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HOMES YOU FEEL:

## WHY SENSORY DESIGN IS HAVING A MOMENT

Designing a home has never been just about how it photographs. The most memorable spaces—the ones you want to linger in—are experienced with the whole body. They invite touch, soften sound, temper light, and move with you throughout the day. Lately, I've noticed a quiet but meaningful shift in how clients talk about their homes. They're less concerned with what's "on trend" and more focused on how a space makes them feel. Joyful living, by design, is having a moment—and it's rooted in the senses.

Sensory-led design asks us to slow down

and pay attention. What does the floor feel like under bare feet throughout the winter? How does light move across the room? Is the space calm when the house is full, or does sound bounce and echo? These questions shape homes that feel instinctive rather than imposed — balanced, intuitive, and deeply personal.

In my own practice as a designer, I've learned that comfort often comes from restraint. Natural materials do much of the heavy lifting. For example, wood with visible grain, stone that hasn't been over-polished, textiles that invite touch.

These elements ground a space and create warmth without excess. When a client runs their hand along a honed stone countertop or leans into a softly upholstered banquette, the reaction is immediate. They relax. The house begins to feel like home.

Light is another quiet but powerful player. In Canada, where seasonal light changes dramatically, how we filter and layer it matters. I like to soften overhead lighting and rely more heavily on wall washers, lamps, and reflected glow. Sheer drapery, even in modern spaces, diffuses daylight

*Continued on page 28*

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beautifully and brings a sense of movement as it responds to air and time of day.

Sound is just as important. Hard surfaces can be stunning, but without balance, they create harsh acoustics. Thoughtful layering of area rugs, upholstered furniture and window treatments absorbs noise and makes conversations feel intimate rather than sharp. I've worked on open-concept homes where a



single oversized rug transformed the room's look as well as its mood. And suddenly, people stayed longer at the table.

One of the most intimate sensory experiences in a home is hardware. We touch it every day, often without thinking about it. Knurled handles and ribbed pulls introduce subtle grip and rhythm, turning a functional moment into something tactile and satisfying. Several Canadian brands, including VOGT, have been exploring this beautifully in recent years. Their use of warm finishes, pastel soft colours and softly shaped handle detailing brings warmth to kitchens and especially bathroom spaces that can sometimes feel clinical.

On Trend: Tactile Stone

Stone trends are moving away from high polish and toward honed, leathered, and softly brushed finishes. These surfaces feel warmer and more organic, and they age gracefully. Texture adds depth without visual noise.

I've also been drawn to materials that carry a sense of quiet imperfection. Laminam, an Italian manufacturer known for large-format porcelain slabs, has introduced finishes that feel



worn, textured, and almost geological. Raised surfaces and subtle irregularities catch light differently throughout the day. Used on a vanity, wall, or fireplace surround, they bring a tactile richness that feels both contemporary and timeless. Because they're made from natural materials and designed for durability, they align beautifully with a more sustainable approach to luxury.

The key, as always, is balance. A home shouldn't overwhelm the senses; it should guide them. Pair smooth with textured, warm with cool. Let stone sit beside wood, metal soften fabric, and matte finishes play against gentle sheen.

**Pro Tip: Layered Touchpoints**

Successful sensory design comes from layering tactile moments, so no single surface feels flat. The goal is quiet contrast

between stone, metal, wood and fabric, not competition.

Some of my favourite projects are the ones where clients tell me the house "just works." Their hand naturally reaches for a surface that feels right. The kitchen is calm, even when it's busy. The bedroom encourages rest without trying too hard. That instinctive quality is hard to fake, but easy to feel.

When a home is designed through the senses, it invites you to slow down. It supports daily rituals—morning coffee, evening baths —while quietly elevating them. In a world that constantly demands our attention, there's something deeply luxurious about a space that gives it back.

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