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# Advocate

## The gray house with the yellow door — a Bialczyk reality

**BY ROXIE MURPHY**  
**ADVOCATE STAFF WRITER**  
 rmurphy@wardpub.com

BELLE — Tall trees in fall colors line the edges of a hay field — soon-to-be a park-like yard — around a gray house with a yellow door a little more than three miles down State Highway 89. The picturesque house in-progress is the soon-to-be forever home of Garret and Danica Bialczyk and their two small children.

The property is currently enclosed with a fence and gate. Danica explained their driveway is a shared road. Two other families who purchased parcels of the old farm are building nearby. She said she would eventually like to remove the gate.

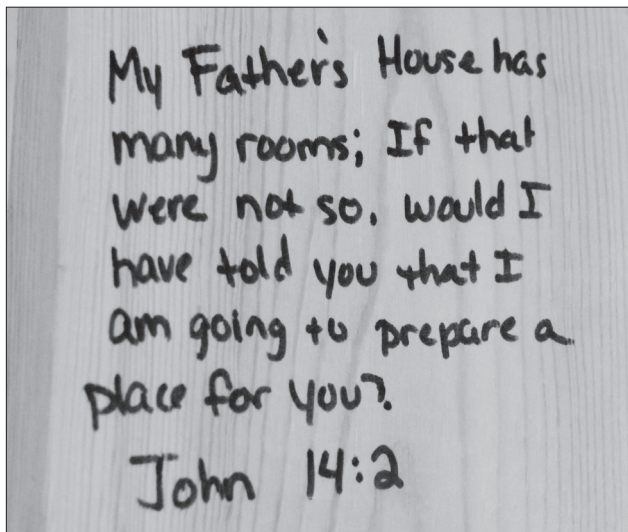
The house is also currently surrounded by hay bales, but they said it was a happy accident.

“We have some folks renting land below us, the dad got confused and started cutting ours down. The son came in and said, ‘hey, you’re in the wrong spot.’ He calls me and said he made a couple of passes by accident. We had been looking for someone to mow it down, so we told them to finish it and they can have the hay.”

They also discussed potentially purchasing animals for their kids to raise for 4-H.

The family has so many plans for the future that started two years ago when they noticed the property was going up for auction.

The Bialczyks have had their eyes on property for years.



**AS THE** walls on the Bialczyk home went up, the family blessed the house by writing scripture in permanent marker in each room and above and around the door frames.

“We always said if it ever came up for sale we would buy it,” Danica said.

The land came up for sale on an auction in 2020. It was owned by a Butler family in St. Louis.

“It was part of a huge farm and they broke it into several different smaller pieces,” Garret began. “We were interested and were wanting to put our house up for sale because we knew it wasn’t our forever house.”

Garret said it was then they began to discuss building.

“That was never really in my dream —,” he began. Danica said it was a dream they never thought they could make a reality.

He agreed, but they thought the dream was unattainable because it was so expensive.

“So the land came up and it was auctioned off,” Garret said. “We were bidding on a different piece of land but ended up with this one. It was right off of the road which was a big deal, it was more than what we had in town and got us out of town.”

The couple thought they were bidding on nine acres of property and wound up with 10.2 acres.

“It gives us more freedom,” Garret said. “We got a little bit more, but it cost us a little bit more.”

In 2021, the family sold their house and moved in with Danica’s parents.

“We considered other options before we decided to stick building,” Garret said.

They considered a trailer or modular home, but ultimately decided it wasn’t worth the price, but the ideas that came from viewing so many was priceless.

“Even if you’re not wanting a modular home, walk through, because they make very efficient use of all of their space,” Garret said.

Danica said she expected them to be like trailers, but they were full blown, awesome houses.

“They had incredible designs and we got a lot of our influences from that,” she said. “We know that the less

**Bialczyk - continued on page 4B**

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**CONTACTORSBROKE** ground and began working on the Bialczyk home in mid-April. Staring in front of their yellow door are Danica and Garret Bialczyk with their children Ryker and Kyra. The children (photo left) often came to watch the contractors at work.

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**Bialczyk — continued from page 2B**

corners on a house it is a little bit cheaper, and if you do this and that it is a little bit cheaper, so we are trying to save money that way, which is why it is a long rectangle and straight line groove.”

When they decided they were for sure going to stick build, they went out for bids.

“It took forever to get bids, because it is hard to find someone,” Garret said.

