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Fall Home Improvement *and contractor's guide!*

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Inside: Over 35 Contractors and Businesses inside.



Signs it is time to overhaul your kitchen

Remodeling a kitchen adds value to a home. Remodeling Magazine's "Cost vs. Value Report" indicates mid-range kitchen remodels cost about \$66,000, and homeowners can expect to recover about 60 to 80 percent of that cost at resale.

Homeowners may wonder if remodeling their kitchens is worth the investment. But homeowners should not just consider cost, but also the current conditions of their kitchens when deciding if a renovation project is the right move to make. These signs indicate it may be time to renovate a kitchen.

- **Breakers are triggered:** If the lights go dark from a tripped circuit breaker every time you try to microwave and run the toaster oven at the same time, your wiring is likely not up to the task of handling the workload and could be out of date. A kitchen remodel will assess wiring load needs and an electric overhaul may be necessary.

- **Lack of storage:** One of the biggest hassles homeowners encounter in their kitchens is a lack of storage space. If making a meal involves a Jenga-like stacking and rearranging of kitchen tools, or if an avalanche occurs whenever you search for an item, you might need more storage. A carefully planned redesign can achieve this, even in a smaller kitchen.

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Kitchen — continued from page 2B

- **Outdated appliances:** Even if your appliances are not avocado green or mustard yellow relics of the 1970s, they might still need to be replaced. According to CRD Design, appliances are only expected to last around 10 to 15 years. If appliances have become unsafe or energy hogs, it could be time for a remodel.

- **Family is expanding (or shrinking):** Kitchens often are the heart of a home. They need to meet the needs of the family that resides in that home. A remodel can add space as needed. On the flip side, when a couple becomes empty nesters, kitchens can be redesigned and downsized to reflect their new needs and desires, such as the addition of a wine chiller or espresso station.

- **Poor lighting:** Task lighting is essential in a kitchen, but older homes may not be equipped with lighting where it's most needed. A carefully designed remodel can improve lighting with under-cabinet lights, pendants, overhead lighting, and even natural light to make the space attractive and more functional.

- **Frequent run-ins:** The notion that you can have too many cooks in the kitchen refers to having too many people trying to pitch in or offer their opinions. However, it also can apply to when too many people are gathering in a small space. Redesigning a kitchen can improve the efficiency of a space and make the room feel larger.

- **Aesthetic appeal:** Many kitchen remodels have been inspired by unsightly kitchens. Cosmetic changes can lead to big improvements.

Kitchen renovations can add instant appeal and help address issues that tend to plague outdated rooms.



Signs of electrical problems in a home

Homeowners know that all sorts of issues can affect a home. Issues can run the gamut from the merely annoying to the unsafe. Electrical issues fall into the latter category, posing a significant safety hazard if left unchecked.

According to the home safety experts at UL (formerly known as Underwriters Laboratories), learning to recognize warning signs of electrical wiring issues can greatly lower the risk of house fires. House fires pose a significant threat, as the Electrical Safety Foundation International notes that electrical malfunctions cause more than 50,000 house fires each year. UL indicates that the majority of those house fires can be prevented, and learning to recognize signs of a electrical problems in a home is a key component of home fire prevention.

- **Dimming or flickering lights:** The UL notes that light fixtures do not typically draw a substantial amount of power, so dimming or flickering lights is not often indicative of an issue with a fixture. Dimming or flickering lights could indicate that the circuit the lights are on is overburdened, most likely by large appliances sharing the circuit with the lights. If dimming and flickering lights are a problem, homeowners can speak to an electrician about

Electric - continued on page 4B

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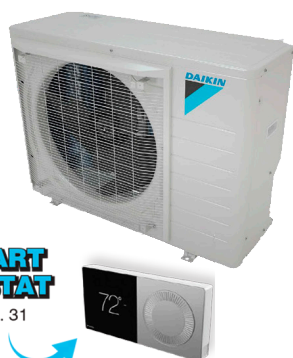
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Electric - Continued from page 3B

moving the fixtures to another circuit or installing a new line specifically for major appliances.

- **Odors:** Odor emanating from an outlet, fuse box or breaker panel should be reported to an electrician immediately. The odor, which some homeowners indicate smells like fish, could be a result of an overheated circuit. Odor coming from an outlet, fuse box or breaker panel could indicate a significant electrical issue, so homeowners should not hesitate to report this problem to an electrician. Odors can sometimes travel through HVAC systems as well, so homeowners should take note and call an electrician even if their outlets do not smell.

- **Hot outlets/switch plates:** Outlets and/or switch plates that are hot to the touch are another indicator of an electrical issue. UL notes that outlets that become hot even when nothing is plugged into them could be wired incorrectly. In such instances, an electrician will need to fix the issue, and in the meantime it may be best for homeowners to flip the breaker or remove the fuse for the outlet.

