

Fall HOME IMPROVEMENT & Contractors Guide *Guide*

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Quaker still looking ahead nearly 75 years later

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FREEBURG — As Quaker Windows and Doors prepares for its 75th anniversary next year, the company is celebrating its recent growth and achievements.

Over the last three years, Quaker has grown at a rate of 83 percent, which earned it a spot on Inc. Magazine's list of the 5,000 fastest-growing privately owned companies in America.

Quaker's Chief Marketing Officer Bill

QUAKER WINDOWS and Doors manufactures aluminum, vinyl and wood window and door products in Osage, Maries and Miller counties.

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Siffard said the company is one of the oldest businesses on the list.

“Most of the companies you find on the Inc. 5,000 started between 2015, 2016 and 2019,” he said. “They’re not even 10 years old, and we’re 75. We’re going into our diamond jubilee.”

Siffard said Quaker’s expansion took off after the Great Recession in 2009, which impacted the housing and construction markets. Ten years ago, Quaker only had the main campus and the glass facility in Maries County. In those 10 years, it has gone from a \$50 million company to a \$300 million company. Employment has increased at a similar rate from about 300 people to more than 1,500 employees.

Looking Back

Quaker began in 1949 as Quaker Shade Co. Founders Harold and Marge Knoll started the business in St. Louis before moving it to Marge’s hometown of Freeburg within its first year. At that time, the company’s primary product was Venetian blinds.

In the mid-1950s, Quaker introduced its first aluminum storm windows. This preceded a critical market shift in 1961 when the company introduced its first aluminum replacement windows. The products quickly drew public attention, and the magazine Life named Quaker a nationally recognized window brand the following year.

Quaker acquired more than six acres in Freeburg in 1982 to accommodate a boom in business. A few years

later, the company began producing vinyl windows. By the end of the 1980s, Quaker was one of the first companies manufacturing aluminum, vinyl and wood windows all under one roof.

The largest building on Quaker’s Freeburg campus opened in 1996 at 55,000 square feet.

Siffard said some members of the Knowles family remain involved in various capacities with the company. The daughters and daughters-in-law of the founders are part of the ownership group. Younger family members have also joined the company.

“We have a third generation that is involved,” he said. “They’re all taking on different roles whether it’s in IT, sales and operations, manufacturing, training. It’s great that the third generation is actively involved and keeping that culture of the family-owned business.”

Even with a milestone anniversary approaching, Quaker is more focused on the future than the past.

“The real story isn’t so much where we’ve been,” Siffard said. “It’s about where we’re at and where we’re going.”

Many Markets

Something that sets Quaker apart in the window-and-door industry is the company’s multi-faceted approach to its production and markets. Many companies specialize in one market: residential, commercial or luxury. Quaker produces products in all three. Recently, the company has begun selling luxury products on the West Coast.

“We have our doors and window systems going into multi-million dollar homes owned by the stars,” Siffard

said. “They don’t want you to take pictures a lot of times because they’re a little private about it, but it’s really amazing some of the stuff we’ve seen now on the luxury side.”

Quaker sells its commercial products coast-to-coast. At the time of the interview in September, Quaker was supplying products to a large commercial project in Hawaii. Siffard said the company trucks the products to the West Coast where they go on ships for transport to Hawaii and use in the multi-million dollar project.

“We’ve done all 50 states,” he said. “People have shipped stuff to islands and other parts of the world that wanted to use our products.”

Quaker focuses on selling its residential products, often vinyl windows, in what Siffard calls the “Goldilocks Zone.” He describes the Goldilocks Zone as the area where Quaker could send a truck in a single day. The Goldilocks Zone is about a 500-mile radius, which is about the same for most companies that use trucking routes.

Companies that specialize in one part of the market might also limit themselves to one primary product, such as only wood windows or only aluminum windows.

“What makes Quaker unique is that we play in both worlds,” Siffard said. “We offer aluminum, vinyl and wood windows and door products, which nobody really does unless they’ve tried to buy a company and then assimilate it.”

Other companies might integrate into another market

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by buying out a smaller company and operating plants around the country.

“We’ve done it organically,” Siffard said.

Sometimes Quaker’s products combine the materials. Wood windows come with an aluminum-clad exterior to improve structural and thermal performance while lasting longer with windows with wood exteriors.

Siffard estimated that by volume, vinyl windows make up about 40 percent of Quaker’s production. Aluminum makes up another 40 percent and wood windows make up about 20 percent.

“Some of the new technology we’re coming out with for our wood windows, we’re seeing a lot more growth and interest,” Siffard said. “Especially with some of the areas that we’re moving into with the luxury wood windows.”

Siffard said the different divisions of the company each have their workload change with the economy.

“The light commercial side, which is hotels and multi-family housing, will take off sometimes,” he said. “Residential, when interest rates are low like a couple



QUAKER’S CHIEF Marketing Officer Bill Siffard (above) points to a label while explaining the workflow in the company’s manufacturing plants. Once products reach completion, they are put on trucks twice daily for shipment to customers.

of years ago, we couldn’t make enough windows. We were working two full shifts, and orders were going crazy.”

Siffard described the market changes as a “give-and-take” because Quaker’s diverse line of products keeps a downturn in one side of the market from having too

much of an effect on the whole company.

“That’s a real positive,” he said. “We’ve diversified so not only are we in those different markets, but we offer a variety of product solutions to meet the ever-evolving needs of our customers.”

Siffard said that from year to year, the

company’s work in each market fluctuates. He estimated an average split of about 50-50 for Quaker’s residential and commercial work. The luxury division has only been around for a few years, but luxury sales have more than doubled each year.

Facilities

Quaker’s Freeburg campus focuses on residential production. The facility produces vinyl windows and doors, wood windows and doors and residential aluminum windows and doors. Originally, Quaker’s commercial work happened at the Freeburg campus.

“At one point in time, everything was here (in Freeburg),” Siffard said. “In the old days, you didn’t need the big, long (production) lines. Now, for the lines we put in, they’re \$1 million each or more because of the automation, the robotics, everything in that respect. It just takes a lot more space to run it.”

Siffard added that Quaker still needs people to run the production lines, too.

“It reduces the wear and tear on the people,” he said. “Some of these windows

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QUAKER USES glass manipulators (left) to move large glass units in the manufacturing facility. Chief Marketing Officer Bill Siffard said the equipment helps keep workers safe and prevent strain while working with heavy materials. "Number one for us is safety," he said.

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QUAKER'S ALUMINUM plant at the Freeburg campus houses 2.7 million pounds of aluminum. The company keeps some regular sizes in stock and orders other sizes commercially to fit project needs.

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are huge. We have a lot of equipment now, so rather than having six people try to pick up a window, they just have a mover. They use suction cups to clamp onto it and they just move it across and bring it to the next spot.”

Eldon’s campus opened in 2020 with an initial area of about 200,000 square feet. Last year, Quaker completed a 250,000-square-foot expansion to the campus to add more manufacturing capacity and a fully automated glass line onsite.

“It’s 500,000 (square feet) over there now,” Siffard said. “It’s all together, so it’s quite a nice little walk. You get your steps in if you tour it.”

The Eldon campus focuses almost entirely on commercial production. It makes aluminum products and some vinyl for places such as hotels. The facility also features a design center where Quaker plans new products, especially for the luxury market.

“None of the products that are there existed five years ago,” Siffard said. “We’ve redesigned and created so much

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new product innovation that our core products are young.”

The planning of the Eldon campus means Quaker could expand by another 250,000 square feet at that location. Siffard said in the future it could be the site of new paint, glass and manufacturing facilities.

“We planned it out and laid it out for the long term,” he said. “That would just focus on growing our capacity to support the commercial side.”

Siffard said the expansion of other campuses and the movement of some operations to other sites does not mean a loss of jobs at the Freeburg campus. It just means the focus shifts to new equipment or the expansion of other facets of the business, such as residential and luxury products.

The Eldon campus has created about 500 jobs in Miller County since it opened.

The Maries County campus, about two miles south of Freeburg, opened in 2004. At the time, it was Quaker’s largest facility at 65,000 square feet. It housed glass manufacturing and tempering.

In 2016, the vinyl building on the site opened. It is 185,000 square feet. The wood building followed shortly after that.

A future 100,000-square-foot expansion at the Maries County campus will allow for more capacity to produce doors. The expansion will create more space on the Freeburg campus that Quaker plans to turn into an engineering and innovation center for prototyping and testing.

“We’re really excited because we’ll be able to not only have the area to go ahead and design new technology for our windows but also do the testing,” Siffard said.

Orders

Quaker makes all its products to order.

“We don’t make standard stuff, like when you go to Home Depot and see a bunch of windows,” Siffard said. “Everything gets done through our automated system. (Customers) put in the sizes they want (and) the types of material, whether it’s aluminum, vinyl or wood. Then, we build them to order and ship it out.”

He estimated the company makes about 300,000 windows in one year.

“And every one is unique, so there isn’t a standard that we’re going to do 1,000 of this (type),” he said.

When a customer places an online order with Quaker, the order goes to the scheduling program. Computers will send out the orders to the appropriate plants including the number of windows, sizes, colors and other specifications.

After the plants receive an order, the employees begin cutting the frames to fit the requests. At the same time, the glass plant receives the order and workers there prepare the proper size sheets for combination with the frames.

“The same day (the frames) are going down the line being produced, the glass shows up and they just drop them in,” Siffard said.

From the time customers place an order, Quaker can have their products delivered in as little as two weeks.

Bigger, more complex products may take longer.

Quaker buys its glass in jumbo sheets. If the glass plant has any material that it cannot use, the company recycles the glass. A truck takes the glass to a recycling center that grinds up the glass. Then, another truck drops off the ground-up glass and Quaker sells it.

“We’re not just throwing stuff out into a landfill,” Siffard said. “We’re going ahead and recycling whatever’s leftover or whatever we don’t use.”

Innovations

Some of Quaker’s innovations so far include its patented OptiCore and SolidCore technologies, which changed how it produces aluminum windows. The technology started with use in commercial products, such as 40-story buildings. Then, Quaker adjusted the technology to also fit with residential products.

Windows receive ratings from the Fenestration and Glazing Industry Alliance that denote their strength on a scale from R (residential) Windows to AW (architectural windows).

“We have products that are AW 100 rated,” Siffard said. “We’ve taken those products, we’ve had the design flexibility and we’ve created a line that has the same bone structure, but now we’ve made it for the residential and luxury markets.”

By bringing the technology to the residential market, Quaker has brought more opportunities to build homes with large-scale glass without sacrificing the strength of

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the buildings.

Siffard said two factors contribute to a window's overall performance: structural performance and thermal performance. Structural performance includes a window's rigidity, which is the ability to fill a space in a building with glass without losing any of the building's structural integrity. Thermal performance includes how a window supplies heat to a

building.

Quaker's OptiCore and SolidCore technologies help enhance thermal performance in its windows. The company also offers a variety of glass packages to fit the product to a customer's needs. The market for Quaker's products is nationwide, so customers in the South will not have the same concerns about keeping heat inside the building as cus-

tomers in cooler climates. Paint the company adds to its products for warmer markets contains powder coating similar to what the automotive industry uses to keep frames from getting too hot to touch. Instead, it reflects heat from the sun. That technology also helps prevent heat from entering structures. Regulating the temperature of the windows also helps to prevent wear.

Measuring the thermal performance of windows requires a

variety of tests. The testers create harsh weather environments to test qualities such as if the window is leakproof. Other tests judge how much impact a window can withstand by shooting projectiles at the products.