“Our family — we came out here with shovels and actually broke our own ground where our bedrooms were supposed to be,” Danica said. “But the officials ‘hole in the ground day’ was mid-April.”

They financed the construction loan through Mid America Bank and Hired Daxton Litton in Bland with Litton Construction as their general contractor.

**First things first — dig a hole**

By mid-April Schlotlog Diesel and Excavating’s Kurt Schlotlog of Bland came out to start leveling the property and digging the basement. The family came out in intervals to watch. When the land was ready and Bill Krause Foundations’ Bary Krause of Bland came out to start the concrete work, he invited the couple’s children, Ryker and Kyrah, to help.

“Bary was good about that,” Danica said. “And we watched Kurtis digging.”

They purchased materials from local businesses such as Pioneer Home Center in Owensville, Belle Hardware Store, wood from Becker’s Millwork and Hardware in Freeburg, and finishing products such as Garage Doors

from Miller Door Co. in Rolla.

Walls started going up, and they were ready for water, electric and plumbing.

Ryan Scott with Sunset Heating and Cooling in Belle came in to do the HVAC system, plumbing and electric and B&H Well Drilling and Pump Services, LLC from Bonnots Mill dug the well.

The house was starting to take shape on the outside when Garret, who is on the Maries R-2 School Board, contacted the Belle High School Building Trades class about a previous agreement for the group to assist in finishing the house.

“I think a critical part is the partnership that has been leveraged between all of the local partners from the very beginning,” Bialczyk said. “We started conversations with all of these groups (bank, contractors, school) early on to make sure we could get to where we are and get it done.”

Now that the outside of the house is complete, Garret says partnering with the school’s Building Trades Program is one of his favorite parts.

“One of my favorite things about this is the involvement of the Building Trades Program; this is a chance to invest in our kids at a time when people are really starting to value the trades programs again,” Garret said. “I get the chance to brag on what they are doing all the time when someone ask how progress is coming on the house, whether it be at work, in the community, or elsewhere.”

Garret added that one of the Building Trades students assisted his dad with the frame work in the house over the summer, so he will be on the house project from

beginning to end.

Before the interior walls went up, the Bialczyks painstakingly discussed where to allocate their 1,900 square feet of space.

“The kids’ rooms are exactly the same size,” Danica said. “The contractor wanted to move one wall back a bit, and we were like, no, they have to be the same size.”

They opted to include a hallway between the kids’ bedrooms and the open concept kitchen and living room. A small bathroom divides the space.

“We wanted to protect their privacy so people couldn’t see into their rooms if we were visiting,” Danica said. “A lot of people say the hallway is wasted space, but we also wanted the wall for cabinets and the kitchen.”

The kitchen will include a center island between the two spaces so whoever is cooking can participate in the living room activities.

The hallway to the kids’ rooms is right of the entryway and a shared home office is to the left.

“We are hoping that eventually we can get some remote work or hybrid from home,” Garret said. “If that’s the case we are going to have to have good internet and if that is the case it would be worth it.”

The master bedroom is located to the left of the entryway, complete with French doors that lead onto the wood deck with a perfect view of the fall trees. An en suite accessible through a barn-style door also allows access to the couple’s walk-in closet.

“We have to live here forever, not our kids,” Danica

**Bialczyk - continued on page 23B**

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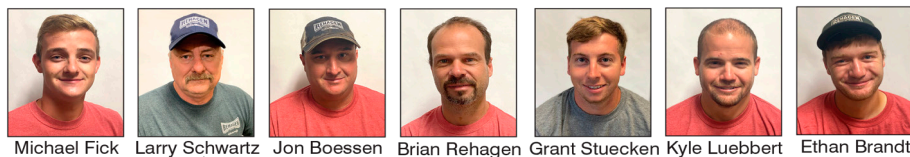


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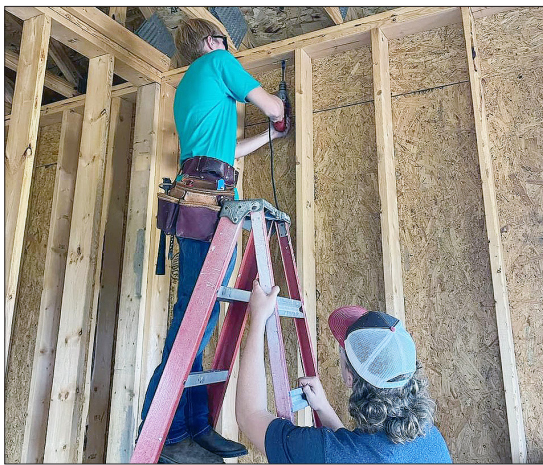
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**AFTER CONTRACTORS** completed the exterior of the Bialczyk home, the family implemented their agreement with the Maries R-2 School District's Building Trades class to complete the finishing touches such as electrical wiring to the fuse box, hanging drywall, mudding, tapping, painting and laying carpet to name a few things.