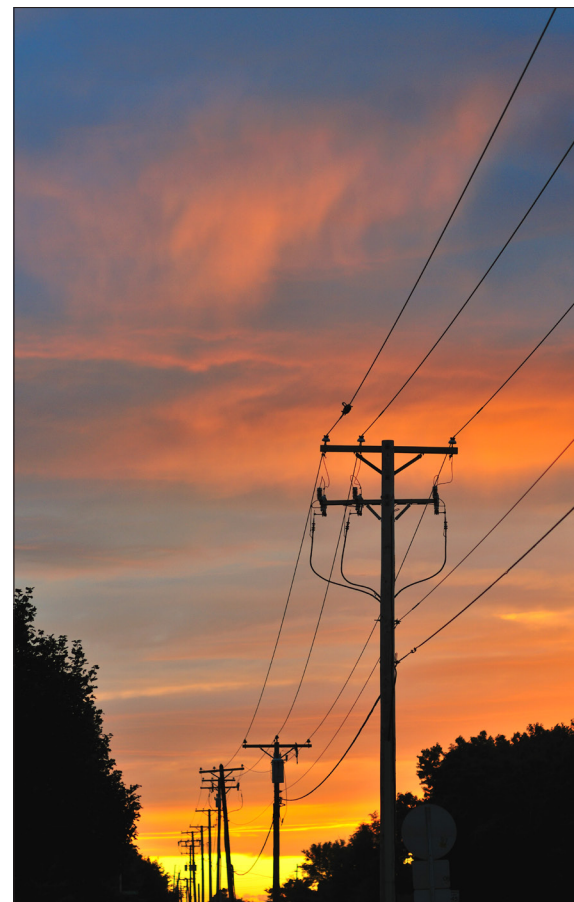
- **Frequently blown fuses or tripped breakers:** According to UL, circuit breakers and fuses have a built-in fail-safe that is designed to prevent overloading. Sometimes a tripped breaker is a result of an aging appliance. One way to detect that is to plug in the product to more than one outlet in the house. If each breaker trips, then the appliance is likely to blame. However, if using the same outlet continues to trip the breaker regardless of what's plugged into it, then the circuit requires the attention of an electrician.

Electrical issues increase the risk for home fires. Fortunately, such issues are generally preventable and often easily remedied by a qualified electrician.

Explaining easements, setbacks and CCRs

Property setbacks as well as easements and conditions, covenants and restrictions (CCRs) must be considered before renovating an existing home or building a new one. Setbacks are mandated buffers between surveyed property lines and permanent structures. Easements are legal designations that enable individuals or entities to use portions of a person's property for physical access or to build on it for one reason or another. Easements may be owned by utility companies for gas lines or government agencies when sidewalks are on a private property. Additional examples of easements include greenbelt conservation easements, beach easements or view easements, according to The Spruce,

a home and lifestyle resource. CCRs include rules established by many planned communities, subdivisions and planned unit developments. CCRs, easements and property setbacks can affect which type of renovations are allowed on particular plots and may affect the issuance of permits. It's essential to learn about property easements, CCRs and setbacks in advance and discuss them with contractors when drawing up preliminary plans. Your property deed or plat map as well as the local building inspection offices can highlight any regulations that may be in effect on your property and if they may affect future projects.





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Seven characteristics of modern houses



Homes contain a variety of components that appeal to homeowners with different ideas about the perfect place to call home. That starts with the style of a home.

Buildings are classified according to share components. A Craftsman style home will have a covered porch with a set of wide base columns, while a Cape Cod home is often defined by a gabled roof and dormer windows. Modern houses, which are sometimes called contemporary homes even though the terms are not interchangeable, will have their own sets of unique characteristics. Here's a look at seven features that make modern homes unique.

1. Minimalist approach: Contemporary and modern homes both employ an approach that leans toward minimalism, including clean design lines. Spaces are open and airy without the clutter of too many ornate architectural details. While modern homes may have some curvature to their design, contemporary ones are all about an angular look.

2. Neutral color palette: Modern homes tend to utilize a neutral color palette. Modern homes may use "earthy"

Modern - continued on page 7B

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Modern — continued from page 6B

elements, such as wood and brick, in ways that do not look rustic. Contemporary homes rely on a color palette of black and white with shades of gray or other neutral colors.

3. Geometric shapes: Modern homes have strong horizontal and vertical elements that showcase geometric shapes in their designs. Contemporary homes often have flat roofs, while modern homes may not.

4. Large, unadorned windows: Most modern homes showcase a lot of natural light by utilizing large windows that are not covered up by heavy window treatments or elements like shutters and thick trims. Large windows are the focus of the interior and shift attention to the view outdoors.

5. Open floor concept: A hallmark of modern interior design, the open concept floor plan removes many of the walls that tend to separate common areas of a home. This helps to foster the spread of natural light and maintains the emphasis on simplicity of design.

6. Smart elements: Thanks to the proliferation of smart technology, smart homes are cropping up with greater frequency. While smart devices can be included in any home style, they tend to feel like they were designed specifically for modern homes. In a similar vein, modern homes may include environmentally friendly elements, such as solar panels, upcycled materials, added insulation, and energy efficient lighting.

7. Updated kitchen spaces: The clean lines and attention to technology and open space generally extends to modern kitchens. Modern kitchens tend to feature efficient, top-tier appliances with additional storage and space amenities that keep the room from feeling cluttered.

While some may consider modern homes austere, many others are right at home among their clean lines and airy spaces.



Key components of three popular home interior styles

Considerable thought goes into designing a home's interior. From which color to paint the walls to the size of the living room couch, homeowners must make a variety of decisions when planing their home interiors.

One way to simplify interior design decisions is to choose a style. Interior design styles run the gamut from traditional to modern, and each style has its own

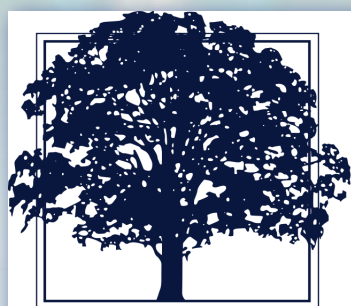
unique look and feel. Though homeowners need not feel beholden to any particular item associated with a given style, three of the more popular styles, traditional, modern and farmhouse, each have certain key components that can ensure a home ends up with a look homeowners are aiming for.

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Signs of pest infestation at home

Pests come in many shapes and sizes, from the smallest of insects that crawl through crevices or under moldings to larger mammals that find their way into attics and basements.

