

THE LOOK

Wild on the inside

The best of the outdoors takes on a chic new life as designers turn materials like tree bark and reindeer hides into rustic decor

MATTHEW HAGUE

Summer has officially started and it's almost the Canada Day long weekend, which, for many people, means it's time to get in touch with the country's vast wilderness. Camp out in a provincial park, maybe, or, for the daring, forage for food and seek shelter in some undiscovered corner of the North.

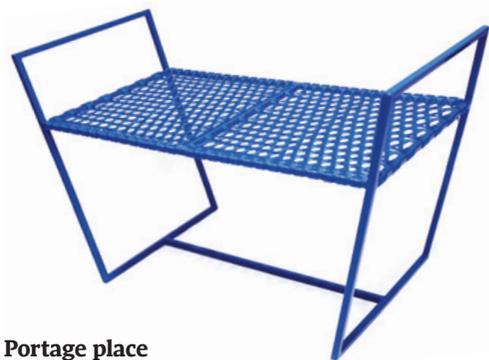
But for those of us who consider "tent" a four-letter word, there's a rainproof, mosquito-free way to commune with nature: bring it indoors with a piece of ultra-rustic decor.

Lately, designers, both Canadian and international, have been inspired by the wild and are turning materials like tree bark and reindeer hides into stunning lights, cabinets and tables.

There is an ethical component to the look. Many of the designers are simply trying to elevate the waste byproducts of the food industry – cast-off skins from salmon fisheries, unused horns from cattle farmers – into something practical or just plain beautiful. And others are painstakingly gathering their materials from forest floors, trying to create the ultimate in local, handcrafted finery.

Here, six innovative ways to bring the outdoors in.

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**Portage place**

With its tapering frame and hand-woven meshing, the Paddle bench by Montreal's Samare takes its form from the bow seat of a canoe. The colours can be customized as can the meshing – it can be either be a traditional, rawhide babiche or a vegan-friendly, synthetic nylon. Price upon request. Through samarestudio.com.

**Soft lighting**

Toronto-based designers Alex Jowett and Michael Greenwood channelled the Sami people from Scandinavia for their White Heat pendant lamp: the frame is made of Baltic birch and the hide is an byproduct of the Sami's main source of livelihood: reindeers. Because it's assembled from all natural materials (save for the bulb), it was designed to eventually be disposed of with minimal impact on the environment. \$967. Through Atelier688.com.

**Drum circles**

With her Salmon Drum tables, Vancouver-based Sabina Hill took a cast-off material – fish skins – and used them to create a luxurious piece of decor: The tanned hides have a rich, rough texture which contrasts well with the smooth, polished walnut of the table tops. Price upon request. Through sabinahill.com.

**Kindling chic**

For his Accumulation cabinet, Korean designer Xerock Kim hand-collected all the tree bark from a forest near his studio. He used the rough wood to clad a polished, machine-made chest to highlight the difference between natural beauty and typical, industrial furniture. Price upon request. Through kimxerock.com.

**Cattle call**

Best Made is a New York-based design firm run by a Canadian expat, Peter Buchanan-Smith. Because his Stay Sharp whisky tumblers are individually hand-hewn and polished from Ankole cattle horns, they each have their own unique grains, colours and shimmering streaks. \$89 per pair. Through bestmadeco.com.

**Knit picks**

Kaufmann Mercantile's house shoes are both striking and practical: the hand-knit uppers are made from water-repellant, ultra snuggly Patagonian sheep's wool and the soles are made from salmon skins, which looks delicate but, when tanned, becomes durable enough to walk on. \$59. Through kaufmann-mercantile.com.