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S & P/TSX 14,682.39 44.40	TSX Venture 670.58 1.00	Dow Jones Closed	S & P 500 Closed	Dollar 79.62¢ US 0.09	Gold Closed	Oil Closed	Natural Gas Closed
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BRIEFINGS WEEKEND EXTRA

Recession not likely: Oliver

Finance Minister Joe Oliver doesn't believe Canada will fall into a recession amid "mixed signals" from an economy that's contracted for four consecutive months. "We don't have a recession. We don't believe we will be in a recession," Oliver said Friday in Toronto. "A recession is technically two consecutive negative quarters and we don't have results from the second quarter." Oliver sees indications that consumers and manufacturers are more optimistic.

New Brunswick to cut e-waste

New Brunswick wants to reduce the amount of electronic waste that ends up in its landfills. The provincial government has posted proposed changes to a regulation under the Clean Environment Act to allow for public comment. The new rules would make industry responsible for managing their electronic products from the date of manufacture to the end of their use and disposal.

Aetna buys rival health insurer

Aetna will spend about \$35 billion US to buy rival Humana and become the latest U.S. health insurer bulking up on government business as the industry adjusts to the federal health care overhaul. The proposed cash-and-stock deal, announced early Friday, would make Aetna a sizable player in the Medicare Advantage business, which offers privately run health care programs for the elderly and some people with disabilities.

Mexico City plans Uber rules

Mexico City is proposing regulations that would allow Uber and other smartphone-based ride-sharing apps to operate, while requiring drivers and cars to be registered. The proposed regulation also calls for such companies to pay into a fund for transportation infrastructure. The city also would create an app for licensed taxis and help pay for their GPS technology.

Don Cayo: In my opinion

B.C.'s carbon tax has reduced emissions, but whether it has helped the provincial economy is up for debate, says an analysis.



» C4



PHOTOS: JENELLE SCHNEIDER/PNG

Interior designer Patricia Gray has two decks, which she has done up as outdoor living spaces: one for lounging and the other for dining.

Taking it outdoors

New fabrics, products fuelling trend to expand livable space

JENNY LEE
VANCOUVER SUN

Vancouver homebuyers love outdoor living areas so much, one condo developer is even favouring large balconies over space for a dining table and a second bathroom.

"We want to make the outdoor space livable. That's a very important part of marketing a condo these days," said realtor Ken Chong of Macdonald Realty, who is marketing Bold on Fraser, a boutique-sized East Vancouver condo development.

The outdoor living trend — both for single-family homes and condos — is in full swing, with a cascading business effect on landscape architects, builders, interior designers, artisans and craftsmen working with decking, fencing, masonry and of course, retailers who supply everything from

outdoor area rugs, dining sets, furniture, lighting, fireplaces and heating.

"We are seeing the trend affect the architecture in neighbourhoods as well," said interior designer and project manager Benjamin Simpson, who works largely with west-side Vancouver's \$2 million-plus single-family homes.

"Modern, flat roof construction allows for large rooftop

"A lot of our clients are downsizing from houses and moving downtown, so they don't have yards."

PATRICIA GRAY
PATRICIA GRAY INTERIOR DESIGN

patios that have been a huge selling feature for the spec homes we have designed," said Simpson, co-owner of Blank Canvas Interiors.

Clients used to spend half as much on their exterior budget than indoors, but "now it's almost par," with clients including masonry, built-in planters, different elevations of decking, outdoor living rooms with fireplaces and dining areas as well as lavish kitchens, bars and lounges, Simpson said.

Sixty per cent of clients now ask Simpson for exterior design.

"Five years ago, it would have been half that," he said.

Where the outdoor living trend comes from, no one

really knows, but many conjecture that Vancouver's high real estate prices are key.

Demand has changed with the increase in real estate prices, realtor Chong said. "The nice white picket fence for the average family doesn't exist and the balcony is the next best solution."

Downsizing baby boomers miss their gardens.

"A lot of our clients are downsizing from houses and moving downtown, so they don't have yards," said Patricia Gray of Patricia Gray Interior Design, who specializes in downtown condos.

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PHOTOS: ARLEN REDEKOP/PNG

Before and after: GERALYNE MITSCHKE redecorated a balcony in Vancouver. Requests for outdoor design have increased 'exponentially' in the last five years.

Taking it outdoors

Greater product range and lower prices for outdoor heating units have helped extend usability into cooler weather, and advancing textile technology means beautiful fabrics including weather-resistant velvets and chenilles are now available for outdoor use.