Siffard said the powder coating on aluminum windows is more environmentally friendly than liquid paint. Quaker treats the windows to clean them before the coating. The process also microscopically etches the windows. The addition of the powder creates a little electrical charge so the powder adheres better. Then, the window goes into an oven where it gets an even powder coating.

"We can match any color someone would want," Siffard said. "We get people saying 'I want my door to be the same color as my new sports car.' We say 'Give us the color chip.'"

Siffard said Quaker is always trying to stay ahead of the market. Two years ago, the company started attending the International Builders' Show, which is the largest light construction industry trade show in the country. At the show, more than 1,000

booths showcase products and innovations in the industry.

Another market Quaker serves is the historical and renovation market. Siffard said Quaker is a "strong player" in that market. People and organizations can sometimes receive tax credits for renovating historic buildings while keeping the buildings' original looks. Through the production of aluminum windows, Quaker can replicate the look of steel windows that were once a common feature in buildings now deemed historic. It can do the same for wood windows.

"We improve the structural performance," Siffard said. "We improve the energy performance. But we maintain the same looks, and it blows people away that it looks like when it was first built."

People

Siffard said Quaker's longevity is a testament to the people who work there. The company always has openings on the manufacturing side, but it also has career opportunities in fields such as engineering, marketing,

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sales, accounting and human resources. Quaker's substantial size compared to the small communities where it operates means the company sometimes struggles to find employees to keep up with its growth.

"There are only 450 people that live in Freeburg," Siffard said. "You could probably talk to all 450 and they're connected to Quaker: a family member worked there, they work there, they used to work there, whatever it is working at the facility."

Siffard said he thinks something the community sometimes overlooks is that Quaker offers people a chance to build a career in the area where they grew up. If they love Osage County, they do not have to leave to find work and start a family if they work at Quaker.

"We've always gotten great support from the community to find good people," Siffard said. "I've dealt with companies all over the country, and the work ethic and the commitment to excellence... you have a unique breed in Missouri with people who just work really hard and take pride in their work."



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What to know when picking new interior doors

Renovation projects run the gamut from patio paver installations to home additions to exterior lighting projects. There's no end to the ways homeowners can tweak their properties as they aspire to renovate and transform the interior and exterior of their homes.

Interior door replacement projects can dramatically alter how a home looks, especially when existing doors are dated, damaged and/or fading. Though homeowners may have grand visions of a new kitchen or outdoor living room when beginning such projects, they may not know where to begin when the time comes to replace interior doors. The following rundown can help homeowners as they begin to explore their options and start down the path of replacing interior doors.

Materials

Interior doors are manufactured from an array of materials, some of which may be more effective at reducing noise than others. Wood, medium-density fiberboard (MDF), solid-core, hollow-core, and even metal and glass are some of the materials categories for interior doors. Homeowners can define what they

prioritize with each door and then choose the material that aligns best with that goal.

Installation

Installation costs are another variable to consider when replacing interior doors. If the frame of the door is being replaced along with the door, homeowners may benefit from utilizing a professional installation team, as removing an existing frame and installing a new one is a complicated project. Pre-hung doors come ready to hang with hinges already attached, so skilled do-it-yourselfers may be able to hang these on their own. Installation costs can be expensive, but homeowners with little DIY experience are urged to work with professionals so a job can be completed correctly, on time and within budget.

Style and design

Style and design merits consideration as well, and homeowners are urged to afford ample time to explore a wide array of options that might be more expansive than

Doors - continued on page 11B

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Doors — continued from page 10B

homeowners realize. Hinged doors, pocket doors, French doors, and barn doors are just some of the styles homeowners can choose from, and it may make sense to choose various styles when replacing all or most interior doors in a home. Each type of door typically comes in an assortment of designs as well, and it can take time to choose the right design for a given home.

Hardware

Hardware such as doorknobs and locks is easy to take for granted. However, homeowners replacing their interior doors will need to make these choices when picking new doors. Standard hardware offerings may disappoint upon installation, so afford ample time to doorknobs and other hardware to ensure the finished product impresses from the get-go. Customization of hardware may add a little extra to the final cost, but it should not be enough to bust a budget and will likely result in a more impressive finished product.

Interior door replacement can create a whole new look inside a home. Homeowners are urged to afford themselves ample time to consider their many options when replacing interior doors.

Improving storage in common areas

Increasing storage capabilities at home is a popular goal among many homeowners and renters. Despite how much space a person may have at home, there's often a desire to have more or maximize the areas that are there. According to the Self-Storage Almanac, there are an estimated 51,206 storage facilities operating in the United States today, and MJ Partners Self-Storage Update says 11.1 percent of households currently rent at self-storage facilities. IBISWorld indicates the Canadian self-storage industry has grown at an average annual rate of 3.1 percent over the last five years.

People often turn to external storage facilities to house their belongings when space is at a premium at home. Others may focus their organization energy on closets, garages and basements to free up room. But common areas around the home also can provide additional sources of storage. Common areas are locations where people come together for activities.

Living room/family room

Living rooms and family rooms are

areas of the home where people spend many hours. These tend to be multifunctional spaces where people entertain, lounge and even enjoy movies or gaming. Possibilities in these living spaces



that can create extra storage include furniture that serves double-duty. For example, a storage ottoman adds decorative appeal but also can be filled with board games or books. Cabinet-style TV stands may not be as streamlined as mounted versions, but they're ideal places to stash games, remote controls and other accessories.

Entryway

An entryway or mudroom can quickly succumb to clutter. When

organizing such a space, think about the needs of the household. A storage bench will be a place where everyone can sit to put on shoes, and then stow footwear underneath when not in use. A wall-mounted rack can hold the current season's jackets or sweaters, as well as purses or backpacks for easy access. A shelf with some hooks can store keys or hold a basket to store the daily mail.

Hallway and closet

Closet organization systems can be the unsung heroes in closets utilized by multiple members of the family. These customizable components can be sized accordingly for the space, and then configured as needed with a balance of shelves and hanging racks. An out-of-the-way nook or long hallway can be enhanced with a bookshelf to hold photo albums or that library that only continues to grow as new reading material is acquired.

Homeowners can make common areas more functional with the addition of storage.

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Simple strategies to create more storage space in the kitchen



If home is where the heart is, then the kitchen is where that heart spends most of its time. Kitchens are where family and friends tend to congregate during holiday celebrations, and many a homework assignment has been completed at a kitchen island while parents prepare dinner.

The popularity of kitchens is reflected in the attention these rooms get from renovation-minded homeowners. Data from the National Association of Home Builders indicates kitchens are the most popular room to remodel. Upgrading kitchen storage is a popular renovation project, and it's also one that has practical appeal. Adding more storage in the kitchen gives the room a more organized feel, which can make preparing meals more enjoyable and create space when hosting and guests inevitably congregate

Storage - continued on page 13B

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Storage — continued from page 12B

around an island. With those benefits in mind, would-be organizers can consider these strategies to create more storage space in the kitchen.

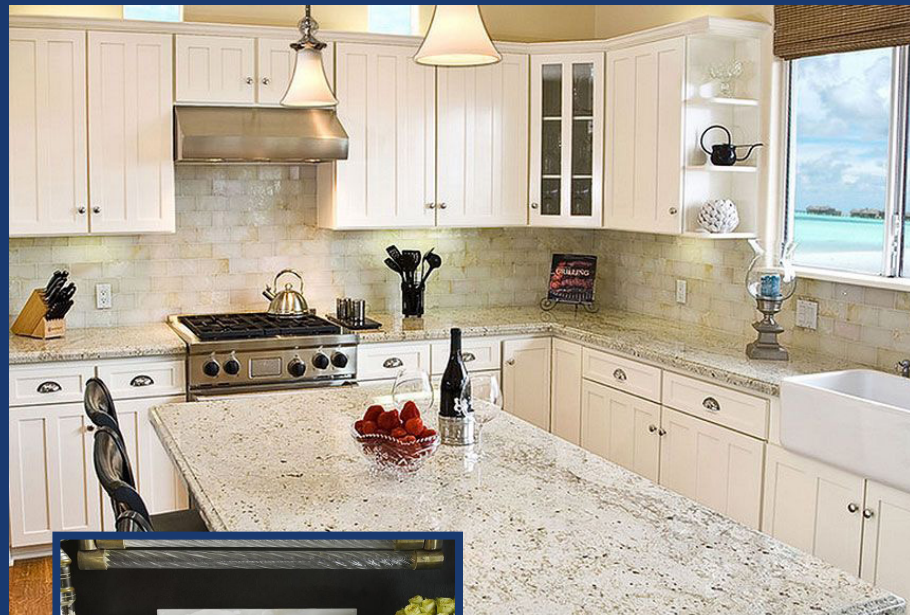
- Take stock of the spice rack. Creating more storage space does not necessarily have to involve tools like screwdrivers, hammers and nails. Spice racks can easily become overcrowded as amateur cooks expand their culinary repertoire. A crowded spice rack inevitably spills out onto the surrounding countertop. Take stock of the spice rack and discard any spices or seasonings you haven't used in a while. This can create a more organized look and free up extra counter space.

- Make a digital cookbook. If your go-to recipes are filling a binder or two, those binders are almost certainly taking up precious storage space. Scan printed recipes and convert your physical recipe collection into a digital cookbook you store on a tablet.

- Install roll-out shelving in the pantry. Roll-out shelving puts the entire pantry to use. Without such shelving, items are destined to be relegated to that nether region known as the back of the pantry. Some items never emerge from this area, as cooks forget they're there and then purchase duplicates, which inevitably contributes to storage issues. Roll-out shelving ensures all items in the pantry can be found and greatly reduces the likelihood that cooks will have lots of duplicate items taking up precious kitchen space.

- Remove single-use gadgets from the kitchen. Much like spices and seasonings vital to the preparation of specialty meals have a tendency to be used just once, kitchen gadgets that lack versatility have a way of gathering dust and taking up storage space. Whether it's a popcorn maker, a seldom-used but space-needy wok or another gadget that's used infrequently, if at all, store single-use gadgets in the garage or another area of the house where they won't get in the way or contribute to a less-than-organized look in the room.

A handful of simple strategies can help anyone create more storage space in the kitchen.