Taking care of a home or buying a new one can be stressful enough

without having to contend with a potential pest infestation. Much like any other

home issue, like a leak or faulty electrical system, pests can cause significant damage if left unchecked. Furthermore, the droppings left from certain creatures can compromise human health. For example, National Exterminating says rodents can spread hantavirus, while droppings from other pests can exacerbate asthma and allergies.

The best way to stay ahead of potential pest problems is to recognize signs that pests are present.

Droppings

A classic sign of infestation, pet waste includes fecal droppings or urine trails. Certain waste is easier to spot than others. For example, bed bug droppings are much smaller than mice or rat droppings. Homeowners can carry out thorough examinations of furniture, bedding, walls, floors, and areas of the home that get little foot traffic to look for pests.

Dead bodies

Another sign that points to pests is the presence of dead insect or animal bodies. A large number is indicative of a pest problem.

Active pests

The experts at Batzner Pest Control say that live animals or insects in and around the home are potential signs of infestation.

Most are very good at hiding, so finding specimens may require some investigat-

ing in the kitchen, bathrooms and outdoors near the perimeter of the home.

Evidence of nesting

Most animals want somewhere cozy and comfortable to bed down and will use materials available to them when making nests. Look for shredded paper, feathers, gathered twigs or grasses, home insulation piles, or any other red flags that could be nests.

Smells, sights and sounds

Animals and insects can give off smells and make sounds. Roaches are said to have an "oily" odor, while mice may produce "musty" smells. Homeowners may hear gnawing, squeaking, scurrying, or scratching. In addition, there may be holes, gnaw marks, signs of burrows, and other signs of pests. Wood shavings or sawdust could indicate the presence of termites, which cause serious structural damage.

Stored pesticides

People who are viewing a potential new home and find cans and canisters of pesticides or pest traps should recognize that there is likely a problem with animals or insects there.

Pests can be a concern for homeowners, who can overcome the issue after learning to identify signs of their presence.




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Interior — continued from page 7B

1. Traditional

Homes with a traditional interior style give a formal yet welcoming feel. Many individuals associate crown molding and wainscoting with traditional interiors, so that's something homeowners aiming for this style should keep in mind. Minimal or modern furniture pieces don't fit with the traditional style, which tends to utilize period pieces made from real wood.

2. Modern

Modern interiors may differ depending on which style of modern homeowners are aiming for. Midcentury modern typically features unique furnishings that some might see as retro. However, many companies now offer updated takes on midcentury modern that call to mind a bygone era but don't make individuals feel as though they're living in a museum. Urban modern is another popular modern style, and home interiors fashioned in this style tend to be light, airy and not crowded with furnishings. Calm, soft tones are a go-to with urban modern interiors, helping to create the serene settings many homeowners are hoping to create with this style.

3. Farmhouse

Farmhouse has become very popular in recent years. In fact, a recent survey from the interior design service Modsy found that farmhouse was the most popular design style in 26 states. Farmhouse is beloved for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is its association with a simpler lifestyle. The rustic charm of the countryside is never far from the mind when in a home with a farmhouse-inspired interior. Traditional farmhouse and modern farmhouse are different styles, but natural materials and bright colors, particularly white walls, are elements shared by both.

Traditional, modern and farmhouse are three popular home interior styles. Each has its own unique components, and homeowners can supplement their favored style as they see fit.

Low-cost ways to revamp living areas

Home improvement projects require substantial financial investment. But just because a homeowner wants to bring a fresh look indoors doesn't mean he or she has to break the bank along the way.

Living rooms are some of the most frequently used spaces in a home, and they can use an update from time to time to stay on trend or to make the area more functional for a changing family dynamic. Here are some budget-friendly ideas for breathing new life into living room designs.

- Establish the budget. Homeowners should figure out how many dollars they can designate to a living room makeover before purchasing supplies or hiring out the work. Figure out the scope of the remodel, visit stores or suppliers to price out materials, get estimates from contractors, and then plan for some unforeseen circumstances along the way to determine if this type of renovation is affordable. If not, scale things back until the project more closely aligns with your budget.
- Change the paint color.

Lighter and brighter colors are on trend. A can or two of paint can do wonders for updating a space without a large financial commitment. Pair that new paint color with new window coverings and complementary throw pillows to pull the theme together with minimal expense.

- Update the flooring. Tired, outdated carpeting or other flooring can use an overhaul. While solid hardwood flooring may be preferable, there are many types of laminate flooring that mimic the looks of popular wood colors and styles for a fraction of the cost. Plus, many are sold at home improvement retailers and even at warehouse clubs or online for reasonable prices. Laminate flooring also may be a potential DIY job for a skilled homeowner, saving even more money.
- Introduce a fireplace. Fireplaces were once hot commodities, but that popularity waned in the 1970s and 1980s. Homeowners with chimneys may discover a fireplace was boarded over and the bare bones still exist that can be renovated to bring back character.

There also are ventless freestanding units that are quite affordable that can mimic the look of a built-in fireplace.

- Reupholster instead of replace furniture. There's no need to throw away quality furniture if the fabric is the only thing impeding design. New upholstery or even a slipcover can update designs.

- Conquer clutter. Rather than adding something to the living room, remove clutter to give the room a more airy feel. This can instantly change the look of the room. Use cord covers to tame plugs for electronics and remove unnecessary furniture from the room.

- Improve lighting. Another easy and often inexpensive fix is to change lighting fixtures, including using brighter, more energy efficient LED bulbs, and to assess lighting needs to eliminate dark corners of rooms that can make the space seem drab.

Living room spaces in need of an update often can benefit from improvements that go easy on the wallet.

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How to pick the right trees for your property



Trees benefit a landscape by serving both aesthetic and utilitarian functions. A home surrounded by healthy green trees can be a sight to behold, and those same trees can benefit surrounding plants and wildlife at the same time.

