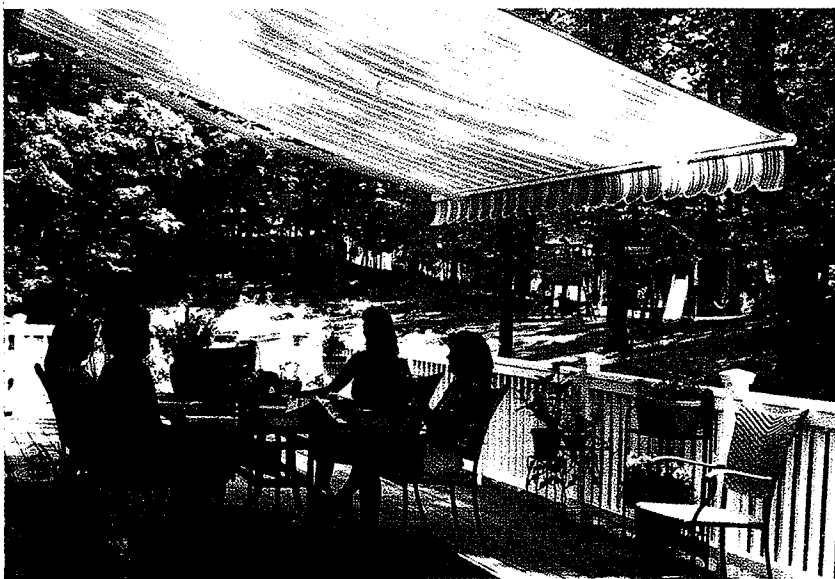


On a roll

From full sun to complete shade, retractable awnings offer the best of both worlds

By Gord Delamont Special to CANADIAN RENOVATOR



ASK ANY REALTOR WHAT TURNS A HOME into a hot property, and a deck or a patio is almost always close to the top of the list. And no wonder. A deck or patio is a wonderful haven for relaxing far away from all the stresses of modern living. And who can resist the call of the barbeque and festive outdoor entertaining when the weather gets warm?

For the renovator, a deck or patio job is also one of the most fulfilling contracts. After all, having a new outdoor space to enjoy can be one of the most satisfying parts of being a homeowner. Unfortunately, due to uncooperative weather that can be too hot or too wet, that satisfaction isn't always guaranteed—unless the investment is protected with a retractable awning.

“A quality retractable awning is one of the best investments a homeowner can make for outdoor comfort and value,” says Jake Korol, president of Rolltec Rolling Systems Ltd., a Concord, Ontario-based manufacturer of retractable awnings. “A

retractable awning extends and enlarges the living area and its usefulness. With a roof above a deck or patio, it becomes another room. And because the fabrics are so good and colourful, homeowners enjoy a holiday feeling every time they roll out the awning. It's like being in the Caribbean."

"At one time a retractable awning was looked at as a luxury item, now it's becoming a part of a house that many people wouldn't do without and lots more are just discovering."



With a retractable awning, homeowners also gain the flexibility to enjoy their deck or patio on their terms. When the sun gets too hot or a passing shower threatens, they simply extend their awning for near-instant protection for themselves, their guests and their furniture. When they want to enjoy the sunshine, they simply roll the awning back up for inconspicuous storage against the house. In addition, retractable awnings can help keep indoor temperatures lower as well, helping to reduce costly air-conditioning bills. Less direct sun can also help prevent carpets and furniture from fading.

"UV (ultra-violet) protection is such a big issue now," adds Korol. "Twenty years ago it wasn't an issue. Now everybody is looking for protection from the sun—and an awning is the best way to bring that protection to an outdoor space."

With all the advantages of a retractable awning, you'd think that everyone would have one. But as Korol notes, lingering misconceptions about affordability and ease of operation, combined with a big push to more comfort-oriented outdoor spaces, mean the retractable awning market is only now poised for substantial growth.

"At one time a retractable awning was looked at as a luxury item," says Korol. "Now it's becoming a part of a house that many people wouldn't do without and lots more are just discovering. Because there's been a trend to bigger and better outdoor living areas, more people have become interested in awnings and they're discovering how affordable and convenient they are. So the market opportunities for renovators are excellent, both as an add-on product or as a dealer."