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## Signs it is time to overhaul your kitchen



**R**emodeling 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.

- **Outdated appliances:** Even if your appliances are not avo-

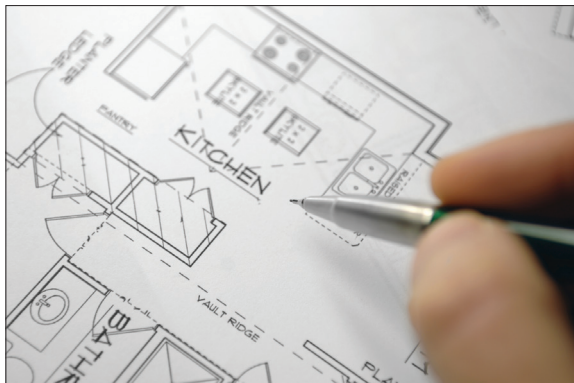
## Kitchen — continued from page 6B

cado 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.

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## Must-have features in your bathroom remodel



**V**eteran homeowners recognize the value of remodeling their kitchens and bathrooms. Kitchens and baths tend to appear dated more quickly than other spaces, such as living rooms and bedrooms, which can always be revamped with some fresh paint and new furnishings.

The home improvement pricing resource Home Guide indicates an average bathroom remodel costs anywhere from \$5,500 to \$15,000 depending on the size and scope of the renovation. However, a bath redo can increase a home's resale value and can return as much as 68 percent of homeowners' investments. As homeowners plan their bathroom renovations, it's a good time to consider improvements that will improve function and add design appeal for years to come.

- Floating vanity: Add an airy feeling to the room by creating space between the vanity and the

**Bathroom - continued on page 9B**

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## Bathroom — continued from page 8B

floor. A floating vanity can be a counter with a vessel sink or even have cabinets, as long as the vanity doesn't extend to the floor.

- Freestanding traditional sink or tub: There's something elegant about a freestanding tub or pedestal sink. Such features can lend a classic vibe to a space. However, freestanding fixtures also come in modern or eclectic forms, so there are options for any design style.

- Frameless showers: Switch to a walk-in shower option, which improves aesthetics and makes it easier to "age in place" in a home. Pair that frameless shower with clear glass shower doors so sightline in the space remains unencumbered.

- Natural textures: Create a calm and serene sanctuary in the bathroom with light, natural hues and materials. Nature-inspired colors on tiles, walls and vanities can add to the spa vibe.

- Dual sinks and vanities: With a double vanity, two people can share the space and easily use the bathroom without getting in each other's way. One vanity with two sinks works, but homeowners can create even more personal space by dividing vanities and mirrors.

- Small textured tile on shower floors: Small textures are appealing and add safety. The added texture and grouting will keep feet from slipping on wet floors. Also, opt for mold-resistant grout to make cleanup even easier.

- Special shower heads: Invest in shower heads that can run the gamut from creating steam showers to rainfall effects. Some showers will have multiple shower jets to offer an invigorating experience.

- Improve drainage: Increase the diameter of the drain pipe in the bathroom from the standard to a two-inch drain pipe. This will reduce the risk of clogs and overflow leaks.

- Install a window: Natural light and air flow can reduce the risk for mold and mildew growth, and windows add some aesthetic appeal to a space. Just be sure to choose frosted privacy glass.

Additional considerations for a bath remodel include heated floors, well-placed and attractive storage options and a toilet enclosure (water closet) for added privacy. These and other bathroom renovation ideas can add value and improve the appeal of the room.



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## How to approach a basement remodel

A fully finished and functional basement is a dream for many homeowners. Such a space, when completed, can serve as an entertainment space, a man cave, an artist's studio, or any number of additional functions.

