

# STYLE

**Decor ideas are not typically tailored** to the modern man's design aesthetic; however, masculine aspects in the home are just as attractive as feminine ones. Women typically rule design and decor duties, but that's not to say men's tastes are not as refined. Masculine style is restrained, distinguished, functional with clean lines and can sometimes be bold in colour. Perhaps Mr. Right requires his own men's den in the house. Defined by personality type, HGTV has five ideas to help ensure a man's style is represented in his home. Visit [hgvtv.ca](http://hgvtv.ca) for more design ideas. *Weekend Post*



## BODY AND MIND

Can patients be treated without seeing their pain?

By REBECCA FIELD JAGER

# DIALLING UP DOCTOR

**A**gnes Kowalski creates an intimate atmosphere for each of her sessions. The 30-year-old psychotherapist closes the door to her Brooklyn home office, turns on soft music and lights a candle or two. A white noise machine blocks outside distractions and offers additional privacy. Once everything is in place, Kowalski settles into a chaise lounge and the session begins.

In Toronto, Mindy Postoff, a 27-year-old technical-support representative, retreats to her bedroom, closes the door and lies down on her bed. She picks up the phone and pours her heart out to the familiar voice on the line. This ritual has taken place every week or two for almost two years. A one-hour phone call leaves Postoff exhilarated.

"The feeling lasts for the rest of the evening," Postoff enthuses. "I feel connected and much more aware of my emotions and actions."

The telephone, a device most of us use to keep in touch with someone else, is, for Postoff, a means of keeping in touch with herself. The process is called phone therapy and Kowalski describes herself as one of its pioneers.

Three years ago, Kowalski, a Torontonian, shut down the bricks-and-mortar counselling service she'd started five years before and replaced it with a phone-only model. Was she tired of slogging to work every day, always putting on a happy face to clients, paying those ghastly overhead bills? No. Kowalski simply wanted to move to New York City, where she'd been offered a chance to co-produce a series of meditation CDs. She couldn't bear to pass up the venture – or give up her clientele.

"I didn't want to leave and lose all my clients," she explains. "So I thought, what if I could offer my services by phone? I put it out there. 'Are you willing to try this?' I asked. About 80% said yes." She currently spends 25 hours a week counselling patients on the phone.

Among them is Stephanie McCracken, a young woman with a troubled past that includes physical and sexual abuse. She sees no end in sight for her need for therapy and isn't willing to let 300 or so miles separate her from her beloved counsellor. She talks to Kowalski almost weekly.

"I come from a violent, welfare-poor family," she says. "My father left before I was born. When I turned 16 I ran away from home and became a prostitute. Compared to my home life, I felt more safe and loved on the street. The men complimented me, pleased me and gave me money and gifts. It was a much more positive environment."

Stephanie currently works as a stage technician at Niagara on the Lake, Ont., but it's a seasonal gig so she also works as an exotic dancer to augment her income. Is phone therapy helping her transition out of the sex industry?

"I don't think the sex industry is something you need to get out of," she says. "What phone therapy is do-



Agnes Kowalski left Toronto for New York and took about 80% of her patient load with her – in a sense.

JEFF ZELEVANSKY

### TALK THERAPY TIPS

Lucy MacDonald, a therapist in Eastern Ontario, offers a few suggestions for getting the most out of a telephone counselling session.

1. Choose a space at home or the office where you will not be interrupted. If possible, or necessary, let others know that you will be on the phone for the next hour and do not want to be

ing is giving me the courage and the voice to stand up for myself."

Fuelling the popularity of phone therapy is a slew of advantages: no more getting to and from the therapist's office, worrying about someone recognizing you walking into the building or having to face a vir-

tual stranger when discussing your darkest secrets. But it is this lack of face-to-face encounters that has Dr. Neil Gottheil, the clinical director at Turning Corners Psychological Services in Ottawa, worried. How can a therapist truly help a client without laying eyes on the person?

2. Turn off call waiting and cellphones so there are no distractions or interruptions.
3. If you are a parent, wait until your children are in bed or at school before your scheduled phone session.
4. Have a "starting point" question or statement when approaching your

first session. For example, "I am feeling angry most of the time and it is having a negative impact on my co-workers," or "My teenage daughter has decided she is quitting school and we don't know what to do."

5. Have a pen and paper handy to make notes and write down any questions you might have.

"I don't see how it is possible to connect with a client listening to words but with a wealth of information in facial expression and general presentation missing," he says, offering the example of someone who shows up for a session unshowered and dishevelled. "This is critical information gleaned

from the eyes."

He believes too that therapists entrusted to lead a client into potentially dangerous territory only when that client is ready, may not be able to make the determination correctly in the absence of non-verbal clues. And what if such probing results in an emotional meltdown? The therapist isn't even in the same room to help the client through it.

As an alternative, Dr. Gottheil recommends services across Canada such as Telemedicine, an Ontario-based two-way video-conferencing service available in most hospitals. At least there, the client is in a hospital setting that is monitored, he said.

Dr. Thomas Nagy, an independent practitioner and professor at Stanton University, supports the video-conferencing suggestion. He points out that video cameras attached to both party's computers would at least provide a visual component to the sessions. His reservations regarding phone therapy stem from a lack of research around its efficacy, and personal experience. One day, due to unavoidable circumstances, he was counselling a person with multiple personality disorder over the phone. Although she was talking about something sad, he had no idea how much pain she was in until suddenly, another voice, that of her alter-ego, came on the phone and said, "You know, Dr. Nagy, she has tears streaming down her face."

Dr. Nagy admits that this is an extreme example but one that underscores the importance of visual clues.

While many patients can't get to a therapist's office – people with disabilities or living in rural areas, for example – others simply refuse to go. Tiffany Goldberg, 33, the founder of Theraphone, a Manhattan-based telephone counselling service, created her company after serving on a mental health team specializing in counselling people after 9/11.

"There were family members, witnesses, people who fled the buildings and rescue and recovery workers who were so traumatized they wouldn't come into the city, they couldn't even get on a train."

Today, she reaches a population she believes wouldn't access traditional counselling services. She says that roughly 85% of her clients "are men who for reasons of pride and privacy would never walk into a therapist's office. To them, phone therapy is like going to a confessional. They talk about all sorts of intimate issues like sex, infidelity and relationships."

Distance-treatment research is being conducted in North America, but in the meantime Agnes Kowalski continues to grow her business undaunted by naysayers. In addition to setting up an ideal physical atmosphere for sessions, she prepares mentally as well. "I go into a zone, a soft focus place, where I'm listening to what you're saying and how you're saying it. I can hear the anger, tension, frustration, sadness or whatever is underneath. I peel away those layers just like I would in person."

She insists that she can read voice the way a traditional therapist reads body language.

Weekend Post

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