"If you're spending on average \$1,000 a square foot to live downtown for indoor space, a 100-square-foot deck ... equates to \$100,000 of real estate," Gray said. "You're furnishing your million-dollar condo beautifully. What are you going to put on the deck? Rubbermaid? No."

Two years ago, Jerry Schmidt changed the name of his store from Vancouver Sofa Company to Vancouver Sofa and Patio. The Richmond store carries outdoor furniture, fire pits and umbrellas year-round, offering product in multiple standard as well as custom colours.

Fire pits are probably the newest trend for the market, Schmidt said, with prices dropping from \$6,000 five years ago to \$1,500 to \$2,500 now.

At Moe's Home Collection, outdoor furniture sales have been doubling every year for the past three or four years, said Sara Samieian, general manager of retail.

"I literally sold out of my two

containers before they even arrived. The following year, I doubled my order and still sold out," she said.

Samieian now fills one-third of her 15,000-square-foot main retail floor with outdoor furnishings.

"It's the first thing you see when you enter my store for at least four months."

Moe's didn't even sell outdoor furniture six years ago.

Modular contemporary sectionals sell well, at \$1,500 to \$2,000 for a four- or five-person unit with an ottoman. Contemporary looks are popular, as well as man-made rattan. Umbrellas are a big seller, and Samieian is considering adding fire pits next year.

Bold on Fraser, which is entering its presale phase, is pairing bedroom-sized, 100-square-foot balconies with 650-square-foot, two-bedroom condos at the expense of a dining table and a second bathroom.

"You can have a nice outdoor table, you can have an outdoor bar, three or four chairs," Chong said.

Its 800-square-foot units will have 500-square-foot balconies.

Balconies are not included in livable square foot calculations when condos are sold, but they do command a premium, Chong

“ Now I hear the laughter of people enjoying their backyards. It's a resurgence of neighbourhood. ”

ERICA WICKES

INTERIOR DESIGNERS INSTITUTE OF B.C.

said. "We're talking about a difference of \$50,000 in price and they are prepared to pay."

Bold on Fraser expects to break ground this summer.

Gray, who has been in business for 33 years, says requests for outdoor design have increased "exponentially" during the last five years.

She believes the driver has been a combination of high real estate prices along with increased technological sophistication in outdoor fabrics.

"Because the price for real estate is so high, this makes economic sense," Gray said. "We've got these fabrics now and some are beautiful enough, we use them for indoors. I'm

upholstering (indoor) sofas in them for clients who have dogs and kids. They're like chenilles and velvets but you can hose them down."

Clients will spend \$20,000 on an outdoor fireplace, electric heaters, seating and artificial grass.

"We did a beautiful balcony for clients where we put down artificial grass, 20 stories or something in the sky. He's a golfer and we wanted to put a little putting green up there for him, 20 feet long. He put a beautiful granite bear sculpture out there done by an artist from Whistler. Lit at night. When I do balconies, they are part of the indoors because you are looking out at them."

Outdoor wicker resin has been popular, but now Schmidt at Vancouver Sofa and Patio is seeing more interest in modern, stainless steel looks. He sells sectionals priced from \$1,000 to \$6,000. In the winter, frames can be covered and cushions brought in.

This year, Schmidt brought in more condo-sized merchandise than before and is planning to continue ordering more.

Young professionals are using their backyards for networking and business entertaining, said Erica Wickes, a registered interior designer and president

of Interior Designers Institute of B.C. "You don't have to pay the \$50,000 for that great outdoor fireplace. It's now achievable within a \$5,000 budget. It's more achievable than 10 years ago," said Wickes, who has seen a 30-per-cent increase in residential homeowners looking to turn their backyards into an outdoor living destination.

"Now it's the Brian Gluckstein outdoor furniture," said Wickes, owner of 34F Design Inc. "It's no longer the plastic chairs that you can hose down. It's got the upholstered look, the throw cushions, the tea trolley cart, the sophisticated cooler finished in resin versus your Coleman coolers in red and blue, canopies or trellises not just wood but metal fabricated that you can drape fabric over or string up with Christmas tree lights, and area rugs for outdoor use."

"In the neighbourhood at night, 10 years ago, I could hear the crickets all the time," added Wickes, speaking of her home in Coquitlam. "Now I hear the laughter of people enjoying their backyards. It's a resurgence of neighbourhood."

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