Despite their usefulness, finished basements are something of a rarity. In an analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau's Survey of Construction, the National Association of Home Builders® found that only around 24 percent of single-family homes built in 2018 have basements. Homeowners who do not currently have a finished basement but are considering such a project can approach the remodel with a few key factors in mind. Careful consideration of these factors can ensure the project is budget-friendly and worthy of homeowners' investments.

- Investment value: Conventional wisdom among home renovation and real estate experts suggests that a basement remodel is best if done to satisfy current inhabitants and not necessarily

**Basement - continued on page 13B**



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**Basement — continued from page 12B**

to appeal to prospective buyers once the home is put up for sale. Remodeling magazine reports that a midrange basement remodel costing around \$70,000 will provide a return of around \$49,000 (or 70 percent) at resale. Though that's not a poor return on investment, homeowners who are remodeling a basement solely for the potential ROI at resale can find other projects that provide a greater return.

• **Foundation:** The foundation of the home must garner ample consideration before beginning a basement remodel. Certain foundation issues, such as soft concrete, cracked or curved outside walls and cracks in the flooring, are indicative of significant issues with the foundation. These issues can be costly to address, and they must be remedied before the basement remodel can begin.

• **Existing space:** Some homeowners may have bought their homes with partially finished basements or even finished areas that they simply want to remodel. In such instances, a pre-remodel inspection from a licensed home inspector can save homeowners lots of money and heartache over the long haul. Partially finished or even aging finished basements might not have been renovated in adherence to codes, which could lead to costly violations down the road. An inspection in advance of a remodel can give homeowners an idea of what they will need to do to bring the basement up to code. Local officials also can provide a list of necessary permits and a detailed description of requirements to ensure the remodeled basement adheres to code.

• **Soil:** Soil surrounding the home should be tested prior to beginning the project. Radon is an odorless gas found in soil that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency notes can increase individuals' risk for lung cancer. Radon can seep into basements and increase that risk even further if it is present at elevated levels in the soil surrounding a home. Radon tests are simple and inexpensive, and no basement remodel project should begin without first conducting such a test.

Finished basements are valuable spaces. Homeowners who want to finish or remodel their basements should consider a host of factors before beginning the renovation.

## Fresh veggies are not exclusive to spring and summer

**S**pring and summer may be the seasons most often associated with gardening. But people who love to grow their own vegetables can do so even when the weather outside is frightful.

Various vegetables thrive in cool temperatures. The home and garden experts at HGTV note that some winter vegetables are hardy. That means they can handle frosts in temperatures as low as 25 F without being damaged. Others are even sturdier in the face of all that winter can throw at them, capable of tolerating temperatures that dip into the high teens.

Growing vegetables in winter requires a different approach than growing in spring and summer, as gardeners must be ready to prevent damage from frost if temperatures get especially chilly. For example, the experts at Michigan State University Extension note that gardeners may need to utilize floating row covers to protect sensitive crops from frost. Gardeners interested in planting winter vegetables can speak with a local garden

center professional about which crops to plant and what to do if temperatures push winter vegetable gardens to the brink.

Though it's up to gardeners what they want to plant, the following are some popular winter vegetables that can make for wonderful, fresh additions to any dinner table even after the traditional gardening season has come and gone.

- Arugula
- Broccoli
- Brussel sprouts
- Cabbage
- Carrots
- Collard greens
- Endive
- Parsley
- Parsnips
- Kale
- Radishes
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**F**armhouse 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

Farmhouse - continued on page 17B

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**Farmhouse — continued from page 16B**

the 50 states indicated this simple, cozy style was their favorite.

Home renovation projects can help homeowners put their own unique stamp 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.

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## Prepare your garden for winter's onslaught

Individuals who don't live near the equator or in another warm climate know that winter will rear its chilly head this year. Cold temperatures and snowy conditions may be excellent for skiing and sledding, but gardeners recognize these conditions are not ideal for their plants.

The inevitable slowing of activity in the garden during fall marks a time to shift attention from constant plant care to preparing the landscape for next season. It may be tempting to simply let Mother Nature take over, but a little pre-winter TLC can ensure gardens make it through winter unscathed.

### Remove spent plants

Decomposing organic material is the basis for compost and other fertilizers. However, vegetable plants that are left to sit can lead to decay in the garden. Decaying plants can serve as hosts for pest populations and diseases. Rotting vegetables also can drop unwanted seeds into the soil, which eventually can strip nutrients that normally would go to next year's crops.

Ornamental plants and perennials can



be cut back in fall. Cut down stalks and remove leaves.

