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EDITORIAL

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OUTSIDE YOUR SUITE





Yes, You Can Upgrade Your Balcony

By Frederick Hann

Award-winning designer and landscape architect Frederick Hann is the president of Garden Connections Inc. Since 2013, this Toronto-based company has been transforming the quality of condo owners' lives in the GTA and Vancouver by creating beautiful outdoor living experiences. gardenconnections.com

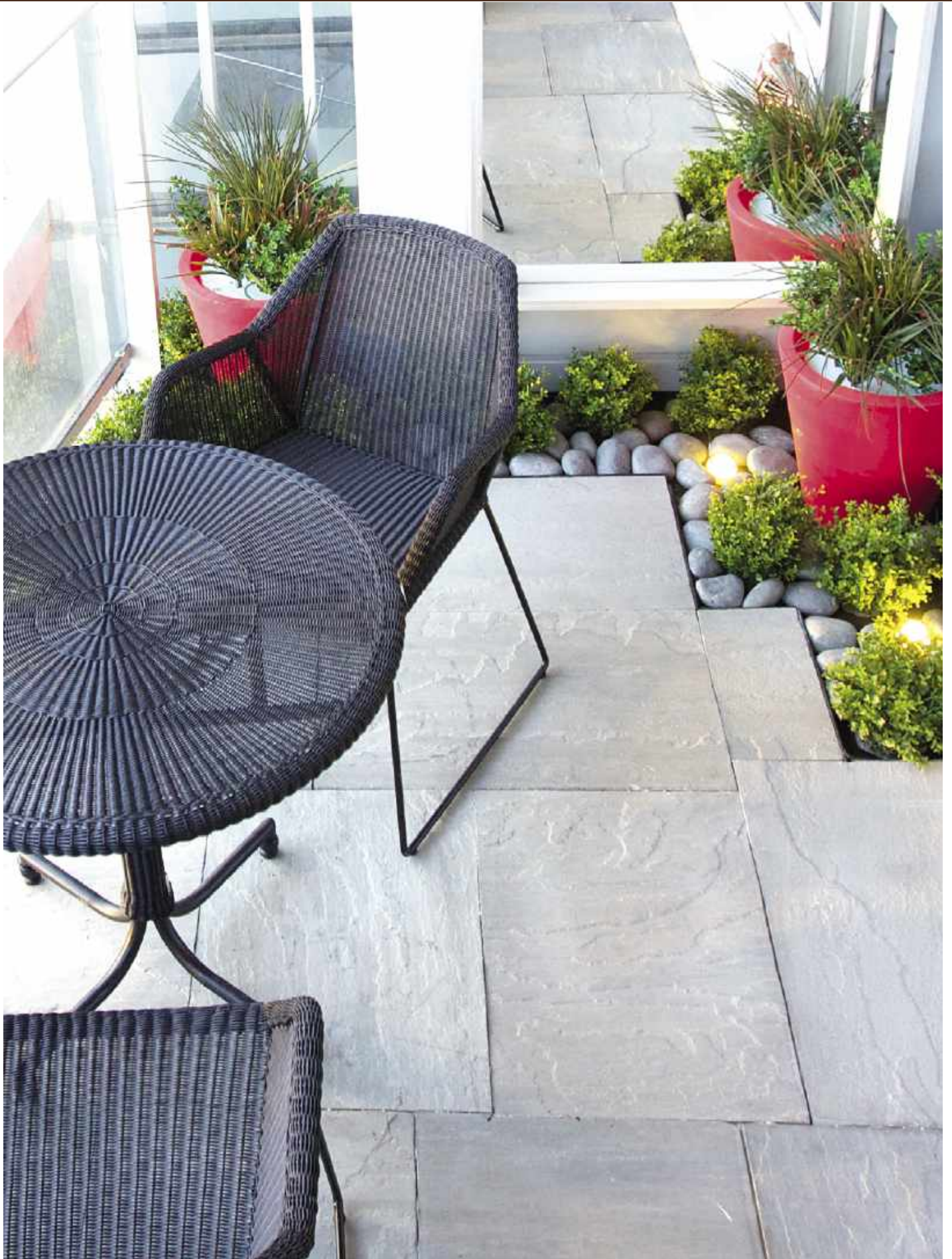
That's a gorgeous balcony in the photograph, isn't it? Maybe you're thinking about upgrading your balcony or terrace. Many condo owners do, especially after having made some improvements indoors. Perhaps you've checked out Houzz or Pinterest to get ideas from upgrades that others have done. And you're getting excited about the possibilities – only to be told by a friend, "No, it's not possible. You're not permitted to do anything outside." Your reply: "What? You've got to be kidding me! I want more than furniture. It's so bare and boring!"