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How homeowners can turn attics into livable spaces

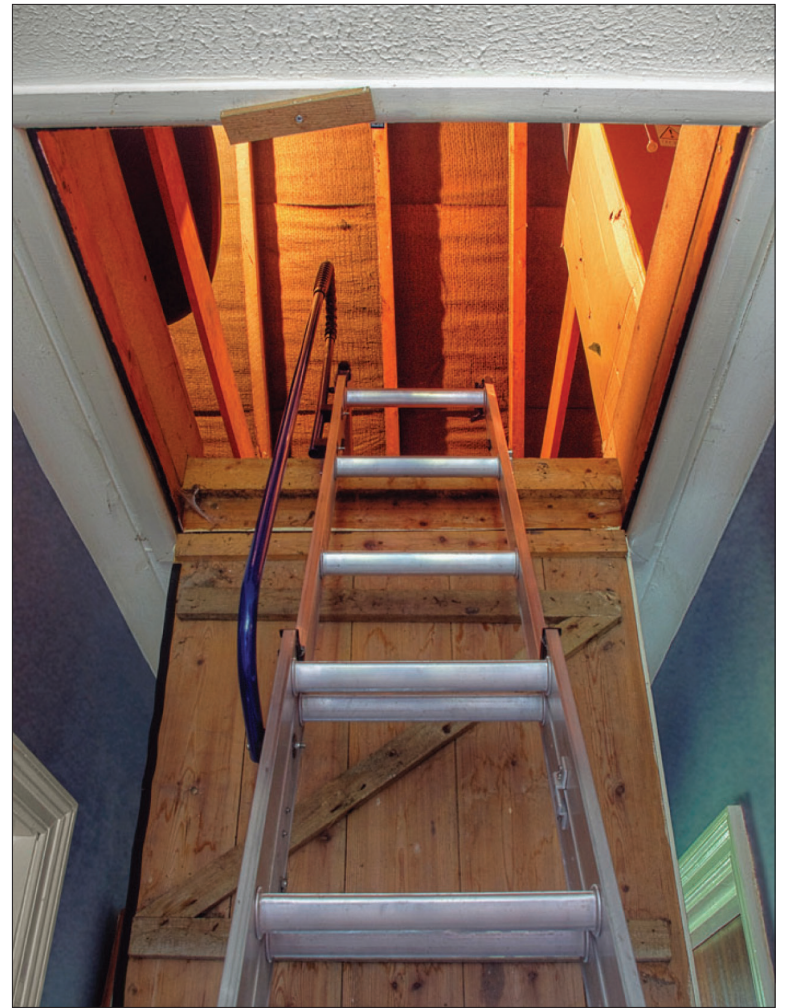
Houses typically feature various areas that are traditionally designed for storage, such as garages, basements and attics. However, with some renovation, these spaces can be transformed into livable areas.

Homeowners who would like to convert attics into livable spaces need to take certain things into consideration before starting an improvement project. While the attic may seem like it has plenty of room and is structurally sound enough to walk in, that's not necessarily so. To be converted into usable living space, an attic must be brought up to the standards of modern building codes, according to the design experts at Board & Vellum. Retrofitting beams and insulation can eat up available space in an attic. Thus, it is best to consult an expert to see if an attic can be converted.

Furthermore, an attic that was not initially designed as a room when the house was built can add

extra "load" upstairs if it is converted. That could present certain structural problems. That means a structural engineer also must be consulted to see if adding beams, flooring and drywall will necessitate other changes elsewhere in the home to accommodate the extra load.

In order to have a functional attic room, building codes will dictate that it needs to be accessible by a full-size staircase. Also, it will need to have another exit in case of an emergency so that will likely be an accessible window, according to the home information site The Fill. Homeowners' budgets and renovation plans will need to factor into these considerations. Homeowners also are advised to check local permits to determine what else may be required to go forward. It is best to follow the rules. Lack of a permit for work can affect the ability to



Attics - continued on page 17B

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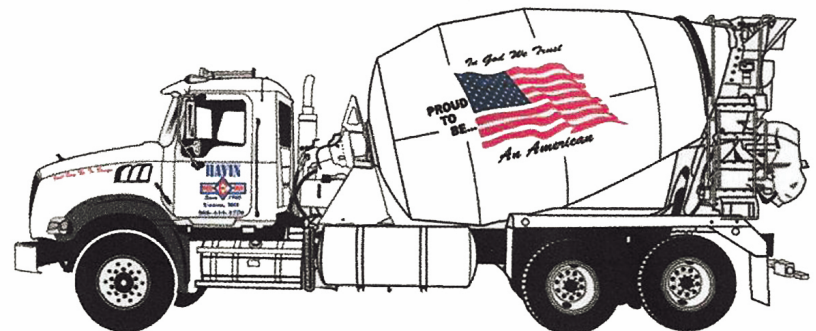
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Wood floor cleaning guide

Wood floors are coveted for a number of reasons, not the least of which is their aesthetic appeal. Many people prefer wood flooring because dust and dirt do not become trapped as they would in carpet fibers, seemingly making wood flooring easy to clean.

Most floors endure a lot of wear and tear. However, with care, wood flooring may last for decades. Part of that care includes understanding how to properly clean and maintain wood floors so they look their best. The following are some steps for keeping wood floors as pristine as possible.

- Remove shoes. It's a good idea to remove shoes, particularly heels, when walking on wood floors. Sharp heels, cleats and other shoes can scratch or dent wood flooring. All shoes can track in excess dirt, which can contribute to a lack of luster as well.

- Sweep or vacuum frequently. The experts at The Spruce suggest sweeping, vacuuming or dust mopping wood floors daily. Dirt and dust make floors more slippery, and dirt or sand particles can lead to scratches on the floor.

- Learn your flooring type. Wood flooring is broken down into three main categories: solid hardwood flooring, engineered hardwood flooring and laminate wood flooring. Traditional hardwood is made of planks or strips of any hardwood covered in a wood stain. Engineered flooring is manufactured by gluing together several thin plies of hardwood. Laminate flooring looks like wood but generally is a veneer or a photographic image of wood covered by a thick layer of melamine resin over fiberboard.

- Skip harsh cleansers. Regardless of flooring type, most are covered by a sealant that can become streaky or dull if the wrong cleanser is used. Avoid chlorine bleach, ammonia, pine oil, or undiluted vinegar. Instead, choose a cleanser that is specifically recommended for the flooring type. Do not allow water or solutions to sit on the floor, as that can contribute to staining and warping. With laminate flooring, avoid wet mopping unless the flooring is specifically marked as being able to be wet. The underlayers of laminate flooring can warp if it gets wet.

- Damp is better than wet. When cleaning wood flooring, use a damp rather than a soaking wet mop. Better Homes & Gardens says standing water can damage wood surfaces.

- Use the hard floor setting. When vacuuming, adjust the vacuum to a hard flooring setting, which will not engage the brush rollers on the vacuum head. Rollers can scratch wood and laminate flooring, advises The Home Depot.

- Use repair products as needed. Scratch and repair kits can fill in small scratches. Wood floor polish and wood waxes also can revitalize worn floors. Again, check that the product is safe for your particular flooring before use.

Wood floors bring warmth to a home and are very popular. Cleaning them correctly can add to their appeal and longevity.

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Three great reasons to replace aging windows

Windows in a home are easy to take for granted. Unless windows are showing signs of wear and tear or so dirty that it's hard to see through them, it's easy for them to go unnoticed. However, replacement windows can add value to a home and even save homeowners a substantial amount of money.

Much of the savings that can be attributed to new windows is related to energy efficiency. The Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy estimates that as much as 30 percent of heating and cooling energy can be lost through heat gain or heat loss, and aging, inefficient windows contribute to such losses. Replacing those windows can save homeowners substantial amounts of money, with one expert at Angi estimating that installation of energy efficient windows can help trim energy bills by as much as 12 percent.

Cost savings are often noted when firms promote replacement windows, but homeowners should know that replacement windows also provide numerous additional benefits. In fact, the following are three great reasons for homeowners to consider upgrading their windows today.

1. New windows help reduce carbon footprint. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency reports that replacing single-pane windows with ENERGY STAR® certified windows can help to reduce CO2 emissions by a significant margin. The EPA reports that such windows can save the equivalent of as much as 6,200 pounds of CO2 emissions thanks to reduced energy consumption associated with the new windows.

2. New windows can brighten a home. Natural light brightens a room and can make it appear larger. Homeowners who have grown accustomed to old windows may not realize how little light such windows let into their homes. Aging windows can become foggy over time and prevent natural light from getting into a home. That can create a gloomy feel and force homeowners to turn up the thermostat on cold days. New windows brighten the home and the natural light that pours in on a cold day can help heat the home at the same time.

3. New windows cut down on noise. Window manufacturers are always on the

lookout for ways to produce windows that make homes more comfortable. Noise reduction is one way to accomplish that goal, and Consumer Reports notes that triple-glazed windows can help to dramatically reduce outside noise. Homeowners who currently have single-pane windows may be astonished by the difference in outside noise levels when upgrading to triple-glazed windows, which contain a third layer of glass. That third layer of glass significantly reduces noise levels, making triple-glaze windows ideal for homes on busy streets or those in urban areas with lots of foot traffic.

Replacement windows pay numerous dividends. Homeowners can reap these rewards and others by replacing aging windows.





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A guide to various types of home awnings

Homeowners recognize that upgrades can improve the functionality and comfort of their homes. Improving outdoor spaces has proven particularly popular of late. The National Association of Home Builders reports that outdoor living has been propelled to the top of homeowner wish lists. Plus, a recent survey conducted by the New Home Trends Institute found connection to the outdoors/nature and outdoor entertaining ranked high among desired home designs.

One way to make outdoor spaces more accommodating is through the installation of awnings. Many homeowners would like to enhance their homes with awnings but do not know where to begin. Learning about the various types of awnings can help homeowners determine which option best suits their needs.

Fixed awnings

Fixed awnings are stationary on a building's exterior. While the awnings are generally stable, they can be damaged by snow or wind. It's key to find an installation expert to make sure the awning is installed correctly so that it can withstand weather and other issues. It's also important to know that fixed awnings remain in the same position and orientation, so it's best to know exactly where to place it beforehand.

Retractable awning

Retractable awnings are the most popular type of awnings because they can be extended when necessary to keep a space cool or protected, then rolled or folded up when not in use. These awnings are advantageous because they can be retracted when bad weather hits to prevent damage.

Motorized retractable awning

Motorized retractable awnings offer the utmost convenience. Standard retractable offerings require a handle or hand crank to manually extend or fold up the awning. Motorized awnings can be operated with a sensor, remote or even motion trigger. Even though they cost more, they're a favorite among homeowners.

Areas of use

Awnings can be installed in various locations. Patio awnings are much preferred because of their large coverage area, which typically spans entire patios. Door awnings are installed above the exterior door of an entryway to protect visitors and occupants from precipitation and to improve the home's look. Window awnings can add additional shade and privacy. There also are side awnings, which are essentially wall-like structures that run across a patio, garden or balcony for wind or sun protection. They're also utilized to improve privacy.

Homeowners can choose from various types of awning materials, including fabric, metal, glass, and others. Working with a reputable awning company is the best way for homeowners to peruse possible products and find awnings that will suit their needs.

Attics — continued from page 14B

sell a home down the line.

Individuals also should plan for heating and cooling upgrades as the home will need to have ductwork installed in the attic, or at the least, a stand-alone heating and cooling unit. As heat rises, it can get quite warm in an attic, so ventilation and comfort should be considered. The attic will need to be wired for electricity for lighting

and other needs. Air sealing and additional insulation can the attic space more comfortable as well. Consult with a qualified electrician and an HVAC technician and have an energy audit done to discuss needs.

Attic renovations can give homeowners more space in their homes, which can be used as offices, bedrooms or cozy corners. This is no small undertaking and all of the right steps need to be followed to ensure a legal, safe and successful renovation.

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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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Make outdoor living spaces more comfortable

Private backyards are now go-to spaces for recreation and entertainment and great places to recharge the body and mind.

One ripple effect of the COVID-19 pandemic was more time spent outdoors, even if it was predominantly on one's own property. OnePoll, in conjunction with the lawn care company TruGreen, surveyed 2,000 American homeowners and found participants spent 14 hours outside every week in 2021, which was three hours more than prior to the pandemic. In addition, respondents admitted that time spent outdoors was therapeutic.

A separate survey conducted for the International Casual Furnishings Association found that people now spend more time relaxing, gardening, exercising, dining, and entertaining outside than in years past. Though COVID-19 may no longer dominate headlines, the desire to enjoy



outdoor spaces has not waned.

While enjoying outdoor living areas, homeowners can do all they can to make these spaces comfortable and welcoming. The following are some good starting points.