As appealing as trees are, not all trees and landscapes make for the perfect match. The Arbor Day Foundation notes the importance of planning when designing a landscape. Planning ensures the trees homeowners ultimately choose for their properties will grow well in the soil and moisture present in their yards.

Careful consideration of a handful of variables can help homeowners determine which trees will make the best fit for their properties.

- **Height:** Homeowners must consider the projected height of a tree before planting it. Avoid trees that will bump into anything when fully grown, as that can adversely affect surrounding greenery and pose a safety hazard. The ADF's tree sizing guide can be accessed at <https://www.arborday.org/trees/right-TreeAndPlace/size.cfm> and serves as

Trees - continued on page 11B

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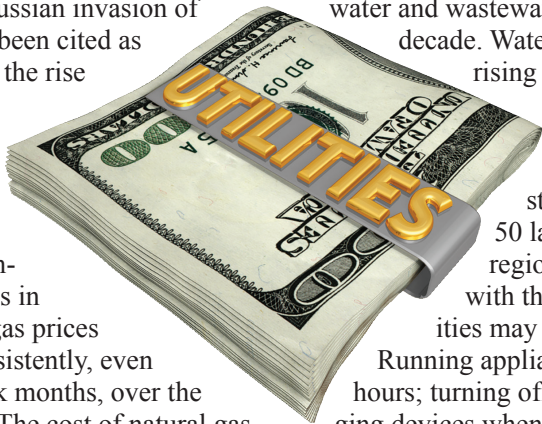


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Rising utility costs

Much like the cost of a loaf of bread or a carton of eggs now costs consumers considerably more than it did a couple of years ago, the price to heat and cool a home has risen considerably. Various factors, from climate-related events to supply chain issues to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, have been cited as contributors to the rise in utility costs, which is not just a North American problem. Following pandemic-induced lows in 2020, natural gas prices have risen consistently, even during off-peak months, over the last year-plus. The cost of natural gas that's delivered through pipes was up 24 percent in February from the year prior. Electricity has gone up as well. According to Choose Energy, an energy report-



ing resource, electricity rates have risen across the 50 states in 2022 by anywhere from 1.7 percent over 2021 (Alaska) to 46.1 percent (Maine). The national average increase is 11.3 percent. CBS News reported in 2019 that Americans are paying up to 30 percent more on water and wastewater bills in less than a decade. Water and sewer bills are rising faster than inflation rates, having increased for an eighth consecutive year in a study of the country's 50 largest metropolitan regions. People concerned with the rising costs of utilities may have to be creative. Running appliances during off-peak hours; turning off lights and unplugging devices when not in use; investigating solar power; and investing in water-saving faucets, shower heads and toilets can help individuals curtail their energy consumption.

Trees - Continued from page 10B

an invaluable resource for homeowners who want to plant new trees around their properties.

- **Canopy spread:** Trees grow out as well as up, so it's important to consider their potential width at maturity as well. The ADF sizing guide can help homeowners get an idea of how wide a tree is likely to be at maturity. Trees that spread out quite a bit don't necessarily need to be avoided, but it's important that they're planted far enough apart so they don't adversely affect surrounding plants. In addition, wide trees that are planted too close together can make the landscape appear crowded, taking something away from its aesthetic appeal.

- **Growth rate:** Growth rate is an important variable because it can affect how quickly homeowners will see changes in their landscapes. Homeowners who want to plant for privacy can consider trees with quick growth rates or purchase more mature trees that are already near full growth. Those who are not in need of instant transformation can try trees with slower growth rates, which the ADF notes typically live longer than fast-growing species.

- **Requirements:** Different trees require different amounts of sun and moisture and different soil components to thrive. Homeowners can have their soil tested to determine which trees will thrive in it. Local garden centers can be a great resource for homeowners who want insight as to which trees will thrive in their local climates.

Trees serve many functions on a property. Choosing the right trees for a landscape requires careful consideration of a host of variables.

Did you know?

The Electrical Safety Foundation International reports that home electrical fires account for an estimated 51,000 fires each year. Those fires exact a significant human and financial toll, causing roughly 500 deaths and more than 1,400 injuries while leading to \$1.3 billion in property damage. Smoke detectors are an important safety feature that may not prevent fires, but they can prevent deaths caused by home fires. In fact, the ESFI reports that 65 percent of home fire deaths result from fires in homes with no working smoke detectors.

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The secrets to cold weather entertaining



Upon the arrival of cold weather, people tend to move indoors and limit their time spent in the elements. For those who live in places where there are restrictions placed on indoor entertaining and gatherings, it may be challenging to find ways to spend time safely together as temperatures drop.

The COVID-19 virus as well as other respiratory viruses are spread from person to person through respiratory droplets released into the air while coughing, talking or sneezing, states the Mayo Clinic. A person is more likely to inhale these droplets from an infected person while indoors, especially when they're in close contact with that person. When outdoors, there is a lower risk of contraction.

Outdoor entertaining in winter may be challenging, especially in regard to keeping everyone warm. The following are some solutions that can help people stay warm and have fun outside.

Invest in fire pits

Fire pits are an affordable way to heat a patio or another outdoor area. They can be great places for friends and family to gather around and enjoy special occasions. They're readily available from garden centers and home

Secrets - continued on page 13B



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Secrets - Continued from page 12B

improvement retailers at a variety of price points.

Permanent fire pits can be built by a homeowner or professionally built by masonry experts.

Install an outdoor fireplace

A step up from a fire pit, outdoor fireplaces not only add warmth, but also improve the ambiance and value of an outdoor entertaining area. Set up outdoor furniture right next to an outdoor fireplace and you have a cozy alternative living room where everyone can gather.

