there in late summer – introduced its porcelain lighting collaboration between founder and designer Shelley Simpson and Zachary Hanna, who was named to the Australia Design Review's 30 Under 30 list last year. One of Mud Australia's new styles, the Pop Lamp, is easily transportable, which was a buzzy concept throughout the festival. British design luminary Tom Dixon also celebrated the introduction of a series of luxe hand-held battery-operated lighting called the Portables.



ANNIVERSARY DATES

To fete 40 years of her eponymous brand, American designer Holly Hunt revealed a selection of new decor items at her showroom in Mayfair. Also on site were Christian and Heidi Batteau, co-founders of Assemblage, an Arkansas-based studio known for its sumptuous hand-made wall coverings. In Shoreditch, whimsical Scottish creative Donna Wilson celebrated her eponymous label's 20th year with the launch of a made-to-order knit and felt wall hangings collection. The brand's festival pop-up displayed a selection of styles recently added to Wilson's Abstract Assembly furniture line.

HEAR AND NOW

Unstruck Melody, a collaborative installation between Toronto-based artist Nirbhai (Nep) Singh Sidhu and the U.K. arts organization Without Shape Without Form, is a pensive and profound combination of sound, sculpture, tapestry and film. The grouping of works, on view at the Victoria and Albert Museum's South Kensington location until Oct. 15, reveals Sikh teachings about community-mindedness and self-discovery in the context of sumptuous visual and aural output. The installation's LDF programming included a listening session that intertwined live music and Simran, the spiritual practice of centring the mind through deep listening and focused repetition.

TOP SHOPS

Award-winning designer Bryan O'Sullivan opened the door to a new gallery next to the famed Claridge's hotel, and you can imagine what kind of opulent fare is found within. Boasting a celestial custom-made ceiling mural by the artist Sam Wood, the cozy address features an array of lavish goods including the studio's plush Croissant sofa and the juicy-hued Jellyfish mirror, so named for its quirky ruffled silhouette. The House by M.A.H, an evolving concept showroom launched by local interior stylist Laura Fulmine, displayed a wealth of considered objects from a set of

SHOULD I BUY A DINING TABLE SET? "I would suggest never to buy matching sets. Although it is easier to do that at big-box stores, it makes a space feel more curated to buy a table and chairs separately, and can be less expensive since it leaves room for you to maybe find vintage chairs that work with a dining table you have."

WHAT SHOULD I LOOK FOR IN DINING CHAIRS? "If you're eating at it every day, you want it not only to look good, but to be comfortable. But if not, maybe you don't have to worry about comfort in chairs," says Velji. "I'm not a big fan of benches. People think they're good because you can tuck them in, but they make it very awkward and uncomfortable to get up."

WHAT MATERIAL IS BEST? "The quality of wood, glass or marble top, all of these elements go into play on what something will cost you," says Velji. "Solid wood tables are the way to go, and find something sturdy. If its a little shaky or has thinner legs, you should not even consider it as it may not last you even a year."

WHERE SHOULD I SHOP? "EQ3, CB2 and West Elm are good starting points, but you don't have to buy new. On Facebook Marketplace or at secondhand stores you might find them for as low as \$500 and that leaves you room to splurge on chairs."

Style file

This weekend's notes from the lifestyle desk

BY GLOBE STAFF



ON THE ROAD WITH FIRST-CLASS EATS

If you're a die-hard foodie, a car lover and a fan of five-star hotels, you will want to secure one of 32 spots now available for a culinary travel experience that seems almost too good to be true. On Friday, the car-sharing company Turo launched Drive to Table, a partnership with Michelin Guide that offers, on a first-come, first-served basis, dinner for two at a Michelin star restaurant, a fancy car to get there, and luxury accommodation for a night. Here's the hard-to-believe part, all-in, it costs \$250. The participating Michelin-star eateries are Osteria Giulia and Quetzal in Toronto; and Kissa Tanto and St. Lawrence in Vancouver. The luxury vehicles, hand-picked by the restaurant's chefs, are various models of Mercedes, Porsche and Audi. And the participating hotels are the Hazelton Hotel in Yorkville and Vancouver's Fairmont Pacific Rim. They also provide a chef-inspired driving itinerary for the day with their favourite things to do in their respective cities (including tickets to attractions). For more information about the package, available until Dec. 16, go to turo.ca or the Turo app.



CELEBRATING 50 YEARS

If it's been a while since you've taken in a performance at the Sydney Opera House, it's time to consider another trip Down Under. The distinctive tile-clad shell exterior wowed the city when it first opened in 1973, and it is still considered one of the most important architectural buildings of the 20th century. This month it's celebrating 50 years and pulling out all the stops with a weekend of free concerts and events Oct. 21-22, with impromptu performances by Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Bell Shakespeare theatre company, Bangarra Dance Theatre and more. A complete redesign in fall 2022 made the concert hall more accessible and fixed wonky acoustics which often plagued audience sitting in the upper reaches of the house. Visitors can take advantage of the city's high-end hotel boom as several new properties have opened this year, including W Sydney, Hotel Morris and the Capella, all walking distance from the Opera House.



NO SOIL, NO WATER – NO PROBLEM

For those with busy schedules seeking a fun way to eat more fresh greens, a Canadian startup has a new solution to grow herbs and produce indoors without soil, regular watering or upkeep – it all grows with fog. Plantaform harnessed an approach first used by NASA, to create an indoor gardening system that uses "fogponics," a subset of aeroponics that uses ultrasonic atomizers to break down the water into a fine mist, using 98 per cent less water than conventional systems. CEO Alberto Aguilar told The Globe. Researched and developed in collaboration with the National Research Council of Canada, the egg-shaped Rejuvenate can grow up to 15 plants with refills of water and nutrients every two to three weeks. The first units, priced at \$799.99 at plantaform.com, are now being used in homes, businesses and restaurants across the country.



Left: Winnipeg-based Lia Karras presented examples of her weaving techniques using material off-cuts and fibre remnants. Above: Tom Dixon's hand-held battery-operated lighting, the Portables.

vintage hand-blown Murano wall lights to delicate ceramic urns by Giuseppe Parnello and home accessories by Toronto-based industrial designer Maha Alavi.

MATERIAL GAINS

The most predominant philosophical thread running between exhibitors at LDF was the navigation of sustainable design with regards to materials. There was a multistorey exhibition called Material Matters at the Bargehouse building on the south bank of the Thames, which included Jack Brandsma's assortment of designs made with hemp fibres, magnesium oxychloride (a.k.a. soral cement) and potato starch – part of a project called Material Magic. Mycelium, the root structure of fungi, had a significant presence including in MushLume's pendant lights and furniture by Osmose Studio. Jasper Morrison Studio presented an array of bamboo items, as well as a new wine cooler made from cork. The buoyant, recyclable material also popped up in a vibrant installation by Simone Brewster, which was commissioned for this year's LDF.

CREATIVE FIBRE

Winnipeg-based textile artist Lia Karras presented examples of her wondrous weaving techniques using material off-cuts and fibre remnants. "Being in London for the London Design Festival and showing my work at the London Design Fair was an amazing experience," Karras says about participating in the London Design Fair – a three-day event included in the festival's programming – for the first time. "The city was full of designers and artists all sharing their work and exchanging ideas. The design world seems to be in a moment of transition as we all grapple with the current social, environmental and economic issues. It was encouraging and inspiring to see so much optimism, ingenuity and creativity in one place."

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