Get all lit up

Outdoor spaces can be enjoyed no matter the hour when there is ample lighting. That could be why the International Casual

Furnishings Association reports those who plan to renovate their outdoor spaces list outdoor lighting as a priority. Outdoor lighting not only sheds light on entertaining spaces, but also makes spaces safer and more secure.

Increase privacy

No matter how friendly homeowners are with their neighbors, there comes a time when privacy is paramount. Fencing, whether

it is wood or vinyl, or even a natural fence made from closely planted hedges, can ensure residents feel comfortable venturing outdoors to swim, take a cat nap or even star gaze in private.

Address the elements

Homeowners should note the direction their backyard faces and the typical daily conditions of the space. For example, a yard that faces southwest may get plenty of strong sun during the day, requiring the addition of shade trees, covered patios or arbors to cut down on the glare and heat. If the yard is often hit by winds, trees or bushes planted strategically as windbreaks can help.

Sit comfortably

High-quality comfortable seating increases the likelihood that homeowners will want to stay awhile in their outdoor spaces. A deep seating set complete with plush chairs, outdoor sofa or love

seat and chaise lounge chairs gives people more opportunity to sit and stay awhile.

Take a dip

A pool can be the perfect gathering spot on a warm day, while a spa/hot tub can bridge the gap to cooler weather. According to the Family Handyman, soaking in hot tubs can relax tired muscles after a long day, loosen up stiff joints, improve cardiovascular health, and reduce the time it takes to fall asleep.

Bite back at bugs

Homeowners may want to consider using a professional exterminator to get rid of ticks, mosquitoes and other nuisance insects from outdoor spaces.

As people spend more time enjoying their properties, they can consider the many ways to make outdoor living spaces more comfortable.

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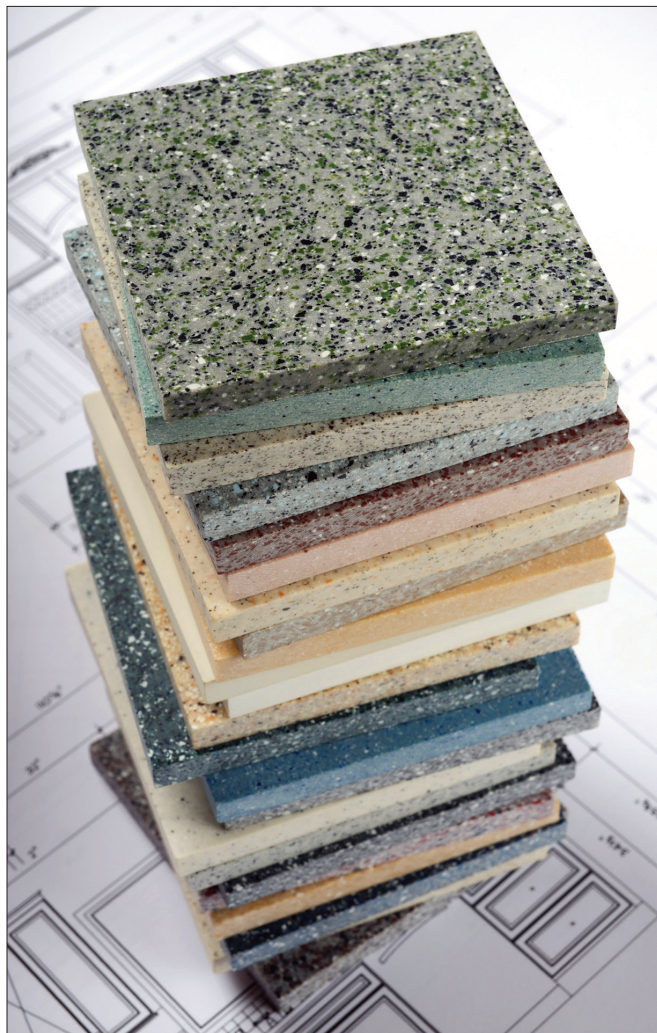
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What to know about kitchen countertop materials



Kitchens are the busiest rooms in most homes. Kitchens have become more than just places to prepare meals, with many functioning as gathering spaces and even go-to dining spots in homes that do not feature formal dining rooms.

So much time spent in the kitchen makes it worthwhile to invest in these popular spaces. Kitchen renovations are high on many homeowners' to-do lists, and there's many decisions to make once they commit to redoing the room. When renovating a kitchen, homeowners will have to choose which countertop material they want to install, and the following rundown of popular options can help simplify that decision.

Quartz

Quartz is considered a low-maintenance and durable countertop material. The home improvement experts at This Old House note that quartz countertops are typically 94 percent ground quartz and now come with an honed, sandblasted or embossed treatment, which makes them appealing to homeowners with varying

ideas on the ideal look of a kitchen countertop. Quartz can crack if it's not handled properly, and edges and corners can chip over time. Rounded edges can minimize the risk of chipping. Costs vary by location and product availability, but quartz typically costs about the same as natural stone.

Granite

Consumer Reports notes that no two slabs of granite are the same, and that uniqueness has long appealed to homeowners. Tests run by Consumer Reports found that heat, cuts and scratches did not harm granite, though this material, like quartz, can crack around edges and corners. Granite is a durable material that, if properly maintained, can last several decades. Granite also is nonporous, which makes it resistant to bacteria.

Laminate

Countertop - continued on page 21B

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Three low-maintenance trees to consider

Few things in nature are as breathtaking as a beautiful landscape. That beauty is perhaps one reason why many homeowners spend so much time and expend so much effort on their lawns and gardens.

Though plenty of homeowners love spending time in the yard, others may not be so inclined. For the latter group, low-maintenance trees can be just what the doctor ordered. Low-maintenance trees can provide the beauty nature-loving homeowners desire without all the extra work of more needy plants. It's always best to consult a local landscaping professional prior to planting to ensure a tree will thrive in a given climate. In preparation for that consultation, homeowners can study this list of three low-maintenance trees while recognizing that all trees may need a little extra TLC in extreme weather.

1. **Jacaranda:** Instantly identifiable by its purple blooms, the jacaranda tree is native to South America, which makes it ideal in warm climates. The jacaranda tree is considered a shade tree and if or when it sheds its leaves, those leaves can typically be mowed, saving homeowners the work of raking them. However, the online home and garden resource The Spruce notes that jacaranda trees can require substantial maintenance when planted near surfaces where people walk, such as driveways and patios. So when planting jacaranda trees, it's ideal to do so in locations where falling leaves will land exclusively on grass.

2. **American arborvitae:** The Arbor Day Foundation® notes that the American arborvitae requires almost no care when it's used as a hedge or a screen. That's a popular use for this versatile specimen with a narrow, pyramid shape. Though it does not provide the bright blast of color offered by the jacaranda, the American arborvitae creates an elegant look that offers considerable privacy as well.

3. **Japanese red maple:** The Home Depot notes that the Japanese red maple are very low-maintenance trees that can adapt to various soil types and grow in an assortment of light conditions. During dry periods, however, the ADF notes the importance of keeping soil consistently moist. Various types of soil can accommodate the Japanese red maple, so this is a consideration for any homeowner looking to add some color to their lawns without a lot of extra work.

When consider new trees for a property, homeowners can easily be persuaded by the beauty of the tree. Though that's worthy of consideration, homeowners who want low-maintenance trees should speak to a gardening professional about the work required to maintain a tree's beauty throughout the year, especially during periods of drought or other adverse conditions. In addition, ask the gardening pro to recommend non-invasive trees. Planting invasive trees can be harmful and cause damage to surrounding plants, which can be costly and time-consuming to address.

Countertop - Continued from page 20B

Laminate countertops appeal to budget-friendly homeowners and Consumer Reports notes that they're easy to install. Home Depot also notes that laminate countertops come in a wide range of colors, textures and designs. Laminate countertops also are durable, which helps budget-conscious homeowners stretch their dollars even further. Laminate countertops are easily maintained, though it's also easy to permanently damage them with knives, so Consumer Reports recommends always using a cutting board when preparing meals on laminate.

Butcher Block

Butcher block countertops are among the more unique options homeowners may consider. Sometimes referred to as "wood countertops," butcher block countertops are made from wooden strips that are fused together. The home improvement experts at BobVila.com note that butcher block is among the more affordable materials, but the final cost will be dictated by location and availability. BobVila.com notes that butcher block countertops are highly sensitive to liquid, so exposure to moisture should be limited. Sealing butcher block countertops immediately after installation can help protect against bacteria and warping. Though butcher blocks can be high maintenance, many homeowners find the unique look is well worth the extra elbow grease.

Kitchen countertops can define how the room looks, and homeowners have many options to choose from when designing a new kitchen.



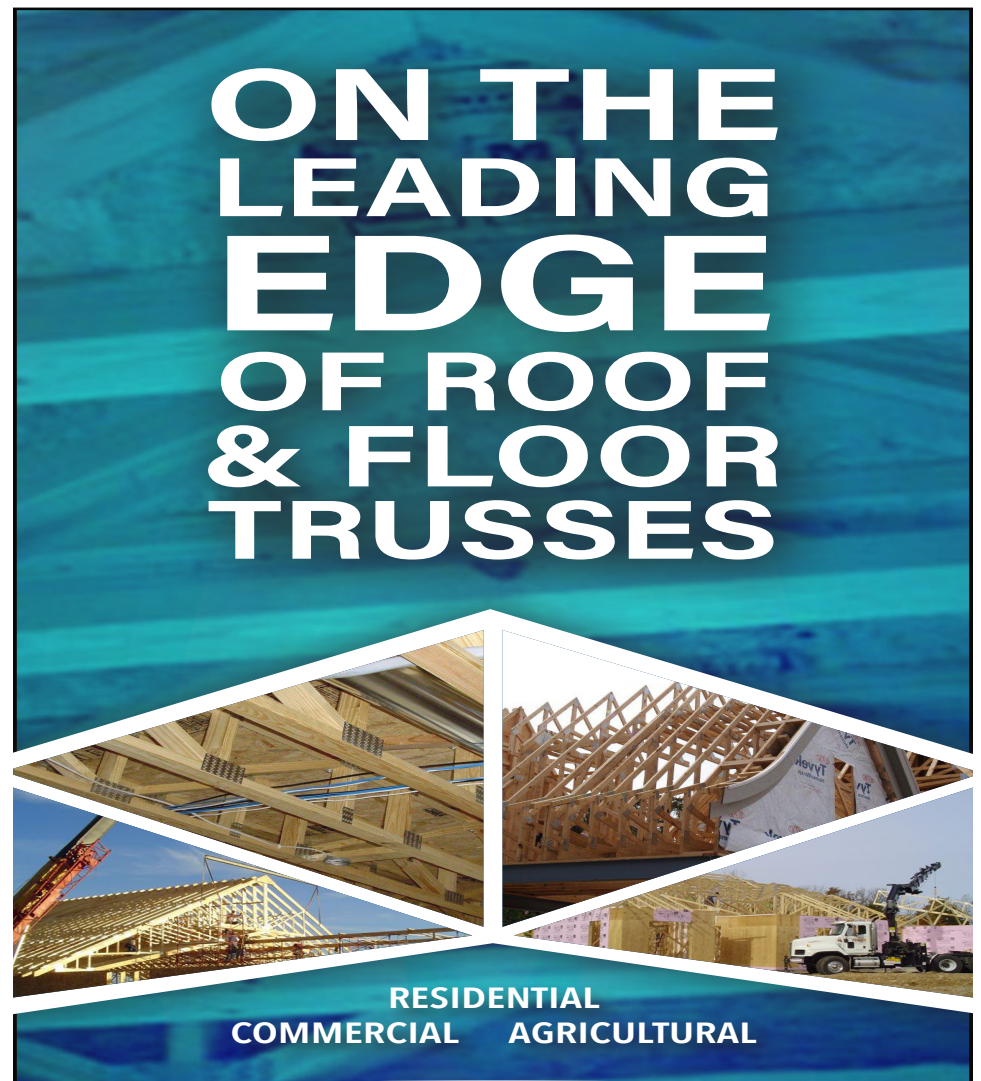
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Give your home a new look with these shutter styles

Homeowners have many options at their disposal if they want to improve their homes. A focus on the exterior can be a promising and rewarding way to direct renovation dollars.