Explore outdoor heating systems

Few things are more effective at warming up outdoor

entertaining areas than patio heaters and infrared heaters. These devices are far more effective than average fire pits or fireplaces. One or two heaters will be enough to keep a large entertaining area warm.

Keep cozy options available

Guests should dress warmly, but having a basket of throw blankets, scarves and parkas available for extra warmth while mingling is helpful. Use outdoor rugs to insulate from the cold from the ground up.

Serve hearty foods and beverages

Stews, chilis, soups, and other hot foods can help

guests warm themselves up from the inside out. Warmed cider, hot chocolate and mulled wines also can be served to help people stay warm.

Get moving

Incorporate activities that encourage guests to move around and stay warm. Beanbag tosses, dancing and even sports like flag football can keep guests' blood flowing.

Entertaining outdoors doesn't have to stop when the weather cools. Find ways to stay comfortable and safe when entertaining outside in the cold.



How to cut costs on home renovations

Do you still have an avocado green kitchen? Is your living room dank and dark? Perhaps there is only one bathroom for a family of six? Answering yes to any of these questions could serve as the catalyst for a home renovation project.

Home improvement projects come in all shapes and sizes — some with huge budgets and others that are more cost-conscious. Regardless of what homeowners hope to achieve with their renovations, a common goal across any price point is a desire to save as much money as possible. Home renovations can be expensive, but there are ways to cut costs.

• Assess the merit of the project. Remodeling magazine annually publishes a "Cost vs. Value Report" that lists the average cost and return on investment

homeowners can expect of various types of projects. If you're planning to sell your home soon, it may be best to focus on repairs and renovations that will generate the most substantial ROI.

• Hire a contractor. Even avid do-it-yourselfers can sometimes benefit from a contractor's expertise, particularly for complex tasks. Don't waste money by trying tough jobs yourself; rely on an experienced contractor who can get supplies for less money and will do the job right the first time. Compare bids from several different contractors and figure out the best value.

• Refurbish existing features. Rather than a complete gut and rebuild, figure out where you can revitalize existing fixtures and more. For example, refinishing existing cabinets can save you up to 50 percent compared with the cost of new cabinetry, according

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Cut costs - continued on page 15B

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Design ideas to give your home a farmhouse feel

Farmhouse style homes are having a moment. A 2020 survey from Homes.com asked more than 5,000 adults across the United States about their favorite house style from a list that included bohemian craftsman, mid-century modern ranch, French chateau, and Tudor, among others. Modern farmhouse was the runaway winner, as participants in 42 of the 50 states indicated this simple, cozy style was their favorite.

Home renovation projects can help homeowners put their own unique stamp

Farmhouse - continued on page 15B



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Farmhouse — continued from page 14B

on their homes, and such projects can be both aesthetic and functional in nature. The following are some farmhouse design elements homeowners can consider as they look to transform their home interiors with this popular style in mind.

Exposed beams

Exposed beams instantly evoke images of a farmhouse. The home improvement experts at BobVila.com note that this rustic renovation project can utilize real wood or faux beams that look like the real thing. Decorative beams that have nothing to do with a home's structural integrity can be installed by skilled do-it-yourselfers. However, even faux beams are heavy, and BobVila.com recommends homeowners have an engineer assess their existing structure prior to installation.

Distressed wood finishes

Distressing is designed to make something look less than perfect. Distressed wood finishes can be found throughout many farmhouse style homes. Furniture and picture frames can provide the distressed look farmhouse fans are looking for. This is a relatively inexpensive project that many homeowners can tackle on

their own after watching some online tutorials that recommend the right tools and techniques to get the job done right.

Kitchen sink

Many components combine to create a truly classic farmhouse kitchen. But perhaps no component is more essential than the classic farmhouse sink. The renovation experts at HGTV note that a classic farmhouse sink features a deep, wide basin. Farmhouse sinks are large enough to handle all the dishes that come after a big family meal. Old-fashioned porcelain sinks are worth consideration by homeowners who want their kitchen sinks to evoke a traditional farmhouse feel.

Countertops

HGTV recommends butcher block countertops for homeowners who favor European farmhouse style. Homeowners overhauling their kitchens to create a farmhouse feel should consider installing a large island with a walnut butcher block countertop for an authentic farmhouse feel.

Farmhouse style homes are wildly popular. Some simple renovations can help homeowners with a fondness for farmhouse style bring this classic look into their homes.



Cut costs - Continued from page 13B

to Angi (formerly Angie's List), a cost comparison and business review resource.

- Choose midgrade materials. Certain materials may be all the rage but they come with a higher price tag. Angi reports that granite counters could be \$60 to \$100 per square foot. However, a composite or laminate that looks like granite and wears well may be \$10 to 40 per square foot. Figure out where you can choose middle-of-the-road materials for maximum value.

- Avoid peak seasons. You'll pay more to install a deck or a pool right before the outdoor entertaining season. There also may be a premium to get work done right before a major holiday. Therefore, consult the calendar to find an off time for a renovation and book it then to save.

- Do some prep work. You might be able to save by doing some of the demolition and preparatory work yourself. For example, you can tear up old carpeting before the installation of new tile floors. Perhaps you can mend and patch up walls before a paint job.

- Buy a display item. Former showroom kitchens and baths often are sourced at a fraction of their recommended retail prices, according to Real Homes, a home remodel guide based in the United Kingdom. Retailers often update their displays and you may score existing showroom items at a discount.

Renovations can be expensive, but there are many different ways to cut costs.

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Six steps to organize your home office

Remote working has become popular in recent years, but the “working-from-home” economy bloomed exponentially as the world was forced to confront the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Stanford economist Nicholas Bloom, as of summer 2020, 42 percent of the United States labor force was working from home full-time.

