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OTTAWA CITIZEN

Chic shed trend reimagines the humble backyard box

It's that instant when you decide it's time for your own backyard hideaway — when you buy into the fact that sheds aren't just for storing junk and hosting cobwebs anymore.



JEAN LEVAC/OTTAWA CITIZEN

Designer Kristi Blok, left, created a she shed out of a backyard garden shed for her sister, Lynsey Bennett.

Backyard sheds are being reimagined as elaborate outdoor living spaces. The trend has laid a foundation in Canada just as it explodes south of the border. Just last month, U.S. cable network FYI ordered production on a new series called *He Shed, She Shed*.

Is any poor, simple storage shed truly safe? Move over lawn mower. Find a new space to squat, rusted paint cans. Sheds are getting a high-end upgrade, transformed into areas for entertaining and lounging, used as studios, hobby workshops and home offices.

"People don't think of using a shed for some purpose other than storage ... a lot of people think: gross, spiders and bugs or whatever else," says Ottawa designer Kristi Blok of Kiki Interiors. "(But) the possibilities are endless ... and what you're seeing with the whole shed trend is people are keeping that rustic, outdoorsy look."

Ottawa's Lynsey Bennett is a case in point. Since buying her home about four years ago, she's slowly transformed her backyard into the perfect outdoor garden, relaxation and entertainment space. At its centre is a 14-foot-by-20-foot shed.

Blok is Bennett's sister and they put their heads together to rethink the property's storage shed. The result is a countrified, laid-back, livable space ideal for Bennett to lounge and read with her cocker spaniel, Maddy — one of the shed's biggest fans — or to entertain company, whether sizable or intimate.

Bennett's shed features a wooden bar with three stools, a fridge, couches and chairs — and some rustic chests and tiny antiques thrown in for good measure. The barnyard wood floor has been whitewashed and reclaimed to provide texture to the front and back walls. And two patio doors were added that open up to her colourful garden and loungers.

"It's another extension of my home," Bennett says. "When I do entertain, I don't have to have everyone in my house. I

have the deck or people can hang out in here ... It adds another dimension."

In fact, Bennett just hosted an annual party and the shed served as an outdoor bar and lounge area for her 30 or so guests.

It was important for the sisters that the shed wasn't an afterthought. The beige and black colours were chosen to match the exterior of Bennett's home.

"We wanted it to feel like it was part of the house, intentional, and part of the whole design," Blok explains, adding the space could easily double as a home office or a place for crafting and hobby art — from sewing to carving and painting.

While existing sheds can be renovated, some people prefer to build from scratch or have a structure custom made.

David Dunn certainly gets a lot of use out of his shed-turned-art- gallery, which he bought from North Country Sheds in Merrickville, Ont. Dunn's outdoor Gallery at the Ramble is located at Rideau Woodland Ramble, a boutique garden centre and display garden near the village.

A gardener and painter, Dunn wanted a place to show and sell his paintings of wildlife and woodlands. "We spend a lot of time in (the shed) eating cookies and drinking coffee, and sometimes drinking wine, and looking at the paintings," he says.

The key selling point? "The double doors at the back that open into the garden," he says, "so you are sort of drawn through the shed into the garden."

Dunn says visitors are often inspired by the 20-foot-by-14foot gallery, citing his structure as a great option for their own potential outdoor workshop or mini cottage retreat.

He sheds and she sheds have another key selling point: They're cost-effective.

"It's really affordable without a mass renovation and it's so practical and useful," Blok says.

Jason Fisher, the owner of Urbanshed in Calgary, agrees. "It's an economical way to add square footage to your home," Fisher explains, noting building an addition on a house would likely cost four to five times the price of a customized shed.

His company both delivers and builds on site, offering customized four-season sheds with options for insulation, heating and air conditioning. Urbanshed.ca only ships to Western Canada, but its galleries offer multiple designs and shed concepts — from a yoga or music studio to a craft room.

Meanwhile, early shed converts like Bennett continue to benefit from their outdoor living space.



"Some friends ask, 'Can I live in this shed? ... Do you rent this space out?'" she says. They're half kidding, but maybe that's the next step in the evolution of sheds.

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Not a word about legality of such structures, or the required permit process. In DNV anything exceeding 100sq-ft would need a permit etc - cjk