Curb appeal has a significant impact on how a home is viewed. Manicured landscapes, updated windows and doors and well-lit landscapes can improve the value of a home and ensure it sells quickly and above market rate.

When homeowners assess items they may want to change, shutters can be an area of consideration. Shutters can help windows look a little less plain.

In most modern residential properties, shutters are purely decorative. However, their roots lie in home protection. Originally, shutters were used in lieu of windows so they were the only way to safeguard a home's interior from the elements. Some shutters still offer that protection, but those typically are installed on



homes in hurricane-prone areas.

Window shutters lend a finished and distinctive look to a home. When shopping for shutters, individuals can choose among various styles.

- **Louvered:** A louvered shutter features several wood slats that overlap each

other on the same frame. A typical louvered shutter features two sets of slats separated by a center rail. Some functional louvered shutters are operational, meaning the slats can be tilted to allow air to flow through. But this is something typically reserved for indoor shutters. Decorative ones have fixed slats.

- **Panel:** Panel shutters come in different styles. Raised panel shutters present a boxed design where rectangular features will stand out from the rest of the frame. Flat panel shutters (sometimes referred to as shaker) have the boxed design, but those rectangles are not raised. Recessed panels are the opposite of raised panels. As their name suggests, recessed panels are set back from the rest of the frame.

- **Board and batten:** Board and batten shutters are formed from grouped single boards joined together with shorter crosspieces of wood called battens. Battens are positioned horizontally or at an angle. These shutters have a more informal, rural feel.

- **Bahama/Bermuda:** These tropical-in-

spired shutters are of the louvered variety, but they're installed from the top of the window rather than on the sides.

- **Scandinavian:** Scandinavian series shutters are very decorative board and batten shutters. They feature a series of cutouts and designs.

- **Combination:** Some shutters offer the best of both worlds, with louvered on top and a solid panel on the bottom, or vice versa. This gives homeowners infinite options.

Shutters are available in various materials. The most common include wood, vinyl and composite. Cedar, mahogany and pine are commonly used woods for exterior shutters. Vinyl is more economical and lightweight, but they can be challenging to clean and do not offer the longevity of other materials. Composite shutters are durable and cost less than wood in most cases.

Color is another consideration when replacing shutters. Shutters can stand out or blend in with the siding and other architectural accents. Shutters also can flank a front door to fully complete an exterior look.

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Design ideas that can create a peaceful feel

Homes are often characterized as sanctuaries for their residents. A calm place to come home to after a busy day at work or school is often just what people need to unwind.

Certain design components can help individuals turn their homes into relaxing respites from the daily grind. With that goal in mind, individuals can consider these ideas to create a peaceful feel inside their homes.

- **Paint with neutral colors.** Wall colors can define the mood in a given room, and neutral colors have long been linked to a calming effect. Subtle shades like beige, taupe and light gray are known to create a relaxed vibe in a room, so these colors can be a go-to choice. Some people consider neutral colors a tad boring, so individuals concerned by that impression can limit neutral colors to rooms designated as sanctuaries, like a reading room, a spa bathroom or a bedroom.

- **Employ natural light.** Natural light also can help to establish a serene setting at home. Large windows that let daylight in can improve anyone's mood. A 2022 study from researchers at the University of Chile in Santiago found that the more natural light that entered a home, the happier people said they felt. Study authors even noted that the largest uptick in well-being was found among participants who lived in homes in which windows covered at least 40 percent of the dwelling's wall space. Opening blinds or curtains and, if possible, installing larger windows in a home can help to establish the relaxing, happy vibe individuals are aiming for.

- **Utilize plants to set a peaceful tone.** The United Kingdom-based Royal Horticultural Society notes that research has found that indoor plants can benefit psychological well-being. The RHS notes that improved mood and reduced stress levels are two benefits that indoor plants can provide. A good mood and less stress can help individuals establish the peaceful feel they're aiming for at home.

- **Keep devices out of bedrooms.** Watching television while lying in bed, scanning a smartphone before turning off a nightstand light and retiring for the night, or reading an e-reader instead of a print book at night can transform a bedroom from a serene setting into one that's overrun with stimuli. According to the Sleep Foundation, technology stimulates the mind, which can make it harder to fall asleep. In addition, blue light emitted by devices disrupts the natural production of melatonin, a hormone that makes it easier

to fall asleep. That can negate any efforts individuals have undertaken to make their bedrooms as peaceful as possible. Designate bedrooms in the house as technology-free zones to ensure the peaceful vibe continues uninterrupted until everyone goes to bed.

A peaceful home makes for the perfect respite at the end of a busy day. Various design choices can help individuals establish a serene vibe throughout their homes.

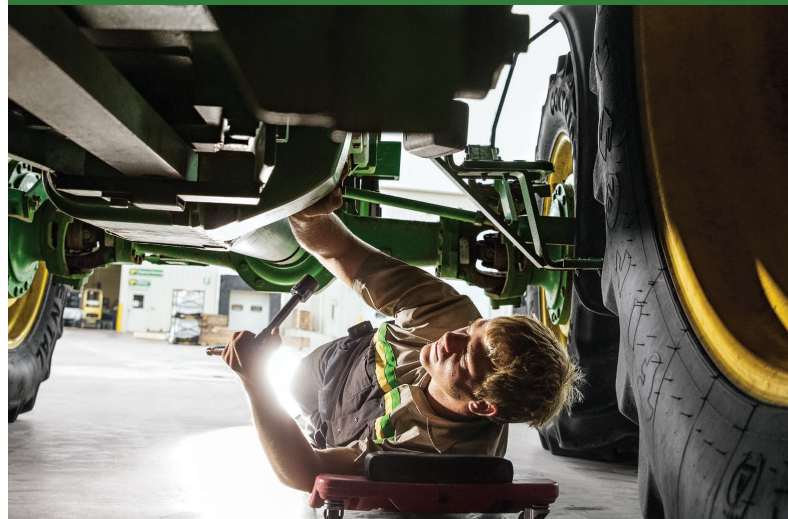


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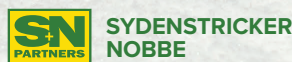
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Owner's suite renovation ideas for luxury spaces

An owner's suite is a sanctuary for homeowners. It's a place where adults can retreat, relax and unwind after a busy day. It's expected that a bed and some other furniture will take up residence in a standard bedroom, but certain elements can help homeowners create stunning spaces.

While the largest bedroom in the home typically is dubbed the "owner's suite," it cannot be classified as a suite unless there

Luxury - continued on page 25B

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Did you know?

An assortment of variables will dictate just how long a home's siding will last, including the amount of sun a home receives and the location of the home. The life expectancy of siding also will depend on the siding material. According to Sunshine Contracting, vinyl siding lasts between 20 and 40 years. It's a popular choice because of how long it lasts and the minimal upkeep it requires. Wood siding, another traditional favorite, is more expensive, but it also boasts impressive longevity, according to BobVila.com. With proper maintenance, which includes cleaning and refinishing, wood siding may last for decades. The coating on aluminum siding typically begins to fade after about 15 years. Fiber cement siding is affordable, durable and low maintenance, and it may actually last as long as the home itself. It needs to be repainted occasionally. Sunshine Contracting says stone veneer siding will last between 20 and 75 years, depending on the stone that is used.

Luxury - Continued from page 24B

is an adjoining bathroom. An owner's suite also may have many more unique features that individuals may want to incorporate into a remodel. Here are some ideas to consider.

Upgraded closet

Those who will be overhauling the walls and layout of the bedroom can configure the space to make room for a serious closet overhaul. A spacious, walk-in closet that has built-in shelves, drawers and rods can improve the functionality of the bedroom. Draw dividers and other components also can optimize space.

Sitting area

In large suites, homeowners may have the potential to set up a sitting area in one portion of the room away from the bed. This area can have a sofa, chairs, chaise, or other furniture and make for an ideal spot to read and lounge. Some people also enjoy having a television adjacent to the sitting area so they can watch a show in the privacy of the bedroom.

Fireplace

Fireplaces add a unique ambiance to bedrooms and make for cozy spaces in which to cuddle up. While a traditional, roaring wood fire is one option, there is much less mess and fuss with a gas fireplace. Some gas fireplaces may not even have to be vented, and they can be turned on with the flip of a

switch.

Private patio or balcony

Owners who want to go the extra mile in owner's suite renovations can incorporate outdoor spaces into the plans. Many homes are now being built with owner's suites on the first floor, facilitating the possibility of aging in place at home. With this layout, the bedroom can be opened up to the outdoors by way of a sliding door or French doors. Decking or a patio can be outside of the room, or even a covered space similar to a Florida room. Those with second-floor suites may want to consider a small deck or balcony where bistro seating can be placed.

Luxury bath

Owners can turn the en suite bathroom into something out of a spa. A steam shower; heated floors; separate area for the toilet, closed off from the rest of the bathroom; and dual vanities and sinks can make this a place that screams luxury and comfort. Do not forget dimmer switches for lighting, and even the inclusion of some new aromatherapy technology for increasing the potential for relaxation.

Many different features can improve the functionality and luxury of an owner's suite. when conditions outside are less inviting.

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Ideas to repurpose a formal dining room

Formal dining rooms are no longer a must-have among home buyers. Reports on the decline of the formal dining room appear to have been premature, as many real estate professionals have noted that some clients still insist that a home must have such a space. However, many agents also report low demand for formal dining rooms.

Beauty is indeed in the eye of the

Repurpose - continued on page 27B

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Repurpose - Continued from page 26B

beholder regarding formal dining rooms. Buyers and homeowners who see these rooms as unnecessary can consider the many ways to transform them to better suit their needs.

- **Playroom:** Parents of young children know that kids have a way of taking over living spaces in a home. If the living room has been overtaken by toys, homeowners can consider converting their formal dining room into a kids' playroom. Formal dining rooms tend to be spacious places that can accommodate a large dinner table, a bar and a buffet table. That means there's ample space for a kids' toy chest, bookshelf, crafts table, dollhouse, and more.

- **Home office:** The COVID-19 pandemic changed the way many modern workers go about their typical workday. Millions of workers now work from home at least a few days a week if not full-time. When the pandemic began, that led to a space crunch, particularly in homes

with more than one working adult. Workers who have been using the formal dining table as a desk for years can now fully commit to repurposing the room. One factor to keep in mind is whether or not the room will need a door. Some formal dining rooms already feature pocket doors or even French doors, but many do not offer any such privacy. A door installation could increase the price tag associated with repurposing the room, but the end result could be well worth the additional costs.

- **Game room:** A large formal dining table might be similar in shape and size to a pool table, but pool players will need some space around a pool table to ensure they aren't putting holes in the surrounding walls each time they pick up a cue stick. If pool doesn't tickle homeowners' fancy, then a room devoted to gaming, complete with a flat screen or two on the wall and some new gaming chairs, can be a great way to repurpose the

space. Modern parents often play video games alongside their children, making this a great way to create a fun and family-friendly space in the home.

