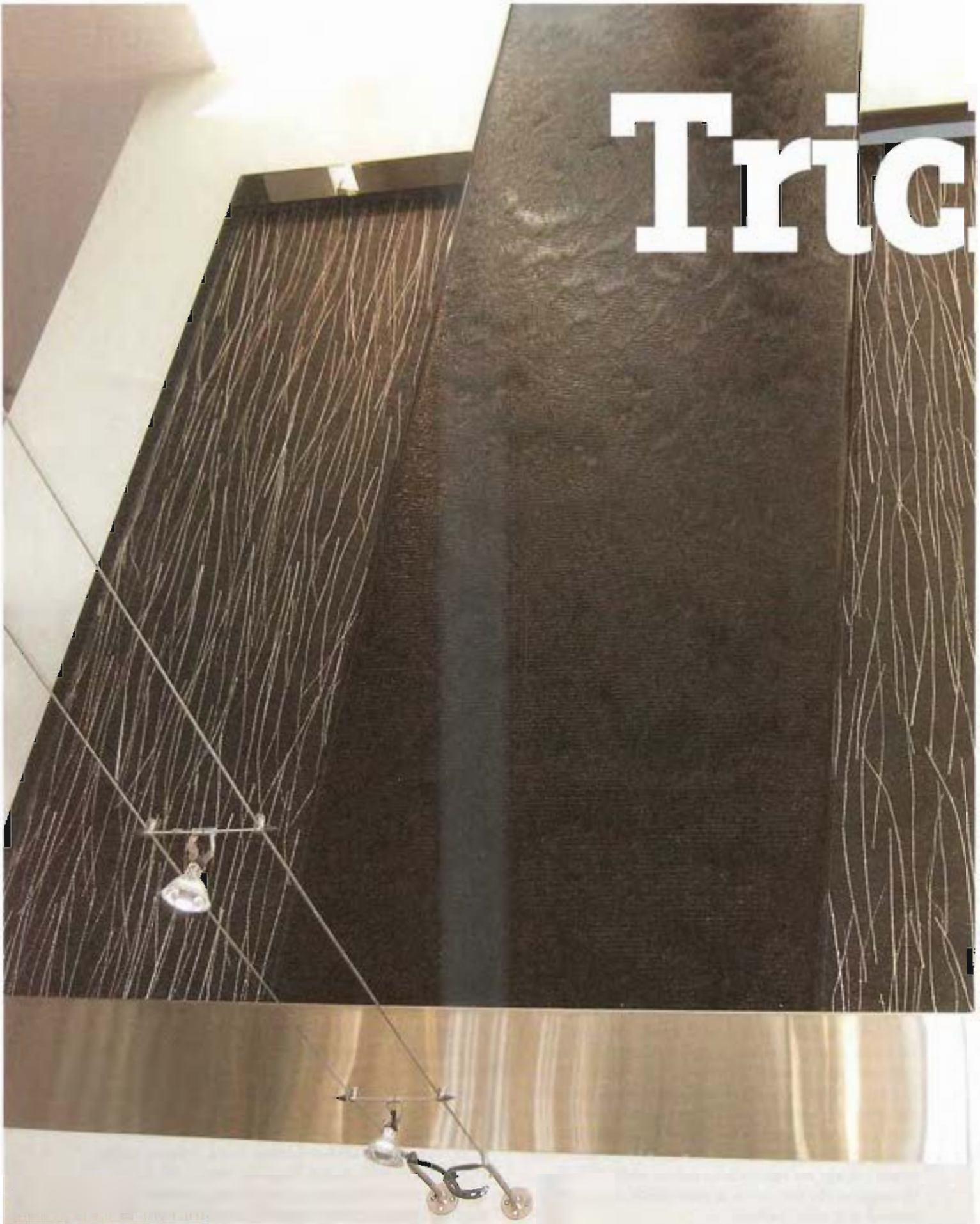


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Indoor water features are both art and a calming influence

By Lisa Bendall

You don't have to live by the sea to enjoy the ambience of water. Today, there are many ways to bring the sights and sounds of moving water into your living space and homeowners are craving these creative ideas.