### Plant a cover crop

The gardening resource This Is My Garden recommends planting a cover crop to set the stage for a successful spring. A cover crop protects the soil and can return nutrients to it. When the soil is bare during winter, weed seeds can easily blow in and lie in wait, ultimately becoming a problem during the ensuing year. Cover crops can include clover or field peas, which will increase the levels

of available nitrogen.

### Amend the soil

Fall is a perfect time to add soil amendments, such as manure and compost. These fertilizers will add nutrients and break down gradually, enriching the soil over the winter.

### Replenish mulch

Gardeners may have added mulch around shrubs and other areas of the landscape early in the season because it is attractive. But mulch also does much

to reduce water loss and protect the soil from erosion. It may inhibit weed growth as well. Replacing mulch when the mercury drops can insulate the soil, which helps to regulate soil temperature. A thick layer of mulch around root vegetables left in the garden can offer protection against hard frosts.

### Divide bulbs

Divide plant bulbs and plant them where you want flowers like daffodils and tulips to grow in the spring.

### Prune dormant plants

Wait until plants are dormant to prune them and adjust their shape. Most shrubs and trees should be pruned in late winter, right before new growth.

### Move potted plants

Bring delicate plants into a sheltered area, such as a greenhouse or indoor garage, so they can continue to thrive during the winter.

Fall and winter still provide opportunities to spend time in the garden. At this point in the year, gardeners can prepare landscapes for the next season.

## Did you know?

Though new flooring and ceiling tiles might not offer the wow factor of a remodeled kitchen, a 2019 study from researchers at the Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University found that replacing floors and ceilings was the most popular home improvement project in the United States in 2017, the most recent year for which data was available at the time of the study. More than five million homeowners replaced carpeting, flooring, paneling, or ceiling tiles in their homes in 2017. The popularity of such projects may have something to do with the relatively low cost associated with them, as the experts at BobVila.com note that overhauling surfaces underfoot and overhead costs an average of \$3,283. That places floor and ceiling tile replacement projects among the least expensive home improvement projects homeowners can undertake, even though such renovations can immediately and dramatically transform the look of a room.

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## Fireplace trends help create attractive, comfortable rooms

**F**ireplaces 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 improve the appeal of a home. Various trends are popular this year, making fireplaces highly coveted features.

## Did you know?

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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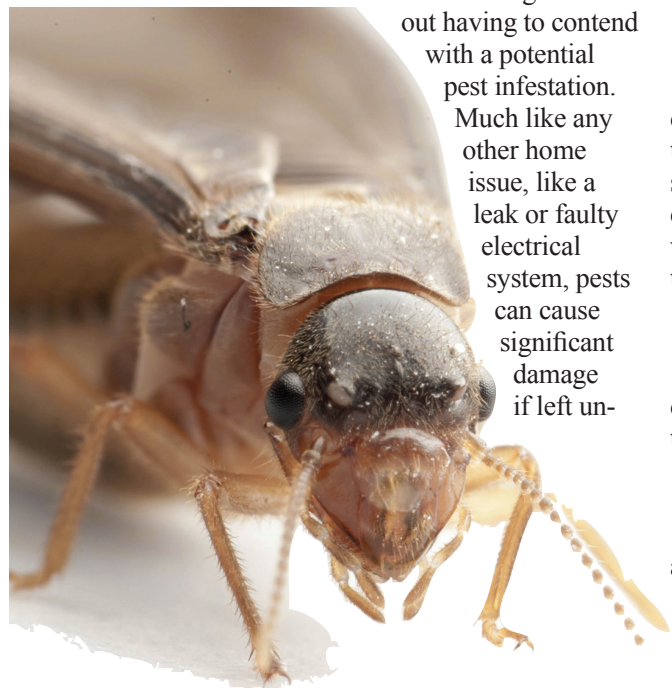
## Signs of pest infestation at home

**P**ests 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 un-



checked. 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 live specimens may require some investigating in the kitchen, bathrooms and outdoors near the perim-

eter 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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## Three factors to consider before converting an attic