- **Reading room:** Devoted bibliophiles may aspire to turn their formal dining rooms into spaces tailor-made for curling up with a good book. Book lovers often lament they lack the space to display all of their books, so this idea can provide the perfect solution to that problem. Replace existing furnishings with some bookcases and a comfortable reading chair and then sit back and crack open a good book. Homeowners who want to go the extra mile can convert the room into a traditional English library, complete with wood-paneled walls, a fireplace, a floor globe, and leather furniture.

There's no end to what can be done when homeowners decide it's time to convert their formal dining rooms into spaces they're likely to use more often.

Did you know?

Certain areas of a home are more likely to draw the interest of prospective buyers when a house goes on the market. When that day comes, many realtors and homeowners rely on staging to make a home as attractive as possible during an open house or appointment viewing. According to a 2019 report from the National Association of Realtors, staging the living room is most important for buyers, with 47 percent of buyers indicating a well-staged living room had an effect on their view of the home. The owner's suite (42 percent) and the kitchen (35 percent) were found to be the next most important rooms to stage. Though the report is generally concerned with selling a home, the conclusions in the report are something renovation-minded homeowners can keep in mind. If prospective buyers are most impressed by well-staged living rooms, owner's suites and kitchens, it stands to reason that those same rooms, when well-designed and recently renovated, will elicit a similarly positive reaction if homeowners ultimately decide to sell their homes in the future.

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Turn a backyard into your own relaxing respite

Backyards have long been places to unwind and enjoy some peace and quiet surrounded by nature.

Thanks in part to financial instability brought on by rising inflation and measures to tame it, homeowners may decide to forgo traditional vacations in favor of staying home this season. There's no better time to invest in a home, particularly outdoor spaces, to make them welcoming respites. The following are some ways to accomplish that goal.

Incorporate a water feature

The sound of trickling or bubbling water can make surroundings more serene. A low-maintenance water feature can help to create a calming ambiance. A fountain that does not require a collection pond will reduce the chance it becomes a breeding ground for mosquitoes. Locating the fountain out of the sun can keep algae growth at a minimum.

Add lights for ambiance

Outdoor lighting options include professionally installed, hardwired lights on the home itself or accent lighting that draws attention to trees or architectural structures on the property. It also may include twinkling lights, which some consider a must-have for any outdoor



retreat. Lights come in all types and price points. Hang them on porches, pergolas or cement posts inside decorative planters and then string lights between the posts. This way the lighting can be moved around as desired.

Lounging spots

A comfortable outdoor loveseat or chairs may be a focal point of the yard, but build in some additional cozy spots specifically for lounging around. Nestle a hammock in a quiet corner of the yard, or enhance a chaise lounge

with throw pillows and a large umbrella for napping poolside.

Add lushness with plants

Plants can transform any space. Use a combination of planted varieties around the yard, then enhance certain areas with potted plants as needed. Plants can make an area more warm and inviting, plus they give butterflies, bees and hummingbirds places to stop by and visit. Consider the help of a professional landscaper to bring a vision of a lush, plant-filled retreat to life.

Blend in the pool or spa

With some unique landscape architecture, the pool or hot tub can be built right into the landscape, making it a cohesive part of the design. This can make the yard seem even more like an oasis, especially when the pool is flanked by a waterfall or bubbling fountain.

Add some music

Thanks to wireless speakers that rely on Bluetooth technology, it's easy to have music piped right into the backyard. Set up a wireless speaker in an inconspicuous spot, such as inside a planter or in the rafters of a gazebo. Turning a backyard into an oasis can provide the respite many people look for on their properties.

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Sights and sounds that indicate floors should be replaced

Nice flooring draws immediate attention when entering a home. Natural wood floors tend to instantly impress, while the right kitchen flooring materials can create the welcoming feeling many homeowners strive to establish in the most popular room in the home.

Stunning floors are hard to miss, and floors that are well past their prime are equally noticeable. Aging floors may fall somewhere between fading and failing to live up to homeowners' standards. Fading floors may not need to be replaced immediately, but the following are some signs that indicate existing floors are nearing their expiration date.

- **Soft spots:** A floor should not give when stepped on. Soft spots could be indicative of water damage caused by any number of factors. Some water damage is caused by mopping the floor with a soaking wet mop, while burst pipes also contribute to water damage that can cause soft spots. A single soft spot on the floor may necessitate a relatively simple repair, but various soft spots indicate extensive damage that might be affecting the floor, subflooring or both. In the latter instance, homeowners should consider a full floor replacement.

- **Creaking floors:** Creaking floors are among the more annoying issues that can arise in a home. In such homes, residents feel as though every step they or their housemates take is being announced. In addition, creaking floors can awake light sleepers, including young children. The floor experts at Discount Flooring Depot note that uneven subfloor could be the culprit behind creaking floors. Though that does not necessarily require a floor replacement, it can be hard to lift existing floors and then refit them after the subflooring has been addressed. That's especially so if low-quality laminate flooring was installed. So while creaking floors may not require a full floor replacement, it's an outcome homeowners who can no longer live with the noise can prepare themselves for.

- **Dated look:** Of course, some floors simply look like the product of a bygone era. Various factors, including location, affect the resale value of a home, but Realtor.com reports that hardwood floors are preferred by both home buyers and renters. In addition, Realtor.com estimates that wood floors could provide a return as high as 80 percent of the initial investment when homeowners sell their homes. If existing flooring looks dated, it might be time to bring it up to speed with something more modern.

A home's flooring is bound to draw the attention of residents and visitors alike. Homeowners who replace their flooring can ensure that attention is drawn for all the right reasons.

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Who doesn't have a space at home that serves as a catch-all for items that seemingly have no other home? For many, this storage wasteland where items go to be forgotten tends to be the garage. Before long, clutter can overwhelm the space and create an eyesore. Garage clutter also makes the space less functional by making it harder to park a vehicle or store equipment.

Organizing a garage takes work, but the end result can improve the appearance, free up space, make work more efficient, and make it easier to find and use tools more readily. Here are some ways to get started on organizing your garage.

Start with cleaning and culling

One of the first steps when organizing a garage is to thoroughly analyze what is needed and what can be removed from the garage. If items belong elsewhere, such as in a shed or the basement, move these

Solutions - continued on page 31B

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Solutions - Continued from page 30B

items first. Discard damaged or broken items. Next, move on to tools or gear that hasn't been used in some time. Will you use it again? If the item has been collecting dust for years, you likely already know the answer to that question.

Pile all items in the driveway so you have a clean slate with which to start. Measure the room to figure out the dimensions so you'll know how much wall space is available for storage.

Free up floor space

The ultimate goal of a garage storage renovation is to make floor space available, according to Stacey Schweiger of Sunshine Organizing. Lifting items off the floor makes access easier, and protects items should there be a flood or leaks.

A combination of wall shelves, overhead shelves, cabinets, and wall hooks can help homeowners create more floor area. Organization becomes easier when everything has a designated space where it can be easily returned to.

Consider weight

When investing in shelving and racks, remember that many of the items stored

in garages tend to be heavy. It's important to ensure that shelves and hooks are heavy-duty and able to withstand the weight of pressure put on them. Verify the maximum weight so that racks will not buckle or tip over and cause issues.

Utilize overhead space

Overhead storage can be reserved for items that aren't used frequently, such as seasonal decorations or luggage.

Out of sight

Some items should be stored out of sight and beyond the reach of children and pets. Cabinets and containers can be used and locked to secure materials, such as fertilizers, paints, solvents, and other chemicals.

Additional ideas

Magnets, pegboards, organization bins and systems, and similar products can be used to corral small or errant items like hand tools, fasteners and more.

Garage organization will take some planning and time, but the end result can be well worth the effort.

Did you know?

Perhaps due to changing weather patterns that have made Mother Nature as unpredictable as ever, Florida rooms are wildly popular. These rooms, sometimes referred to as "sunrooms," enable a home's inhabitants to take in the beauty of nature even on those days when the weather outside is less than welcoming. The cost of a sunroom addition varies greatly and is affected by a host of variables, including the existing structure and whether or not homeowners aspire to utilize the room year-round or during the three seasons when temperatures are at their most moderate. According to HomeGuide, the cost to install an 8 x 10 three-season Florida room averages between \$6,000 and \$18,500. The same size room built to be enjoyed year-round can cost between \$16,000 and \$28,000. Homeowners may choose to create larger Florida rooms, but the cost will increase with each square foot added to the project. Such costs are considerable, but homeowners should know that adding square footage to a home typically increases the home's resale value, meaning it's likely they can recoup a considerable percentage of their Florida room investment when selling their home.

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Plan a spa bathroom remodel

Many health and wellness regimens include treatments that promote relaxation and comfort. According to IBIS Worldwide, revenue for health and wellness spas across the United States has risen at a rate of 1.1 percent over the past five years, reaching \$23.3 billion in 2023. The International Spa Association said that while spa visits fell in 2020, likely due to the global pandemic, visits rebounded a year later.

The popularity of spa visits is one indicator that people enjoy being pampered and frequently make time for treatments. While visiting a spa is one way to rest and recharge, individuals may be able to enjoy similar perks if they incorporate these spa-like features in their homes.

Hang artwork

Any space is made more welcoming and classy with the addition of some artistic touches. Hang pictures that will create a relaxing atmosphere, such as floral prints or beachscapes. Integrating large prints or a gallery wall can add a different dimension to the bathroom.

Bathroom - continued on page 33B

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Bathroom - Continued from page 32B

Change the color scheme

Spas are typically bright and clean and evoke feelings of purity. This can be achieved by choosing white, off-white or pale gray in the color scheme. An all-white design for fixtures and tiles also makes it easy to swap out accessories when the mood strikes.

Incorporate natural materials

When decorating the space, use natural materials like stone, wood and marble rather than plastic or metal. This can add to the luxury appeal.

Install a rainfall shower head

Upgrade fixtures to make them more luxurious. Multi-head shower fixtures and rainfall shower heads can help anyone unwind and relax. Rain showers can evoke calmness and relaxation as they gently cascade down. Additional shower upgrades can include steam functions,

soothing lights and aromatherapy.

Keep the tub

While many adults admit to not bathing nearly as much as they shower, there are benefits to having a deep, spa-like tub. Soaking away the stresses of the day, lounging in the tub with a good book and listening to music while enjoying a bubble bath are all ways to slow down and eke out a bit more quiet, personal time to unwind. Tubs can be outfitted with waterfall features to add to the ambiance even further.

Invest in quality linens

When stepping out of the shower or the bath, individuals can wrap themselves in thick, luxurious towels or robes. Guests also will appreciate comfortable towels if they come to visit.

Certain features can transform home bathrooms into spa-like retreats with a few touches.

Advertiser Index on Page 46

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Kitchen cabinets: reface or replace?

The kitchen is a busy room in many homes. That popularity likely has something to do with why so many homeowners spend sizable sums renovating their kitchens. According to highlights from the 2022 U.S. Houzz Kitchen Trends Study, the median spend on major kitchen remodels grew by 14 percent from the previous year, and minor remodels increased by 25 percent. Spurred on by increased time spent at home during the pandemic, the main impetus for kitchen remodels according to the study was that homeowners wanted to make these improvements all along and finally had the time and means to do so.

There are many aspects of a kitchen that homeowners can change. Houzz found 94 percent of renovators either fully or partially replaced cabinets in their improvement plans. Cabinets are a major component of kitchen layouts. Cabinets help to establish the aesthetic of a kitchen and serve a useful function, providing necessary storage space to ensure the room does not appear cluttered.