The need for home office spaces has increased as more people work from home. Many people have retrofitted various spaces around their homes into areas to get work done. More organized home work spaces can increase productivity. Individuals can follow these guidelines to create effective, organized home offices.

Begin with the desk

The desk is the primary spot where work will take place. The right desk accessories can provide visual appeal and also serve practical purposes. Have cups for holding pens and

pencils, baskets and bins for larger items, and store whatever you can elsewhere so it does not lead to clutter on the desk. Store wireless printers in a cabinet or even on a bookshelf so it doesn't take up real estate on the desk.

Create a printing station

While you're moving that wireless printer elsewhere, designate a space to serve as the central printing hub. This way children who need to print assignments for school will know where to go as well. Printer supplies like extra ink cartridges and printer paper can be kept in decorative storage boxes nearby.

Increase your shelving

Shelving can help keep items organized and off the desk in home offices without closets or drawers. Look for shelves that blend in with decor but are sturdy enough to be functional.

Organize paperwork

Figure out a system that



works for you to help tidy up papers you choose to save. While some papers can be scanned and stored as digital files, color-coded file folders can organize statements and other important documents. This makes it easy to find the folder you need when looking for certain documents.

Establish a charging station

Repurpose certain items, such as a desk organizer, into an easily accessible electronics charging station where phones and tablets can charge at one time.

Make essential binders

HGTV suggests making binders that can store the most important

papers for easy access — even in an emergency. Set up a binder for automotive paperwork, including repair receipts, a medical binder where key medical records are kept, a binder for manuals for devices in the home, and one to store financial documents.

These organizational tips can help remedy common problems around a home office.

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Fireplace trends help create attractive, comfortable rooms

Fireplaces are useful features in a home. Fireplaces are sources of ambient heat and also add style to indoor spaces.

Fireplaces can complement just about any interior style. Fireplaces can be traditional and burn wood or connect to a home's natural gas supply for on-demand ambiance. What's more, fireplaces may come in vented or ventless varieties, depending on homeowners' preferences and what is allowed by community building codes. That means a chimney or flue may not be needed — expanding the list of rooms where a fireplace can be installed.

Certain trends have emerged among fireplace fans in recent years. Here's a look at what's getting consumers fired up about these home decor elements.

- **Minimalist style:** Many fireplaces are designed in neutral colors with minimal trim that directs focus on the fire and not the appliance. When the fireplace is not in use, it blends in with surroundings and will not compete for attention with other design elements.

- **Convertible fireplaces:** Homeowners can

choose between open or sealed fireplaces. A convertible fireplace enables homeowners to have the best features of these options. A convertible fireplace can be converted to wood from gas, or the opposite, in as little as 30 minutes.

- **Nature-inspired materials:** Natural stone continues to be a material of choice in fireplace surrounds. Light colors work well for a fireplace, and also fit with today's lighter color interior design preferences. Natural stone also works perfectly with both contemporary and rustic decor.

- **Vintage fireplaces:** Vintage continues to be a buzzword in 2022, and the choice to go vintage also applies to fireplace styles. A room decorated in vintage elements can be complemented with a vintage fireplace or one designed to look vintage.

- **Integrate into wall decor:** Fireplaces that are built right into a wall save space. One can have a television and a fireplace on the same wall. These types of fireplaces work well in modern home designs. Other fireplaces may be built into bookshelves or other wall features.

Fireplaces can im-

prove the appeal of a home. Various trends are popular this year, making fireplaces highly coveted features.



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It's no secret that a good-looking lawn can entice buyers when selling a home, but homeowners may not realize just how much they can benefit from even the smallest investments of time and money in their home exteriors. According to the Top Agent Insights Q2 2019 Report from HomeLight, low-cost outdoor home improvements to a landscape provide sizable returns on investment. For example, the report found that a \$268 investment in a lawn care service can lead to a \$1,211 increase in home value at resale. Similarly, \$340 worth of fresh mulch can increase home value at resale by \$769. More than 85 percent of real estate professionals who participated in the HomeLight survey recommended other small and simple projects, including removing dirt, grime and cobwebs from a home entrance and trimming trees and shrubs prior to putting a home on the market.

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Low-cost ways to revamp living areas

Home improvement projects require substantial financial investment. But just because a homeowner wants to bring a fresh look indoors doesn't mean he or she has to break the bank along the way.

Living rooms are some of the most frequently used spaces in a home, and they can use an update from time to time to stay on trend or to make the area more functional for a changing family dynamic. Here are some budget-friendly ideas for breathing new life into living room

designs.

- Establish the budget. Homeowners should figure out how many dollars they can designate to a living room makeover before purchasing supplies or hiring out the work. Figure out the scope of the remodel, visit stores or suppliers to price out materials, get estimates from contractors, and then plan for some unforeseen circumstances along the way to determine if this type of renovation is affordable. If not, scale things back until the project more closely aligns with your budget.

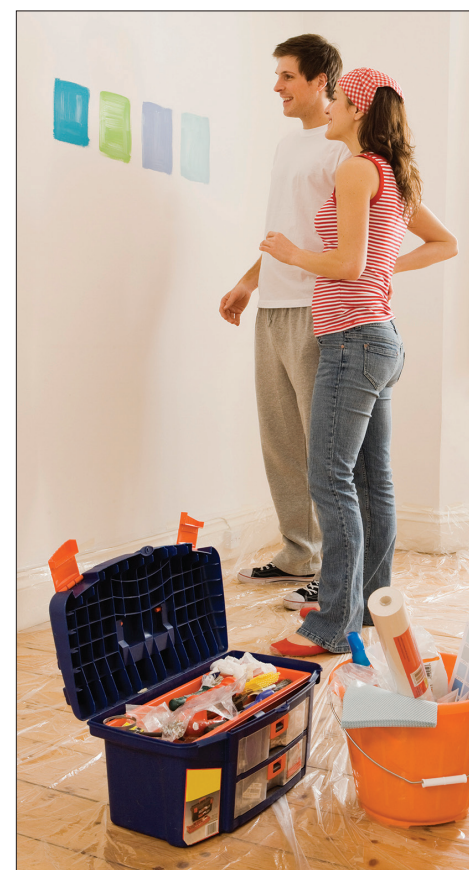
- Change the paint color. Lighter and brighter colors are on trend. A can or two of paint can do wonders for updating a space without a large financial commitment. Pair that new paint color with new window coverings and complementary throw pillows to pull the theme together with minimal expense.