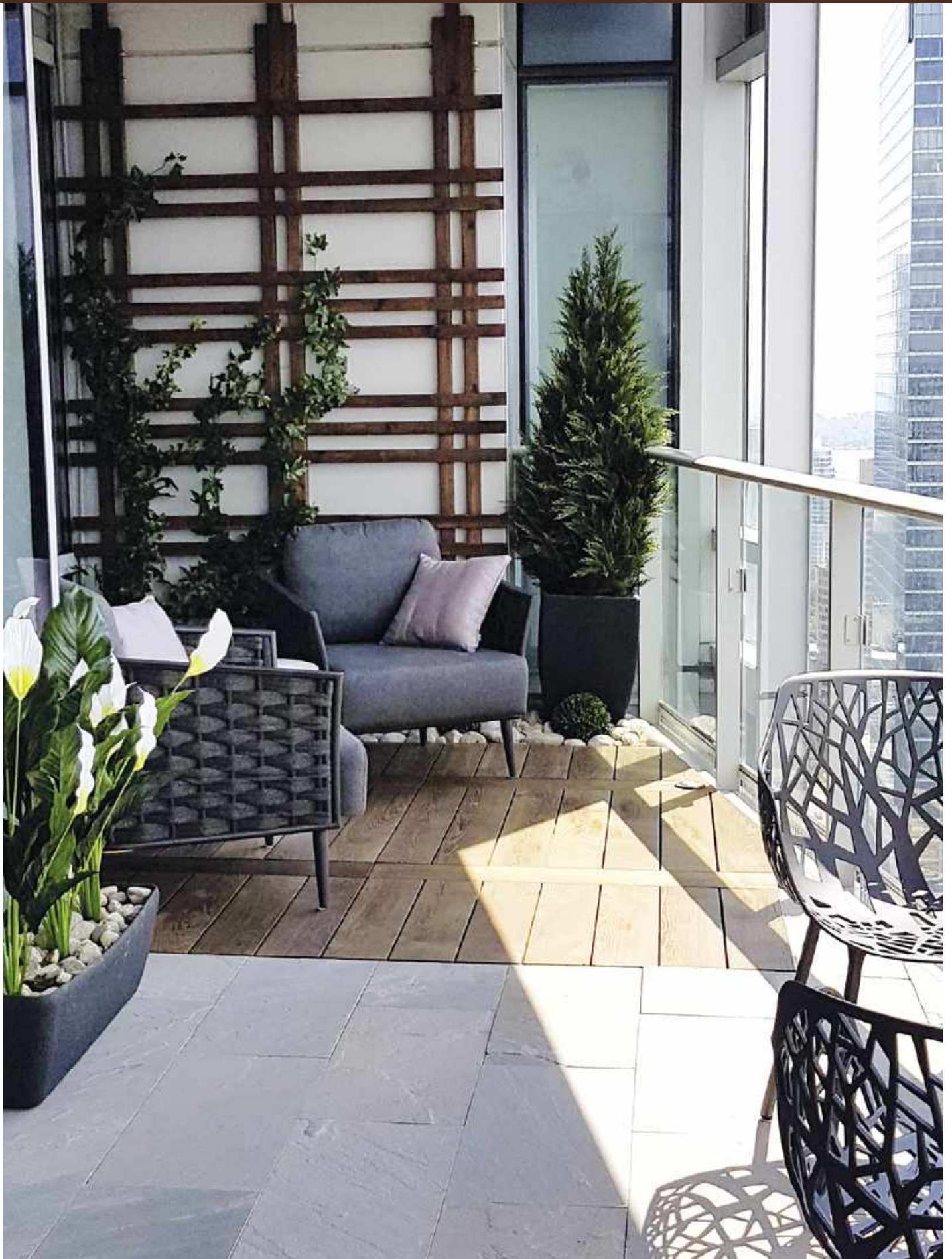
I'm happy to tell you that you are permitted to upgrade your balcony, provided it conforms to specific conditions.

Balconies and terraces have an interesting legal status: they're part of the building's exterior, and are defined under section 98 of the Condominium Act as "common areas," which means their management is the responsibility of your property manager and condominium corporation board. But since a balcony (or terrace) is only accessible to the residents in the suite, it is an "exclusive-use common area." Now that's an oxymoron if ever there was one!

Section 98 allows a condo owner to make an addition, alteration or improvement to the balcony, provided it's not contrary to the Condominium Act or to your Declarant documents. And that's where your Board comes in. It's up to them to ensure your plan checks off all the required boxes and doesn't create a potential liability for the condominium corporation. Which is why your Board gets really concerned when an owner embarks on balcony upgrades or alterations without approval. That's when a balcony becomes a no man's land.

To avoid problems, it makes sense to make your plan with a pro – someone who knows and understands the ins and outs of the rules and regulations, and who has the expertise to build and install the balcony properly. This gives your property manager and Board a level of assurance and confidence, so they will be more likely





to approve your project. They may even get as excited as you are about creating the balcony of your dreams. After all, it's an improvement that adds significant value to your real estate investment and to the value of the entire building.

If this seems like a lot more work than getting new outdoor furniture, it is. But it's well worth it.

The most important reason people want a balcony upgrade is to extend their living space. Small or large, a beautiful balcony can visually make your condo feel bigger inside. And even a tiny "balconette" with two petite chairs and a table can help you feel more connected to the natural world.



NOW LET'S TAKE IT FURTHER!

When a balcony is designed to connect to and harmonize with the interior, it truly becomes an outdoor room. The right furniture, colours and plants are very effective, but what really tips the balance to amazing is beautiful decking and carefully placed lighting - your balcony will be completely transformed.

And while a professional upgrade comes with a price tag, the additional living area comes at considerably lower cost than your condo!

It's all possible and straightforward when you talk with your property manager earlier rather than later. They are there to help you achieve your goals. Helping you and your Board to maintain and increase the value and quality of your building is your property manager's most important responsibility. And of course avoiding potential risks and liabilities from poorly done upgrades - liabilities that would affect all owners in the building.

Winter is upon us, but climatologists are now predicting a milder than normal winter, with spring right around the corner. If you want to have your balcony or terrace upgraded to enjoy next summer, now is the time to start that conversation!

TOP 4 CONSIDERATIONS FOR BALCONY UPGRADES

1. Your proposed upgrade must conform to all building codes, building permits and building rules and regulations.
2. A minimum 42" railing height must be maintained.
3. Nothing can be attached to the balcony concrete slab or to the exterior curtain walls of your building without Board approval.
4. Your Board may require that the proposed upgrades be vetted and approved by a professional engineer.