Homeowners have different options when it comes to cabinet renovations, and they may need to decide if they need to

Cabinets - continued on page 35B

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The benefits of energy-efficient homes

Consumer efforts to be more eco-conscious are more and more noticeable. For proof of that, one need look no further than the increase in vehicle charging stations. Such stations are more accessible than ever and illustrate that consumer preference is increasingly leaning toward products that leave as small a carbon footprint as possible.

Another indicator of a growing interest in eco-friendly products is the popularity in energy-efficient homes. In fact, a recent survey from the National Association of Home Builders found that energy-efficient features are among the most sought-after “must-haves” among homebuyers. Among those surveyed, 83 percent desired Energy Star-rated windows, 81 percent wanted Energy Star-rated appliances and 80 percent preferred energy-efficient lighting.

Though eco-conscious sensibilities compel millions of homeowners to make their homes more energy-efficient, that’s not the only reason to upgrade your home. The following are a handful of the many benefits of energy-efficient homes.

- **Save money:** Inflation was one of the biggest stories of 2022, as the cost of living rose dramatically in the wake of world events. According to data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, inflation led to an overall 6.5 percent increase in prices. But that increase was dwarfed by the cost of electricity, which increased by 14.3 percent in 2022. Energy-efficient appliances can help homeowners overcome that spike, as the U.S. Department of Energy indicates upgrading to such products can help homeowners reduce their energy costs by as much as 30 percent.

- **Improve resale value:** As the NAHB survey indicates, modern homebuyers want energy-efficient homes. They’re also willing to pay more for such homes. Research from the mortgage lender Freddie Mac found that homes with energy-efficient ratings sold for nearly 3 percent more on average than homes without such ratings.

- **Live healthier:** The benefits of energy-efficient homes aren’t just economic, though health-related benefits certainly produce an economic incentive as well. According to the American

Cabinets - Continued from page 34B

replace or reface their cabinets.

Replacement

Cabinet replacement involves removing all of the existing cabinets before new cabinets are leveled and installed. According to the home improvement resource The Spruce, homeowners can expect to pay between \$13,000 and \$30,000 for contractor grade cabinets. Cabinet replacement is a good idea when homeowners want to add more cabinet space or

create a new layout in the room.

Refacing

Cabinet refacing is less messy and less disruptive than replacement. All cabinets remain the same size and in the same location. The cabinet boxes must be in good shape to facilitate a refacing. The process involves installation of new drawer fronts and cabinet doors, as well as veneering of the cabinet boxes. New hardware typically is installed as well. The insides of the cabinets typically remain the same.

The Spruce says cabinet refacing can be 30 to 50 percent cheaper than a replacement.

Most people call in professionals to change their cabinets. Cabinet replacement can be a do-it-yourself job, but it involves measuring and ensuring everything fits and is leveled appropriately. Homeowners who choose to reface their cabinets themselves may opt to paint or restain. Wood veneer or a new door and drawer panel installation can be complicated and is best left to qualified contractors.



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Siding materials to consider for your home



Exterior renovations consistently top the list of projects that offer maximum return on investment, according to Remodeling magazine’s annual “Cost vs. Value Report.” Siding replacement is a popular exterior renovation and one that can completely transform the look of a home.

Siding comes in a variety of materials, and homeowners can explore the pros, cons and affordability of each to make the most informed decision when replacing their existing siding. Factors to consider apart from price include durability, maintenance and aesthetics.

Vinyl

Vinyl siding is one of the most popular siding materials in North America. That popularity is perhaps due to the relatively low cost of vinyl siding replacement, which Forbes Home estimates is between \$6,150 and \$15,900 to install for a 2,000-square-foot home. A wide array of color options as well as weatherproof protection makes vinyl siding worthy of consideration.

PVC, which is what vinyl siding is comprised of, also is quite fire-resistant. Potential pitfalls of vinyl are that it can fade more quickly than other siding materials and is sensitive to excess UV exposure.

Engineered

Engineered materials cost more than vinyl but are considered very durable. They can be advantageous in damp climates or ones where insects are problematic. LP SmartSide™ is a type of engineered hardwood that is very durable, so much so that a 50-year warranty often is offered for the product, according to First American Roofing & Siding. This material can be painted if homeowners desire a change of color down the line. This siding costs around \$2.50 to \$4.50 per square foot for siding and all trim accessories with an additional installation cost of \$5.50 to \$12.00 per square foot. The product is made of wooden strands that have been coated with wax for moisture resistance. A special zinc-based solution is added to protect against

Siding - continued on page 37B

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Siding - Continued from page 36B

rot and insect infestation.

A similar product, HardiePlank™, is engineered from a blend of cement, wood fibers, fine sand, and water. It is similar in price point to the SmartSide and offers resistance to rot and insects. HardiePlank also can be repainted.

Engineered products can be more expensive to install and generally are not DIY renovations, which may deter homeowners working on tight budgets.

Wood siding

Wood is one of the oldest siding materials. It can be stained or painted and comes in a variety of styles, from boards to shingles. It's a popular choice in historical homes or ones with classic, architectural details.

It's important to note that wood is a combustible material that can be susceptible to water and insect damage. It also needs to be maintained continuously to look its best. This makes wood siding a true commitment on the part of homeowners. The cost is midrange between vinyl and engineered sidings.

Metal

Those interested in one of the most energy efficient options in siding can look no further than metal siding. Metal isn't just for roofing. According to Colonial Contracting, Inc., metal siding creates a uniquely modern appearance and comes in a variety of styles that complement homes.

Unlike fiber, wood or vinyl products, metal siding reflects the sun's rays and keeps interior temperatures cooler in the summer, a boon in hot climates but maybe not the most insulating option for cold climates. One potential pitfall is the possibility of rust, which would make metal siding a less ideal choice for those who live near the ocean. The cost of metal siding is comparable to other siding products, at around \$10 per square foot.

These are a few of the siding options homeowners can investigate if they're revamping the exteriors of their homes.



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What to know about replacing gutters

Certain home renovation projects are more glamorous than others. A remodeled kitchen is sure to garner its share of “oohs and aahs,” while a newly paved driveway is much less likely to dazzle guests.

A gutter replacement is another job that might not have the wow factor. But fully functioning gutters are a must and can help to prevent potentially expensive roof damage. Gutters rarely draw attention, but homeowners can keep an eye out for signs that indicate gutters need to be replaced.

Signs gutters should be replaced

Various signs indicate it’s time to replace existing gutters. Homeowners should act promptly if any of the following signs arise, as poorly functioning gutters can make it hard for water to get into the downspouts, ultimately pushing it backward and likely underneath roof shingles, where the result can be costly water damage.

- Peeling paint
- Cracks

Gutters - continued on page 39B

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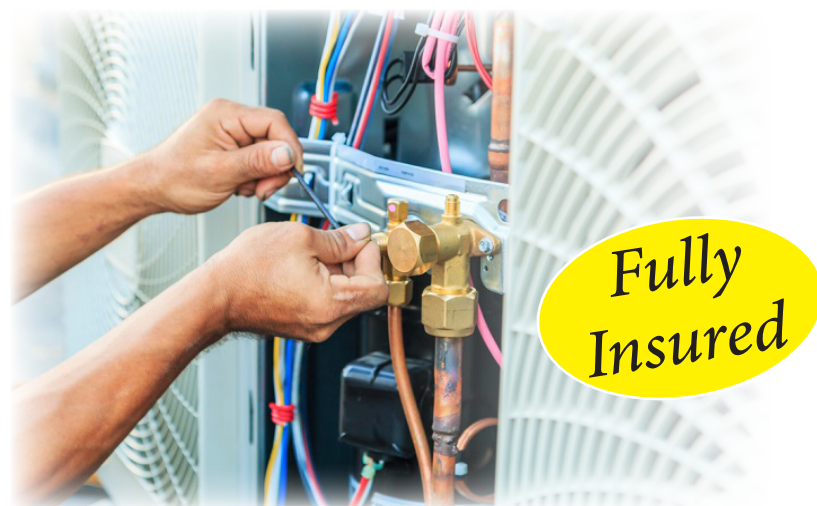
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Gutters - Continued from page 38B

- Pooling water in the gutter
- Mildew in the gutter, which can sometimes be seen even from the ground
- Water damage: Water damage on the gutter can be limited to certain spots and will be noticeable on the underside of the gutter
- Soffit damage
- Sagging gutters
- Detached gutters, which can be detached from other pieces or the house
- Rust

Who should replace gutters?

Many home improvements can be completed successfully by skilled do-it-yourselfers, but a gutter replacement is best left to the professionals. Homeowners who live in single-story homes may be able to replace gutters on their own, but the issues that can arise when gutters are not functioning at optimal capacity make this a job best suited to professionals, even in residences without high roofs.

Some gutters may be under a manufacturer's warranty, so homeowners can check to see if their gutters qualify for a free upgrade. Experience is one of the best reasons to work with a professional gutter installation team. Experienced professionals can identify which gutters are the best fit based on a host of factors, including the pitch of the roof, local conditions and the size of the house. In addition, gutter installation requires the use of various tools that many DIYers may not have on hand, which can cut into the cost savings of doing the project yourself.

Homeowners also should not underestimate the challenges of working on ladders that are high up off the ground. Professionals are accustomed to such challenges, while DIYers may not be comfortable or used to climbing ladders with materials and tools in hand.

A gutter replacement is a worthwhile investment that can ensure rain water efficiently and effectively runs through gutters and away from the roof. Leaving this task to the professionals can ensure the job is done right.

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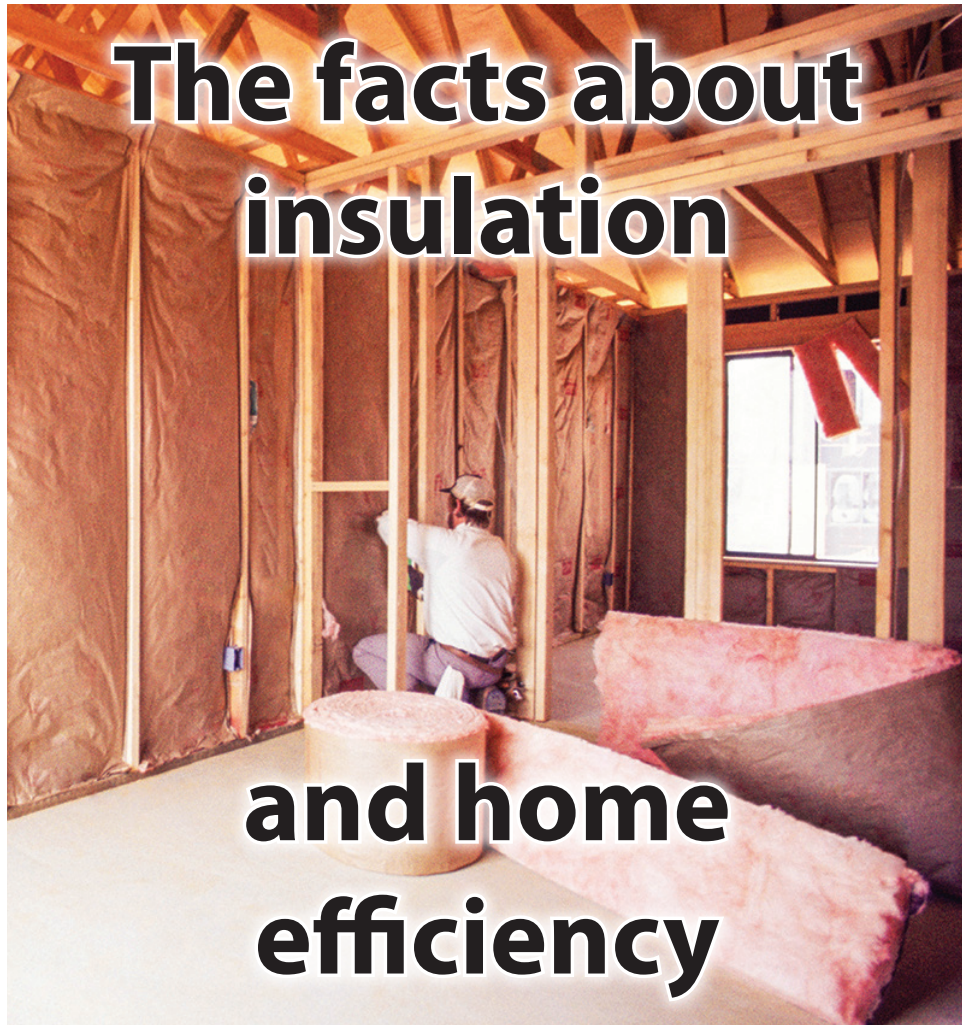
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The facts about insulation

and home efficiency

Insulation can go a long way toward making a home more comfortable. Insulation reduces the transfer of heat from indoors and outdoors so homes stay more comfortable in both the winter and summer. Insulation also can block exterior noise. A properly insulated home is a must, particularly in the wake of rising energy costs. Insulation will help a home be more energy efficient.