- Update the flooring. Tired, outdated carpeting or other flooring can use an overhaul. While solid hardwood flooring may be preferable, there are many types of laminate flooring that mimic the looks of popular wood colors and styles for a fraction of the cost. Plus, many are sold at home improvement retailers and even at warehouse clubs or online for reasonable prices. Laminate flooring also may be a potential DIY job for a skilled homeowner, saving even more money.

- Introduce a fireplace. Fireplaces were once hot commodities, but that popularity waned in the 1970s and 1980s. Homeowners with chimneys may discover a fireplace was boarded over and the bare bones still exist that can be renovated to bring back character. There also are ventless freestanding units that are quite affordable that can mimic the look of a built-in fireplace.

- Reupholster instead of replace furniture. There's no need to throw away quality furniture if the fabric is the only thing impeding design. New upholstery or even a slipcover can update designs.

- Conquer clutter. Rather than adding something to the living room, remove clutter to give the room a more airy feel. This can instantly change the look of the room. Use cord covers to tame plugs



for electronics and remove unnecessary furniture from the room.

- Improve lighting. Another easy and often inexpensive fix is to change lighting fixtures, including using brighter, more energy efficient LED bulbs, and to assess lighting needs to eliminate dark corners of rooms that can make the space seem drab.

Living room spaces in need of an update often can benefit from improvements that go easy on the wallet.



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The different ways to repair a driveway

Asphalt driveways do not last forever. Over time, weather and general usage can degrade the driveway surface, resulting in cracks, pitting and more. Ultraviolet rays, salt and automotive fluids also can affect the appearance and functionality of a driveway. An unsightly driveway can adversely affect curb appeal and resale potential.

Homeowners have to consider various factors when it comes to repairing driveways. They may have the option of getting the driveway resurfaced, resealed or repaved, and each project is unique.

Resurfacing

According to the home improvement price comparison site Kompore It, resurfacing is simpler and faster than installing a new asphalt driveway. With resurfacing, any cracks are filled in to create an even base. Then a new layer of asphalt is applied

Three factors to consider before converting an attic

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, many homeowners suddenly found themselves in need of more usable square footage in their homes. Required to work from home due to social distancing recommendations, millions of working professionals suddenly found themselves setting up shop at kitchen tables or islands, in alcoves, garages, or even walk-in closets. Those makeshift offices were never supposed to be permanent, but as companies loosen workplace policies and embrace full remote or hybrid working arrangements, professionals are seeking more permanent home office solutions.

Home additions are a possibility for homeowners who need more usable square footage, but add-ons may not be the right option for everyone. If adding on won't work, homeowners may want to look up ... at their attics.

Attics with ample space can make for ideal home offices, as they're away from the hustle and bustle of a home's main floor. That can make it easier to concentrate when everyone is in the house and reduce the likelihood that video calls with colleagues and clients will be interrupted by kids and pets.

Attic conversions are not always

possible, and the following are three important factors homeowners may need to consider before they can go forward with such projects.

1. **Dimensions:** Both the renovation experts at This Old House and the real estate experts at UpNest indicate that at least half of a finished attic must be a minimum of seven feet high and seven feet wide and 70 square feet. Requirements may differ depending on where homeowners live, but that 7-7-70 guideline is generally the minimum requirement. An attic that fails to meet such requirements won't necessarily be a lost cause, but it might be costly to make adjustments that ultimately align with local codes.

2. **Access:** Access is another aspect that must adhere to local safety guidelines. Many attics are accessible only through pulldown ladders, but that will have to change if homeowners repurpose their attic spaces. A staircase that complies with local laws will need to be installed, and contractors can work with homeowners to build that and estimate the cost. Homeowners who simply want to put desks in their attics without going with full-fledged conversions are urged to adhere to local access requirements

anyway, as they're intended to ensure residents can safely escape attics in the case of a fire or another emergency.

3. **Climate control:** Attics are converted to provide residents with more livable space. Converted space is only livable if the climate within the attic can be controlled so it's cool in the summer and warm in the winter. An existing HVAC unit needs to efficiently heat and cool an extra room. If it can't, bills might spike because the rest of the home likely won't be as comfortable, forcing homeowners to adjust thermostats to offset that discomfort. That also could affect the unit's life expectancy. Before going forward with an attic renovation, homeowners should contact HVAC professionals to determine if attic spaces can be serviced with the existing units and ductwork, or if an alternative arrangement must be worked out to make the spaces livable.

Attic conversions can be great ways to make existing spaces more livable. Homeowners considering such projects should pay attention to three important variables as they try to determine if attic conversions will work for them.



ACCESSIBILITY IS an important variable to consider as homeowners try to determine if they can convert their attics into a livable space.

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Open-concept homes have become increasingly popular in recent years. An open-concept home is one in which the rooms flow into one another with limited obstruction from walls or other barriers. According to the National Association of Home Builders, 84 percent of new single-family homes have fully or partially open layouts.

