

Home and Garden Magazines

Home and garden magazines cover far more than just sumptuous surroundings. They're into cooking, pool safety, home security, and seasonal lawn care. What's more, they often include consumer-oriented pieces on how to choose outdoor grills, painting products, and range hoods—topics any competent writer can handle.

Therefore, here are a few recommendations:

❖ **Research first, write later.**

Proposing a piece on sofa selection? Check into wood species, craftsmanship, and grades of upholstery. Throw a few knowledgeable tidbits into your query.

❖ **Collect brochures.**

Label according to dealers and store them according to category. Not only will they inform you and later jog your memory, they'll offer possibilities for photo selections. Editors like having something pretty to look at along with something good to read. "Home decor magazines are all about visuals," said Catherine Yarnovich, former executive managing editor of *Romantic Homes*. "If you've got lovely photographs to go with your query, you've got a better shot at getting an assignment." While the magazine may send a photographer to reshoot, it's important to give the editors an idea of the visual potential.

❖ **During interviews, ask questions from a consumer's standpoint.**

Why would anyone pay twice as much for a certain washer and dryer? Why does some art look better unframed? Why might buyers prefer stainless steel sinks? Never forget your real audience—the average homeowner with high aspirations.

❖ **Be aware of trends—and then try to keep up.**

Interior design is a living, breathing, ever-changing entity, as fascinating and evolving as human nature itself. “Be on the lookout for a new take on anything that’s on the market,” said Yarnovich. Don’t, however, accept company assertions at face value, cautioned Jim Adair, former editor in chief of *Canadian Homes and Cottages*. “Too many writers go with claims that a product is ‘the first,’ ‘the most’ or ‘the biggest,’ when it’s really the same as a competitor’s.”

❖ **Attend home shows.**

Over-the-top is exactly what you need to see— because whatever is cutting-edge bizarre now will probably be routine within five years.

❖ **Recognize the difference between a do-it-yourself publication and a coffee table display.**

Different markets, different subscribers. One deals in reality, the other in fantasy. It sounds obvious, but don’t accidentally write for one and then send your piece to another. Also, be aware of geographical differences. “I get tons of queries from American writers who don’t realize that there is a difference between a home magazine for the U.S. market and one for the Canadian,” said Gail Johnston Habs, editor in chief of *Style at Home*.

❖ **Keep it simple.**

With everything you're learning, you may be tempted to share with readers the whole history of the coated glass industry. Don't bother; most people want only simple guidelines on choosing windows wisely.

❖ **Keep readers informed.**

Be sure to supply info on costs, said Adair— where and how readers can get products or services. Toll-free numbers and/or Web sites are essential.

❖ **Vary submissions.**

Try submitting queries to city magazines, state magazines, or even local newspapers. Virtually all have home sections and are responsive to fresh ideas.

❖ **Keep your eyes on the prize.**

No, not the money, but an enduring appreciation for the genius of human creativity. Brilliance is everywhere in the home and garden market—in ceiling fans, in patio furniture, in doorknobs, even in plumbing! Feel the beauty and enjoy the experience.