**A**t 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.

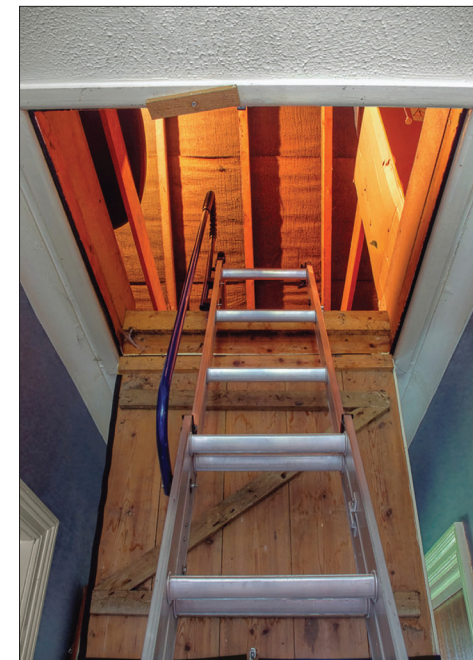
1. **Dimensions:** Both the renovation experts at This Old House and the real estate experts at UpNest indicate that at least half of a finished attic must be a minimum of seven feet high and seven feet wide and 70 square feet. Requirements may differ depending on where homeowners live, but that 7-7-70 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



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

as they try to determine if attic conversions will work for them.



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## Seven things to know before replacing windows



**T**he 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

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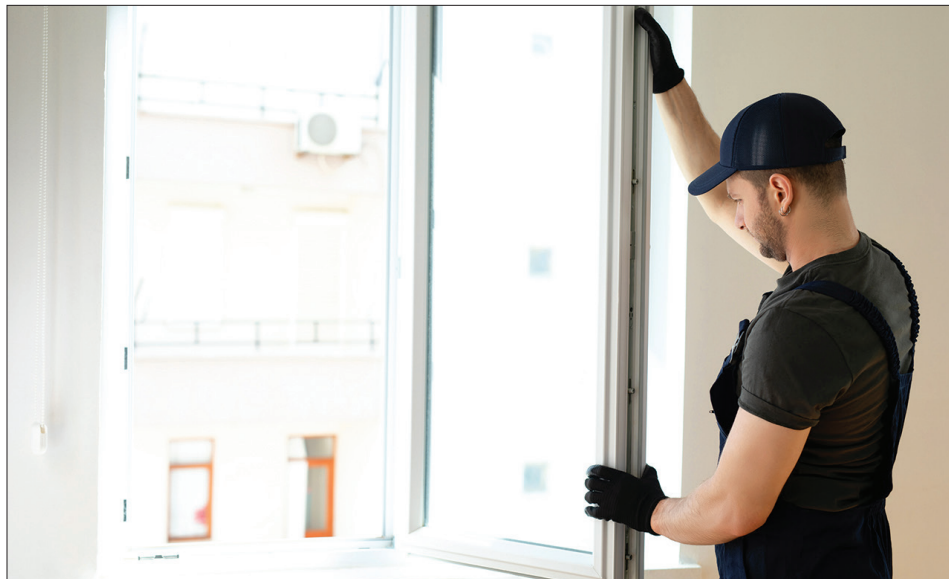
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## Windows - Continued from page 36B

original windows.

6. Think about soundproofing, too. When upgrading windows, also think about how certain windows can cancel out noises and make homes more soundproof. 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.



## Did you know?

Gardening enthusiasts recognize that fall is not a time to rest on their laurels. In fact, fall is a great season to spend time in the yard. The Center for Agriculture, Food and the Environment at the University of Massachusetts Amherst indicates fall is the ideal time to improve the soil for next season. Amending the soil in the fall allows it to react accordingly over time and reap the benefits in spring. UMass suggests getting an accurate soil test to see what is needed in the garden. Samples should be taken from various areas. Avoid doing so when the soil is very wet. At-home kits can test for nitrogen, potassium and phosphorous and determine the soil's pH. Gardeners should till the soil and add compost or manure, which will counteract many nutritional deficiencies. Worm castings also are good to add, particularly for summer vegetable gardens. The gardening company Park Seed says that worm castings are high in minerals and effective at holding water — so much so that they even can be used alone in place of potting soil. Crushed egg shells, coffee grounds and banana peels also can be added in the fall, even if they are not part of a compost pile. The nutrients will break down throughout the fall and winter, and be available just in time for summer plantings.

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## Wood floor installation dos and don'ts

**J**aw-dropping features can sell a home in a heartbeat. A penthouse apartment with floor-to-ceiling windows and a panoramic view of a city skyline likely won't prove a hard sell, nor will a home with an infinity pool overlooking a landscape of rolling hills. As awe-inspiring as such features can be, some more subtle components, such as authentic hardwood floors, also can do much to make a home more appealing to prospective buyers.