Today's retractable awnings come in two basic types: manually-operated models, which are opened by hand, and motorized models, which operate by

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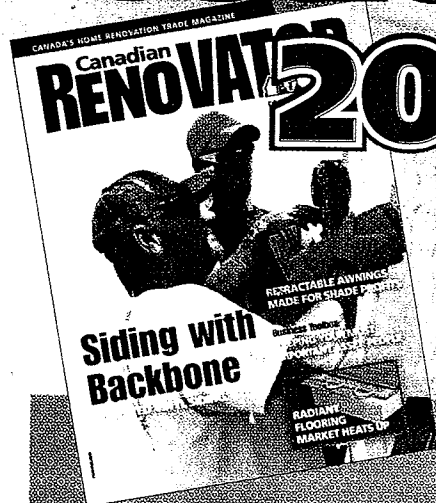
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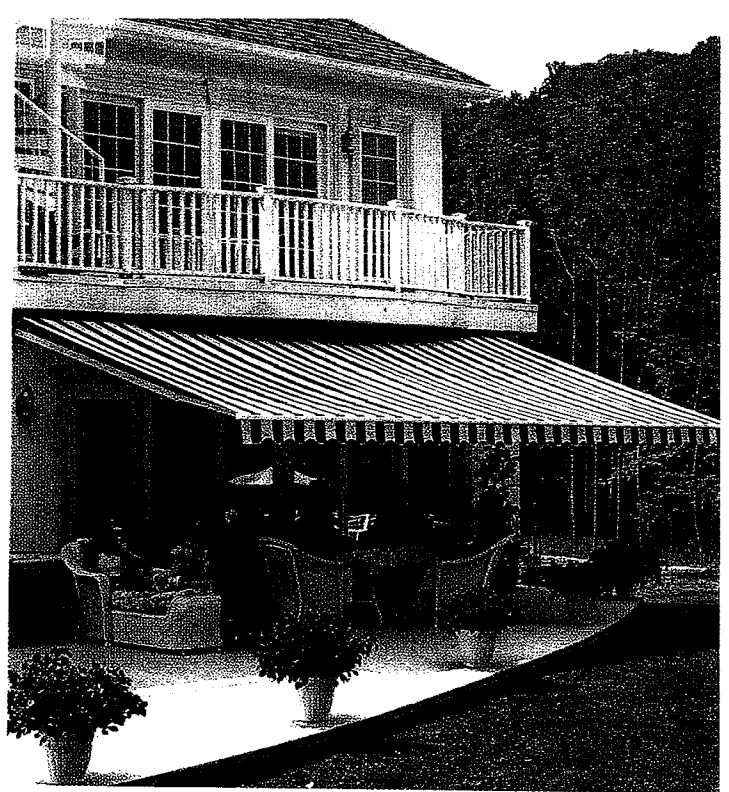
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electricity. Each offers its own advantages. Manually-operated models, for example, are designed so that any adult can open and close them easily, without any tools, in just a minute or so. Benefits include low-cost affordability, easy adaptability to almost any deck or patio, and support arms that can be angled back against the house or set vertically on the deck or patio floor. These arms provide extra support and stability, and increase the awning's versatility by making the attachment of certain options available.

Motorized awnings have retracting arms instead of vertical supports. These arms are operated by cable and an electric motor hidden inside the awning, which opens and closes the awning at the touch of a wall-mounted switch. Many motorized models also offer a remote control option that lets you open the awning from anywhere within about 100 feet, even from inside your home. Motorized awnings are the ultimate in convenience, with classic simplicity and beauty.

Rolltec's newest motorized awning, the Adalia Extreme (X3M), is offered in custom widths (1-inch increments) starting from 7-foot wide, with projections ranging from 5-foot, 4-inches to 11-foot, 8-inches. Backed by a comprehensive 10-year warranty, all parts are made from corrosion resistant materials and finished with a white powder coating. A noteworthy installation feature is weather stripping at the back of the hood that closes the gap at the wall and eliminates the need for caulking.

"Studies show that people will use an awning up to 75 per cent more when it's motorized," says Korol. "When it's just a matter of pushing a button to open or close the awning, it gets used a lot more when people are just sitting for a short period of time."

Some of the newest innovations are making retractable awnings even more convenient to use. Electronic sensors, for instance, can automatically extend the awning when the sun comes out and automatically retract it if the wind picks up.

“A homeowner can override the automatic sun control function at any time, but there is great peace of mind knowing that you have added protection from high winds if you are not at home to bring the awning in,” says Chris Olivieri, director of marketing for New Jersey-based Somfy Systems, a leading manufacturer of electric motors and electronic controls for retractable awnings.

Somfy electric motors are fully contained within the roller tubes of a retractable awning system for a sleek installation that blends right into a home. The motors are also sealed so they require no maintenance.

In addition, high-performance fabrics, such as the Sunbrella brand from North Carolina-based Glen Raven Custom Fabrics, LLC, contribute to the beauty of retractable awnings and help assure years of trouble-free enjoyment. Highly fade- and mildew-resistant and easy to clean, Sunbrella fabrics are backed by a limited five-year warranty.

“Our awning fabric introductions (for 2005) complement popular colours being used outside the home—brick, siding, shingles, paint—as well as inside—furniture and wall coverings,” says Gina Wicker, design director for Sunbrella. “It is essential that awnings work as design elements for exteriors and interiors.”



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