

Cover Story

Quirky stuff

Funky flooring, speakers tucked away in the wall and a sensitive toilet fan — meet a few home goodies that are oddly practical

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SPECIAL TO THE STAR

They may be quirky household items, but they're also useful.

I didn't set out to find a toilet fan or invisible speakers at the recent Metro Home Show. And I didn't go looking for flooring that looks like it should be hanging on the walls of a modern art gallery.

But these products, with their unusual appeal and functions, were hard to miss. And when I looked more closely at them, I found they were actually quite practical.

TOILET FAN

The Panfan is a product that gets right to the heart of what can be a big problem — toilet odours. It attaches to the toilet. With a fan that draws air from the rim holes, odours are removed.

Manfred Dietrich, owner/general manager of Intersteam Technologies, the Hamilton-based business that distributes the Panfan, says this product not only gets rid of odours, it also creates a healthier environment with the elimination of airborne spores.

"The hospitality industry as well as residential consumers are interested in this product, especially with the consciousness of public hygiene being much higher today than in the past," Dietrich says.

Dietrich explains that when the automatic sensor senses an occupant, it sends a signal to engage the Panfan. The fan draws air up through the ports from the bowl and sucks the air out of

the bowl. This air moves up into the tank through a charcoal filter. The sensor then recognizes the absence of the occupant and shuts off the fan.

The Panfan also means ceiling fans and deodorizers are not required. This can even help lower your energy bills as Dietrich says "ceiling fans use a lot more power than the Panfan and they remove heated air from homes. The Panfan directly targets odour, is energy-efficient and creates a healthier environment."

There are two Panfan models available: the Plug-in version, which can be wired in for \$155; and a battery model, which costs \$179 and includes the battery and charger.

For more information, call 1-800-281-4413 or visit www.intersteam.com.

INVISIBLE SPEAKERS

If budget is not an issue, and you like the idea of invisible sound, then Amina high-end speakers, which start at \$800 each, may be just what you've been looking for. Brought into

Canada from Britain a couple of months ago by Artistic Smart Homes, these Amina speakers are advertised as providing "high definition audio with zero visual impact."

"These speakers have no grills and are installed after the drywall is up," says Leo Veri, owner/president of Artistic Smart Homes, who believes there is nothing else like these in Canada. "An opening the size of the speaker is cut out of the drywall. Support blocks are installed in each corner and the speakers are screwed into these blocks. Tape and drywall compound go over the speaker and once the wall or ceiling is painted, you can't even see where the speaker is."

With a hefty price tag that can go as high as \$1,200 for one speaker, Veri admits "these are not for everybody." Traditional in-wall speakers can be found for as little as \$60 but Veri says a good medium-grade pair goes for \$600, a fraction of the cost of the Amina speaker. But Veri says they can make sense if you only want a couple in a room



The Panfan attaches to the toilet and draws air out of the bowl when an automatic sensor detects an occupant.