Hardwood flooring is a sought-after commodity. Data from the National Association of Realtors indicates that 54 percent of home buyers are willing to pay more for hardwood floors. In fact, NAR figures indicate that 28 percent of buyers between the ages of 35 and 54 consider hardwood floors "very important" when looking for a home. Homeowners who are considering selling their homes, or those who simply want to upgrade their existing flooring, may want to consider installing hardwood flooring. Though it's a project best left to professionals, hardwood flooring can be installed by skilled DIYers. In such instances, homeowners may want to keep these dos and don'ts in mind.

DO hire a professional if you have limited or no DIY flooring experience. Hardwood flooring installation is not generally a project for novice

Wood - continued on page 29B



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## Wood - Continued from page 28B

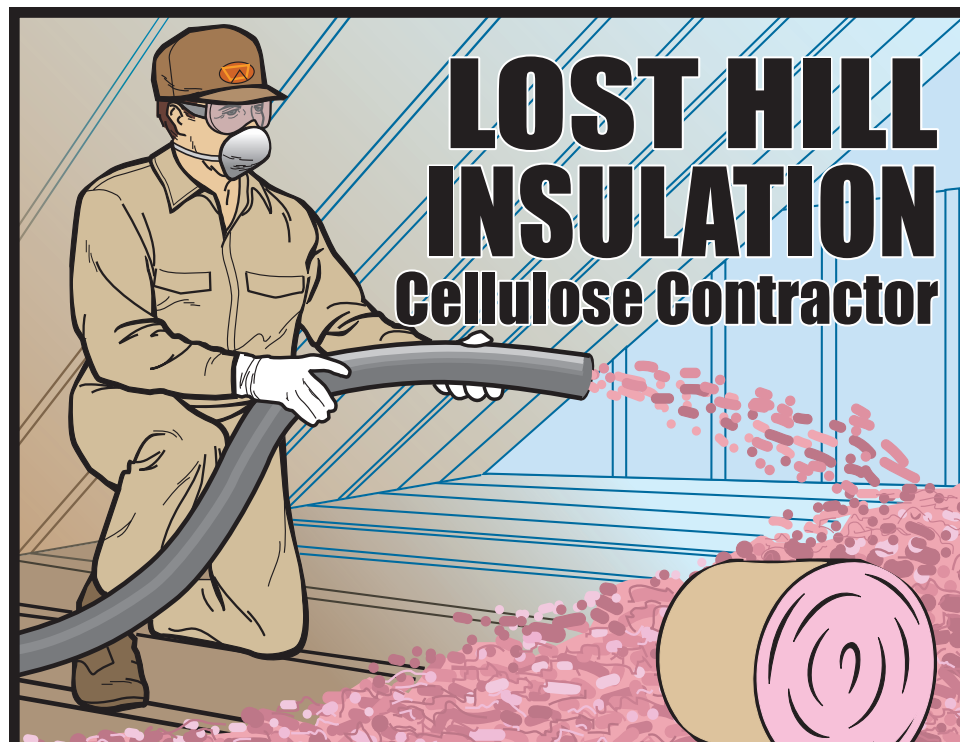
DIYers. Hardwood flooring projects may present some common challenges, but no two homes are the same. So unless they have prior experience installing floors in multiple rooms or homes, homeowners may save themselves time, trouble and a significant amount of money hiring a professional to do the job.

DON'T ignore the subfloor. New hardwoods won't erase the problem of subfloors in poor condition. According to the home renovation experts at BobVila.com, squeaky floors could be an indication that the subfloor has begun to warp or twist. Sinking floors are another indicator of deteriorating subfloors. Subfloors should be somewhat level before new hardwoods are installed, so DIYers should inspect and address subfloor issues before installing new flooring.

DO expose wood flooring to the elements in your home prior to installation. The home improvement resource BuildDirect recommends acclimating hardwoods to the space where they will be installed. Skipping this important step could result in gaps during the winter and cupping over the summer. To acclimate hardwoods, open the boxes and spread them out for about a week while running the air conditioner or heater at normal levels. When storing hardwoods prior to installation, avoid keeping them in potentially moist areas like a basement.

