



WARMTH THROUGH DESIGN

Six ways to turn up the dial and increase cozy in an open-concept home

Written by Evelyn Eshun | Interior design by Evelyn Eshun Design | Photography by Larry Arnal



Evelyn Eshun is the principal designer and owner of Evelyn Eshun Design Inc., also known as ESTudio, a full service design and decorating company in Toronto providing creative and innovative design solutions.

Open-concept has quickly become the layout of choice when undergoing renovations and in new builds alike. These designs are incredibly efficient, saving precious space on walls and halls, unlike what is commonly seen in traditional multiroom floor plans. Open layouts allow for a natural flow of traffic, and they encourage socialization, which is ideally suited to family life and the occasional party. However, in spite of their popularity and the sheer cool factor of living wall-free, one thing open-concept layouts can sometimes lack is warmth—and that happens to be the one thing I think every home should have.

Indeed, when I was tasked with designing this open-concept home, warming up the atmosphere was job one. The homeowners are a busy professional couple who wanted their home to be a restful retreat from the stresses of the day. The house itself sits in a forested setting north of the city, so the external environment was perfectly suited to the cozy interior I had in mind. Here are some surefire ways to crank up the heat in your open-concept space without ever touching the thermostat.

COLOR

Color is one of the easiest and highest-impact ways to change the vibe in your home. Your chosen color palette plays a vital role in how the eye perceives the “temperature” of the room. Light, cool-toned hues will make the walls visually recede, thereby creating the illusion of more space. Pale blues, greens, grays, off-whites, and some neutral colors achieve this look. On the other hand, if your goal is to create a cozy look in your home, opt for dark, warm-toned colors that bring those walls back in. Warm hues like red, orange, mossy green, and grayish-brown all land on the sunny side of the color spectrum and give your space a warm look and feel.

The chosen color palette for this home was neutral, through and through. The clients shied away from anything too bright, dramatic, or overwhelming in any way. One of the goals for the redesign was tranquillity. We achieved this sense of calmness through a monochromatic color scheme and softly textured materials. But neutral doesn’t mean devoid of color entirely. If you want to “dip your toe” in the paint can, so to speak, consider tinting a can of white for a subtle hint of color. Remember: choose something from the warm side of the color spectrum to maintain a warm aesthetic in your space.





ORGANIC AESTHETIC

Organic finishes are another impactful way to offset the coolness of a contemporary, open-concept interior. Hand-scraped wood floors, stone underfoot and on walls, and rustic details and accessories take the warmth even further—echoing a cottage or cabin style that instantly feels like home. If you're on a budget, some flooring manufacturers also offer quality look-a-like products that deliver the appearance and performance of real wood or stone, but at a fraction of the price. These are worth checking out.

FIREPLACE

The fireplace is a natural focal point in any room, drawing attention for the literal heat it gives, as well as its figurative warmth. Mantles beckon with proudly displayed artwork, framed family photos, and collected curios that each tell a story.

On the homeowners' wish list as part of this renovation and redesign was a fabulous fireplace feature wall. The goal was to create an architectural feature. Still, it had to fulfill a practical purpose as well—storage for firewood, personal mementos, and entertainment equipment. We achieved the “wow” factor with a dramatic built-in fashion from an Italian laminate product, which offered durability and a wonderfully rustic look. And speaking of fabulous fakes, the fireplace surround is finished in a cultured stone that mimics real stone. The feature wall boasts an asymmetrical look that lends itself to the casual atmosphere.





Did you know that light bulbs come in warm and cool varieties? To give your interiors a subtle warm-up, swap out your bright-white light bulbs with soft white ones, which lean toward the yellow side of the color spectrum, and are commonly used in living rooms and bedrooms, where a cozy ambiance is key.

LIGHT

One of the quickest and most impactful ways to warm up your home is with light. Ambient, task, and accent lighting work together to do away with dark corners and poorly lit spaces forever. A layered lighting plan is essential and should include a combination of various light sources, such as pot lights, ceiling fixtures, under-cabinet lighting, table and floor lamps, and of course, windows, all working together.



Layer area rugs on top of larger rugs or even over wall-to-wall carpets to create an instant “plush” effect. This look works well in bedrooms, living rooms, family rooms, reading rooms, and dens.

LAYERS

As a designer, I love working with layers. This style of accessorizing brings an added dimension to the overall design. Layers have the power to instantly bring interest and warmth to an otherwise cool, perhaps slightly impersonal space. So, go ahead and pile up those colors, patterns, and textures. The colors and designs you choose to include speak to your sense of style and help tell your story. And when it comes to style, layering allows you to stay fluid. You can easily add, subtract and update your textiles with the changing trends and seasons.

This layering trend lives by the principle of “more is more.” By the same logic, you can warm up your space by doubling up on your cushions and throws, too. Couches and chairs are the obvious place to layer pillows and blankets, but a bench, footstool or even a quiet corner piled high with cushions invite you to curl up.

Especially during the fall and winter months, consider adding layers throughout the main living areas of your home, making them look and feel inviting, welcoming and warm. When spring rolls around again, peel back a layer or two to lighten up the look and refresh your home’s style.



HEAVY FABRICS

Heavier textiles are a great go-to for a warmer look and feel in the home: velvet, thickset corduroy, faux fur, wool, and chunky knits. Swap out your lighter bedding and use richer, textural and weighted sheets, blankets, bedspreads, and accent pillows. The change in seasons also calls for a set of heavier drapes. You'll create a warmer, cozier look inside your home, and heavier window coverings serve the double-duty of naturally regulating your home's internal temperature, giving your utility bills a break.

The homeowners love their new space with all the critical boxes checked: tranquil, warm, and practical needs fulfilled. The result is fresh, modern, and welcoming. The neutral color palette, subtle use of textures and patterns, and built-in elements add just the right touches to make this house feel like home.

For most of us, home is the place we run to at the end of a long day. It's where we go to dry off, warm up and shake off the outside world. It's our greatest escape. Ultimately, the real warmth of a home comes from those who live in it. Of course, some strategic choices and pieces can take a look to the next degree.

