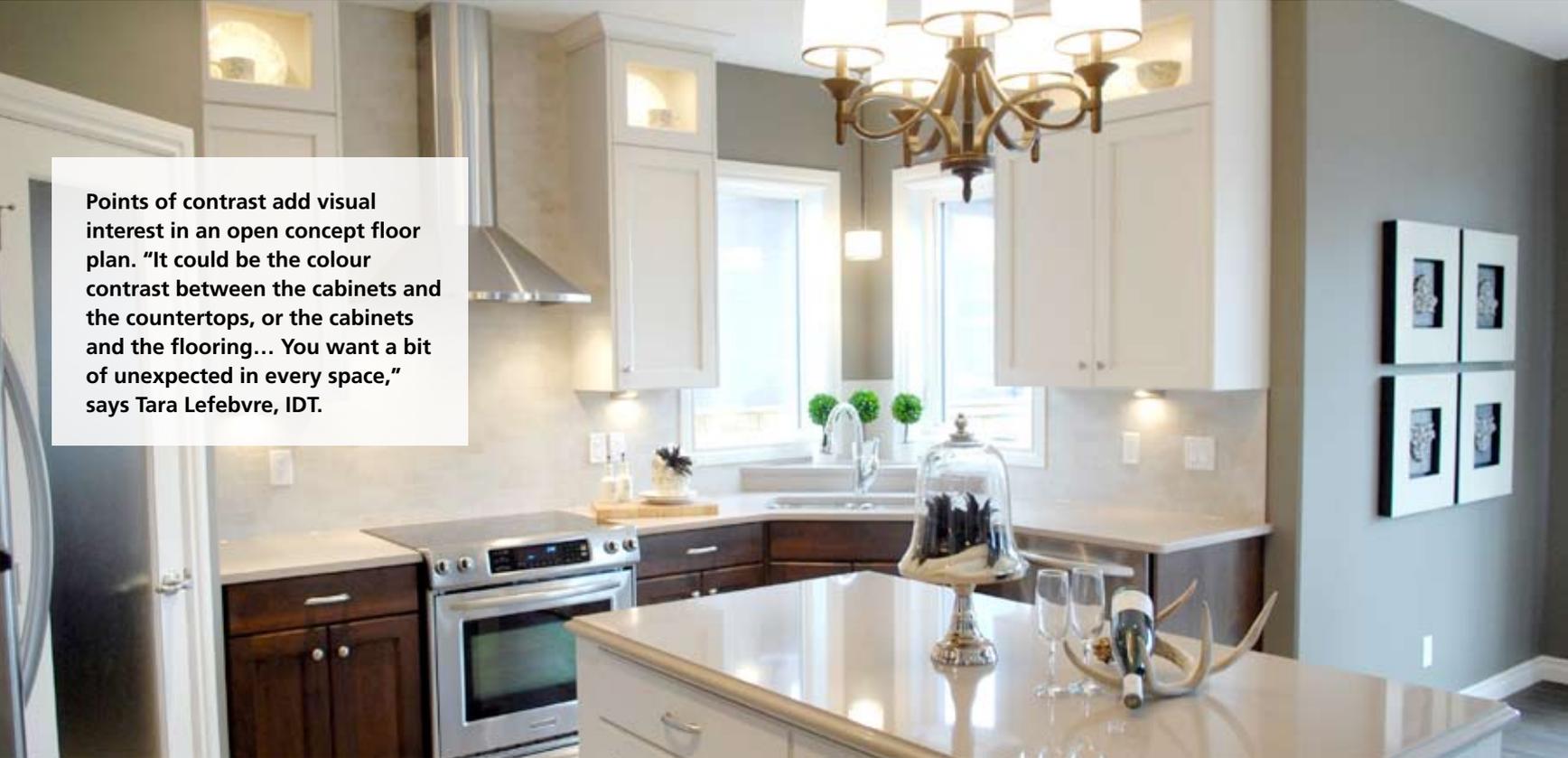


# design elements



Points of contrast add visual interest in an open concept floor plan. "It could be the colour contrast between the cabinets and the countertops, or the cabinets and the flooring... You want a bit of unexpected in every space," says Tara Lefebvre, IDT.

## TIPS FOR DESIGNING YOUR OPEN CONCEPT HOME

BY JEANNIE ARMSTRONG

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One of the design trends distinguishing many of today's new homes is the open concept floor plan.

An open floor plan amplifies the feeling of spaciousness within a home, even one of modest proportions. Living, kitchen and dining areas merge into one unified space, commonly referred to as the 'great room.' High ceilings and large windows that flood the space with natural light turn up the volume even more.