DON'T skimp on tools. A DIY hardwood flooring installation might be less expensive than hiring a professional, but homeowners should resist any temptation to increase those savings further by purchasing less costly tools or fewer tools than is necessary to complete the job. BuildDirect notes that DIYers will need at least a miter saw, table saw, cleat-nailer or stapler, finish nailer, compressor, jamb saw, chalk line, nail set, and tape measurer when installing hardwood floors. Purchase all necessary tools and read product reviews to ensure each tool is up to the task.

Wood floors can be awe-inspiring. Some homeowners can install such flooring on their own, and the project can be much easier if they learn as much about installation as possible prior to beginning the project.



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## Key components of 3 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.

### 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. Mid-

century 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.



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**Bialczyk — continued from page 2B**

joked about the size of the master bedroom.

The entire space is complete with nine-foot ceilings.

The downstairs level has been framed in but won't be completed immediately.

"Everyone says if we don't do it now it won't happen," Danica said.

So they figured a happy medium would be to complete the framing and finish it later.

The area is sectioned off for a small home gym, a future kitchenette for Danica's canning, a theater room, a storm shelter under the porch, and a separate work space for Garret, accessible from the outside.

As the walls went up, so did the scripture. Garret, Danica and the kids took turns writing blessings on the wood posts, around the living room, door frames and other areas where they felt inspiration.

One of the children experiences frequent bad dreams, so their scripture is written above where there bed will someday be placed.

Another scripture near the living room professes the house is built on a firm foundation. It is the Maries R-2 Building Trades class that will eventually cover the scripture with drywall.

Sunset Heating and Cooling ran the electric from the source to the house, but the trades class began working on the electric box in August when schools started.

"They have it planned out," Garret said, pointing towards a piece of cardboard stapled near the box that lines out where each fuse will be linked.

"We are electric friendly in this house, so we want a lot of plugins," Danica said.

Garret added that they have light switches outside the soffit in the front of the house for holiday decorations and lights.

"We can put up the Christmas lights, turn them on with a switch, turn them off with a switch," Garret said.

Danica added that everything is going electronic and it has to be plugged in somewhere.

"When I am old and my oxygen tank needs to be plugged in, I don't want to look for an outlet," Danica said.

They added that they did not set up for phone lines but will have internet.

"We are trying to figure out where we are going through," Garret said. "Century Link ran fiber right in front of us. So I am trying to figure out if we can get a good speed through fiber or what our options are."

Danica said a lot of people are looking at Starlink, and they are in a good open area that it would be feasible, but they agreed it is expensive.

However, along with the possibility of working remotely, the whole family uses the internet.

"All of the kids have tablets, Netflix, two different Roku sticks. It's all streaming," Garret said.

They made one exception to the electric route

and that was to hook up a gas cook top stove.

"It is still a question of where we are going to get it from," Garret said.

Once the electric is completed, the group will begin hanging drywall, taping, mudding and eventually painting.

"We were told it would take them about a year," Garret said. "They should be done by next May."

Until then, the family is excited and they try to come into the house several times a week to see the progress and complete things on their own. They even decorated the front porch for fall.

The couple have been steadily staining the back deck and can't wait for outside light fixtures to be installed.

This dream-to-reality home has been an expensive endeavor — something the Bialczyks thought would cost them between \$200,000 to \$230,000, but since materials have gone up, they acknowledged it will be more.

"It's only going to go up," Garret said when asked if they wish they would have waited.

The family will continue to live with Danica's parents in Belle until the project is done in April 2023.

Garret said many community members have asked them about the progress of their new house and where they are located. He loves sharing the local aspect of the build and as for where they are located, well — "Right now we just tell people it's the gray house with the yellow door."



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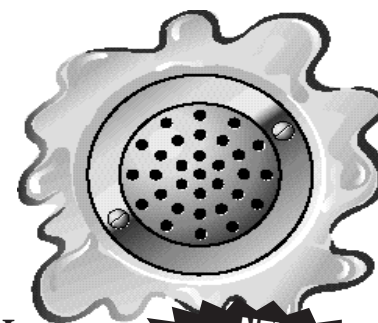
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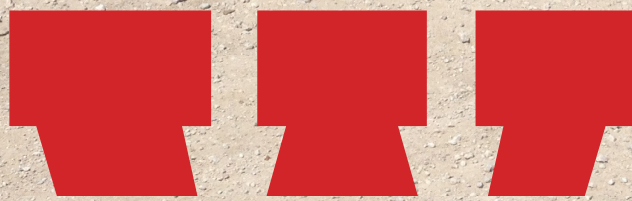
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