While they may seem like a new trend, open floor plans are anything but. Early American homes featured open, often one- or two-room units built around the central kitchen/hearth. This maximized warmth and functionality. Homes evolved as incomes grew, and soon homes had several smaller rooms with specialized functions.

What's old has become new again. However, before diving head first into a new home purchase or a big renovation to realize an open-concept dream, consider the pros and cons of this type of setup to determine if it's really right for you.

Advantages of open floor plans

Open floor plans facilitate the flow of natural light throughout a space and can promote air flow, helping to reduce warm or cool pockets of air in otherwise closed-off rooms.

Open homes make socializing easier, even when people are doing different things. While someone is cooking dinner in the kitchen, he or she can still interact with someone else playing video games in the family room or paying bills in the home office. Entertaining also is easier, as mingling with guests is much more convenient when walls are not getting in the way.

A smaller home can feel much larger if it employs an open concept. The square footage is not divided into smaller quarters, which sometimes are rooms (such as formal dining rooms) that are only used a few times per year. This eliminates underused spaces and opens up sight lines



Pros and cons to open-concept homes

in the layout.

The value of real estate has risen dramatically since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and prospective buyers may prefer an open-concept plan because it can help them minimize building costs.

Disadvantages of open floor plans

Open layouts are not for everyone. The same sense of space that occurs when walls are taken down may make rooms feel cavernous and less cozy, particularly in homes with ample square footage. In addition, privacy can be hard to come by when all rooms feed into one another.

When the kitchen is not separate from the family room space, that makes it easy for noise to compromise the area's comfort levels. There is no hiding from noise

in an open floor plan, as sounds from voices, television shows and appliances tend to echo and blend together. And if the home is a single-story layout, those noises from the main living areas also may carry to adjacent bedrooms.

Smoke and smells are another thing to consider. When something on the stove

spills over, a small range hood will not be practical for clearing smoke from a large space. Though the aroma of freshly cooked food is enticing, it can make it hard for cooks to keep guests out of the kitchen.

Driveway — continued from page 18B

over the existing one. That new layer can range in thickness from 1.5 to 3 inches. A heavy rolling machine will then smooth and flatten the layers together. If the driveway has minor pitting or cracking, then resurfacing can be a cost-effective strategy, as it may be a \$3,000 to \$6,000 job as opposed to \$5,000 to \$10,000 with repaving.

Resealing

Resealing a driveway, also called sealcoating, is another repair strategy. HGTV says resealing can be a do-it-yourself project. Resealing helps the driveway last longer.

The driveway needs to be clean and dry, with holes and cracks filled prior to sealcoating. Start at the far edge of the driveway and seal that area by "cutting-in" by hand for a neat edge. Afterward the rest of the driveway can be

sealed using a squeegee or broom. This project can be completed within two or three days if no precipitation is forecast.

Repaving

A project best left to professionals, repaving typically involves the removal of an existing driveway and the installation of a new one. The sub-grade layer is essential in the process for a smooth look. Contractors also will assess soil and grading when doing work. The construction blog Main Infrastructure says the new asphalt driveway can vary in thickness between two and six inches, depending on budget and need. The contractor also can advise if full-depth asphalt application or an aggregate base is practical.

Assessing the condition of driveway can give homeowners a better idea about which type of repair project best suits their property.

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Seven things to know before replacing windows



The decision to replace windows often comes down to aesthetics and necessity. Drafty windows can reduce energy efficiency in a home, requiring HVAC systems to work harder to keep interiors comfortable. The harder the HVAC must work, the more homeowners will pay in energy costs.

Old windows also may be points of entry for water and insects. Despite the importance of windows, Money magazine advises that new windows make up only a fraction of the home's total exterior "envelope," resulting in only about 5 to 15 percent of total energy savings.

But there are still plenty of reasons to invest in new windows.

1. Vinyl or aluminum may be best. Lumber is farmed rather quickly today and solid wood products may not stand up to elements as well as wood used a half-century ago. To avoid rot, vinyl windows often are an affordable and durable choice. Homeowners also have the option of wood windows with aluminum cladding, which are long-lasting.

2. Moisture problems indicate windows need to be replaced. Condensation that shows up as fogging between double-pane windows or on the inside of windows indicates that the windows are starting to fail. If installing a vapor barrier in the basement or crawl space, ventilating properly when showering or cooking, or using a dehumidifier indoors does not remedy the situation, it might be time to replace windows.

3. Windows add curb appeal. Beyond functionality, replacement windows immediately update the look of the home and can improve curb appeal since they are one of the most prominent features on the exterior of a home. If a house needs an update, replacing windows and can be a quick and affordable update.

4. Consider other energy-efficient upgrades. Sometimes older windows can be salvaged, especially if they are not damaged and only moderately drafty. Replacing panes, sash cords, weather stripping, and even glazing may be less expensive than replacing a window. Plus, older homes with attractive windows complement one another. To keep energy bills down, think about adding insulation to the attic and basement — which is a good idea even if you are replacing windows.

5. The wrong windows can adversely affect home value. The National Association of Realtors says homeowners get about 73 percent of their replacement window investment back when they resell a home. But choosing the wrong windows might lower the value of the home. It's important to match the look of the original windows, including window material and the divided light pattern (the number of panes in each window) with the original windows.

6. Think about soundproofing, too. When

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upgrading windows, also think about how certain windows can cancel out noises and make homes more sound-proof. Some windows can help reduce outdoor distractions like leaf blowers or lawn mowers.

7. Proper installation is key to longevity. Replacement windows are only

as good as their installation in many cases. Poor installation and orders of standard rather than custom sized windows could result in poor fitting and seals. Homeowners should carefully vet and review window replacement contractors to find the best professionals for the job.



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