A well-designed open floor plan will accommodate multiple functions with ease, says Tara Lefebvre, Interior Design Technologist (IDT) with Westridge Homes Ltd. in Saskatoon. "Most of your family's daily activities will take place in the great room," says Lefebvre.

"Open concept floor plans are ideal for entertaining. The open flow of the room invites interaction. You can be cooking in the kitchen while your guests are relaxing in the living room, and never have a break in the conversation."

While popular, open concept homes can be challenging to design and decorate. "Make sure that your builder knows what functions you want the space for. If you do a lot of entertaining and require a lot of seating, make sure the room will accommodate a large dining table, or extra living room furniture. Be aware of the size of your furniture. If there are specific pieces of furniture you are bringing into the home, make sure they will fit into your design," says Lefebvre.

To enhance the flow of the room, Lefebvre advises using the same flooring throughout, with hardwood the most popular choice. She notes you can define a space by changing the floor-

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ing, giving the example of using tile in the front entrance. “If you tile the foyer and have the rest of the room in hardwood, it will make the entrance feel like a separate area, even if it’s all one space.”

Consistency in wall colour will also make your open concept floor plan more cohesive. “It’s difficult to change paint colour within an open concept plan because you don’t always have a good start and stop point,” says Lefebvre. “With some plans, there may be a feature wall that you can accent with a different colour.”

Points of contrast are also needed to create visual interest in the room. “It could be the colour contrast between the cabinets and the countertops, or the cabinets and the flooring. Contrast can also be achieved through changes in texture, or adding an unexpected rustic or vintage piece of furniture in an otherwise modern décor. You want a bit of unexpected in every space,” says Lefebvre.

With so many different activities taking place in your great room, it’s essential to define individual spaces within the open floor plan. Lighting is one way to differentiate the living, dining and kitchen areas. “Even in these large open great rooms, intimate spaces can be created through different layers of lighting, such as the installation of pendant lights over the island or hanging a chandelier over the dining room table,” says Lefebvre. Independent switching and the use of dimmers are also recommended. With the flick of a switch, you can define and highlight a specific zone within the space.

“Trim details are another way to define spaces in your open floor plan; these can include details such as wainscoting, paneling or crown moulding. Ceiling details or changes in ceiling heights can also help differentiate a certain space,” says Lefebvre. Options range from simple ceiling medallions to intricate coffered and vaulted beamed ceilings.

The designer also offers tips for furniture placement. “In an open concept room, you want to avoid placing all your furniture against the walls. Instead, group your sofa, love seat and chairs in a closer, conversational setting. People may think that grouping the furniture will make a space feel smaller, but it can actually help to achieve an image of space,” says Lefebvre.

An area rug will define and unify your arrangement, she adds. “Placing an area rug under your living room furniture, or under the dining room table, will create a feeling of separation within the great room.”

To maintain the spacious, airy feel of your open concept floor plan, it’s crucial to keep clutter under control. “It’s essential to have enough storage space. There needs to be an abundance of drawers and cabinets in your kitchen,” says Lefebvre, who suggests incorporating built-in recycling bins and an appliance garage into the initial design.

“Another good choice for open concept homes is furniture with built-in storage, such as an ottoman or a hall table. They serve a double purpose in the room,” says Lefebvre.

Many of the homes constructed in Saskatoon by Westridge Homes feature open concept floor plans, demonstrating the builder’s clever use of space and meticulous attention to detail.



**Placing an area rug under your dining room table, or living room furniture, will define the space and create a feeling of separation within the great room.**

Westridge Homes is a division of Westridge Construction, one of the province’s leading general contractors. Westridge expanded into residential home construction ten years ago in Saskatoon, under the leadership of managing partner Regan Tameling.

Tameling uses his diploma in architecture and 20 years of experience in the construction industry to build homes that are both visually impressive and practical in design.

Tameling and Lefebvre work in collaboration on the homes’ interior designs. “Regan’s quite traditional, while I tend to lean towards the modern. Together, we achieve an eclectic mix of traditional elements in a modern setting,” says Lefebvre.

Working in the design field for the past four years after acquiring her diploma in Interior Design Technology at Lakeland College, Lefebvre says that she loves every aspect of the design process. “I enjoy being part of the Westridge team and having the opportunity to see a project through, right from the initial planning stage to completion. I get quite attached to the homes, and even though it is very exciting to pass a home over to the new owners, it can still be tough to see them go.” **LS**