"People have very busy, demanding lives," says Jean Stéphane Beauchamp, a Montreal-based interior designer. "Your home should be a place where it's quiet." He frequently fields requests for solitude-themed spaces like reading and yoga rooms, and he finds that water can enhance these areas. "The sound of water is quite relaxing for a lot of us, and brings us back to nature," Beauchamp says.

Whether massive or modest, an indoor water feature can block out noisy neighbours or traffic sounds. It's also visually pleasing, and can be an attractive element of a room or even an entire house, like the 20-foot-tall, stunning indoor waterfalls custom-made by Ross Taylor, founder of Water Trends Design Group in Chilliwack, B.C.

"The thing everyone talks about is the calming effect that it has in a residence," Taylor says. "There is the visual aspect of an indoor waterfall with lighting, and there's the audio part – you hear all the nuances of the water falling. You get almost in a trance. It reduces stress."

Running water has other benefits, too. It will add moisture to a dry room without overdoing humidity. And it releases electrically charged molecules called negative ions into the air, which at high levels may lift our mood by triggering biochemical changes in the brain.

Besides the science and the soothing effects of water, homeowners like to stand out. "People want to be different," says Taylor. "Everyone we've done projects for, they like the fact that they've got this unique feature in their home."

There's no question that a floor-to-ceiling rain curtain or room divider is designed to be different. Depending on scope and materials, Taylor's custom projects range from \$200 to \$400 per square foot of visible water. "If you're looking at a \$20,000 water feature in the home, a lot of people say wow," Taylor says. "But if it's going to be a focal point in the middle of the house at the staircase, it's a huge component of your home." It helps to have a project like this incorporated into a new house, with plumbing and electrical built in instead of retrofitted.



..... New technologies allow for changing LED lighting and water flow at the touch of a button.

Some manufacturers sell prefabricated units for less, but homeowners should compare the quality of materials and check the warranty that's offered. Also, find out if your purchase includes a maintenance plan. Large water features like these require regular cleaning and disinfecting, and will need their water levels topped up.

But you don't have to pay big bucks for indoor water. Small tabletop fountains can also add a touch of tranquility to a room. Many are designed for interior use, but even those geared for the garden can be brought into the house. "There's a much better selection," Beauchamp observes. Outdoor fountains may also come with sturdier wiring and materials, he adds. "The tabletop ones, I find, you can knock over, and have water damage. The big ones have better reservoirs." In the interest of protecting your fine hardwood floors, do test out the splash factor before bringing an outdoor fountain into your formal living room.

And who says you can't have a beautiful water feature in your bathroom? Try a wall- or ceiling-mounted filler for the tub instead of a traditional spout, for a falling stream of water that looks and sounds lovely. The fillers manufactured by Kohler can be installed with a soaker tub surrounded by a deep reservoir to drain the steady



..... If buying a pre-fabricated water unit, make sure it is built with high-quality materials and comes with a good warranty.

overflow. It's like bathing in your own personal waterfall. The downside, of course, is that all that water is wasted down the drain instead of being recirculated.

For pet lovers, even a fish tank can be considered a water feature. "Who doesn't love the sound of the bubbles?" says Beauchamp. "I could go into a pet store and just watch the aquariums and fish." Aquariums, of course, come in a great variety of sizes and styles to fit all kinds of décor.

The options for indoor water will likely increase as new technologies are developed. Today, water features incorporate LED lighting that can shift colour at the touch of a button. Sound levels – from a trickle to a gush – can be completely customized. Misting devices can add a fog effect. "Now the industry is creating applications for mobile devices," says Taylor. "You can control your water feature with your iPhone when you're on your way home."

Whatever your budget, there's a way to bring water indoors. "I've always believed that you're more comfortable in your home when it looks like you, when you can see yourself in your home. I think that's when you relax," Beauchamp says. "And whimsy, I've always found, is part of that." **HC**