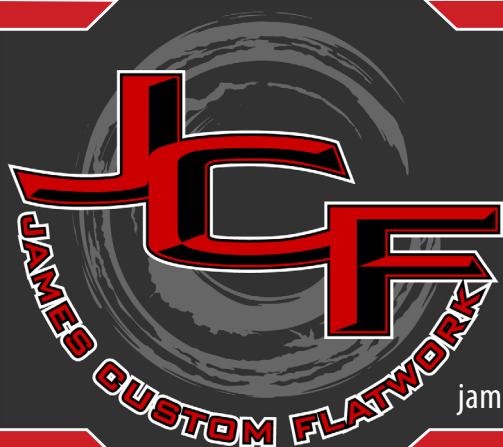
Insulation is easily taken for granted. The following are some facts about insulation and home efficiency that illustrate how much homeowners can benefit from upgrading their insulation.

- Insulation is made from a variety of materials, including fiberglass, wool, cellulose, and spray foam.
 - Unless damaged, insulation lasts for the life of the building. Some settling of insulation may occur, particularly with loose-fill type insulation, and gaps can be filled in.
 - During the Middle Ages, walls of homes were stuffed with straw and mud to help keep out the cold. It is one of the first documented types of insulation.
 - According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, insulation saves more than 600 times more energy each year than compact fluorescent lights, Energy Star Appliances, and Energy Star windows combined.
 - For every Btu consumed in the production of insulation each year, 12 Btus are saved by the use of insulation, says A+ Insulation of Kansas City.
 - An insulating material's resistance to heat flow is measured in terms of its thermal resistance, or R-value. The higher the R-value, the greater the insulating effectiveness. An insulation contractor can let a homeowner know how much insulation and what R-value is recommended for his or her climate.
 - Manufacturers continue to experiment with insulation materials. Environmentally friendly options include recycled cotton denim, paper or plant cellulose, and sheep's wool.
 - Large pieces of insulation are called batts. Traditionally they are made from pink fiberglass, which is extremely fine woven glass. It's important to realize fiberglass insulation can release small particles or fibers in the air when disturbed, so respiratory protection and gloves should be used when handling to reduce risk of irritation.
- Insulation is a key investment in home comfort and efficiency.

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Five luxury features buyers desire

The real estate market has been something of a roller coaster ride over the past few years. Historically low interest rates coupled with a surging interest to move to communities with more outdoor space during the height of the pandemic led to a lot of movement and inventory — as well as some of the highest home prices in some time.

The tides have started to change in recent months, as the housing market has been tepid at best since interest rates have increased. In the week ending August 24, 2023, the national average 30-year fixed mortgage rate pushed to 7.23 percent, while the National Association of Realtors said the median existing-home sales price was expected to surpass the all-time high of \$413,800. The stagnation of the market is caused by high interest rates, sellers not wanting to budge on prices, individuals wanting to sell but not being able to afford other homes, and a general decline in inventory related to each of these factors.

Individuals who are in position to buy right now may be more selective in what they are seeking in homes, particularly if they're spending top dollar. Current homeowners planning to put their homes on the market may want to consider these five luxury renovations to set their properties apart.

1. Smart home features: It's now common for new home builders to include smart home technology when building. Advanced home tech, like facial recognition for doors, intuitive home assistants, smart lights and outlets to control appliances from a smartphone app, and similar offerings can make a home more attrac-

tive.

2. Modern open floor plans: Even though there has been some shift to buyers wanting homes with delineated borders, most still are drawn to those with open concepts. Those who are selling may want to investigate where they can open up rooms or take down walls to recreate these features.

3. Outdoor kitchen: A luxury indoor kitchen is still a major draw for buyers, but increasingly people are seeking properties that also maximize outdoor entertaining spaces. Having an outdoor kitchen with built-in grill, sink, counters for food preparation, and a refrigerator or wine chiller may be coveted. When an outdoor kitchen is near amenities like a spa, grand patio, pool, and other outdoor living spaces, the home really will beckon buyers.

4. Saltwater pools: Pools have both pros and cons at resale. Therefore, sellers should speak with a realtor before installing a pool simply to make a home more appealing. However, if there already is a pool, converting the set-up to a saltwater system may win over buyers. Saltwater systems rely on fewer chemicals and proponents say the water feels more silky and less irritating.

5. Upgraded owner's suite: An owner's suite complete with luxury spa bath, walk-in closet with built-in storage, sitting area, and potentially access to an outdoor space will win raves with buyers.

Selling a home today is a bit more challenging, but luxury home features can tip the scales in sellers' favor.

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Small renovations that make a big difference

Home renovation projects were high on homeowners' priority lists during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic. Throughout much of 2020, people across the globe were forced to spend much of their time at home as leaders and governments across the globe sought to prevent the spread of COVID-19. More time at home compelled millions of homeowners to invest more in their properties, thus sparking a renovation boom.

By early 2023, the renovation boom that marked the initial days of the pandemic appeared to have burst. In May 2023, the popular home improvement retailer Home Depot reported its sales had fallen by 4.5 percent in the first quarter of the year and that its income had fallen by more than 6 percent from the same period a year earlier. That marked the end of what Home Depot CEO Ted Decker characterized as "a three-year period of unprecedented growth" in the home improvement sector.

Home Depot's decline in sales was attributed to a number of factors, including a pivot among homeowners from large projects to smaller renovations. Inflation and

Renovations - continued on page 43B

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Renovations - Continued from page 42B

the looming threat of a recession have led many homeowners to emphasize smaller projects. With that in mind, the following are some small renovations that can have a big impact.

- **Storage addition:** Regardless of where storage is added, be it the kitchen or a home office or a laundry room, extra space to keep items out of view can dramatically alter the look of a home. Unused kitchen walls can be transformed with some inexpensive, easily hanged shelves, while some laundry pedestals with storage drawers can help keep washrooms clear of clutter.

- **Polish floors:** Elbow grease might be the biggest expenditure when cleaning hardwood floors. The wood flooring experts at Bona® advise homeowners to polish their floors once every two to four months depending on how much foot traffic the floors get. A fresh polishing can make floors look brand new and ensures dirt and dust are not hanging around as uninvited houseguests.

- **Paint:** Painting is another inexpensive option for budget-conscious homeowners who want to update their homes. There's no shortage of places in a home, both inside and out, where a fresh coat of paint can make a statement without breaking the bank. Fading paint on bedroom walls and kitchen cabinets can be painted over with a fresh coat of the same color or even something more vibrant. Outside, apply a fresh coat to a wooden deck or paint over brick siding to create a whole new look.

- **Molding:** Crown molding can add a touch of elegance to any room. Rooms can be transformed in a single weekend with the installation of new or replacement crown molding. A simple molding installation is a task many do-it-yourselfers can handle on their own, while homeowners with less DIY experience may benefit from hiring a contractor to create a layered molding look.

Homeowners are pivoting away from costly renovations to more budget-conscious projects. Various less expensive undertakings can transform spaces at a fraction of the cost of more extensive renovations.

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Exterior renovations that boast the best ROI

Remodeling with a return on investment in mind can be a smart strategy for homeowners, whether one is thinking about moving in the next few months or further down the road. Though this approach is an inexact science, in many instances, it's savvy for homeowners to consider what buyers may want when planning home improvements.

Homeowners may be surprised to learn which renovations garner the best ROI at resale. The home loan and refinancing company RenoFi indicates that overall home improvement projects provide a 70 percent ROI on average. Many high-ROI projects add functional space and improvement. The following are some exterior renovations that help homeowners recoup the most money at resale, according to Remodeling magazine's "2022 Cost vs. Value Report."

1. Garage Door Replacement: 93.3 percent recouped of \$4,041 cost
2. Manufactured Stone Veneer: 91.4 percent recouped of \$11,066 cost
3. Siding replacement (Fiber Cement): 68.3 percent recouped of \$22,093 cost
4. Window replacement (Vinyl): 67.5 percent recouped of \$20,482 cost
5. Siding replacement (Vinyl): 67.2 percent recouped of \$18,662 cost
6. Window replacement (Wood): 66.3 percent recouped of \$24,388 cost



7. Deck addition (Wood): 64.8 percent recouped of \$19,248 cost

8. Entry Door Replacement (Steel): 63.8 percent recouped of \$2,206 cost

The majority of renovations on Remodeling magazine's list of the best investments are exterior renovations, making this area of a home a particular point of interest for homeowners. The only interior project that cracked the Top 10 ROI for projects was a minor mid-range kitchen remodel.

Exterior renovations perhaps add the most bang for your buck because they're not only functional, but also because they add immediate curb appeal. Much in the

way it has been said people eat with their eyes first — which is why chefs spend so much time on elaborate plating — buyers will judge a property by how it looks when they arrive, even before they've stepped inside a home. In essence, home buyers often judge a book by its cover. A worn exterior may indicate to potential buyers that the home was not maintained, however false that assumption may be.

It's important for homeowners to consider all factors before beginning a renovation. Certain projects offer a stronger return on investment than others, and that's a significant consideration for homeowners thinking of selling their homes.



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The pandemic changed much about the way people live, including a propensity for spending more time at home. In 2020, people spent far less waking time, roughly an hour and a half less on average, with people outside of their own households.

Though restrictions that limited social interactions have long since been lifted, spending at home has remained popular. More than two-thirds of Americans are spending more time at home, according to the American Time Use Survey from the U.S. Department of Labor. Inflation and the looming threat of a possible recession are undoubtedly keeping more people at home. With all that extra time on their hands, respondents have been poring their energy into fixing up their homes. Lawns, kitchens and living rooms are popular spaces to renovate.

As people continue to fix up their homes, they may be interested in ways to make them more comfortable. Certain furnishings can ensure living spaces are comfortable places to pass the time.

- Ensure an abundance of light. One stark overhead light will not create a cozy environment. Introduce groupings of illumination where you hope residents and guests will congregate to engage in conversation. Utilize different lighting sources, such as task lighting, table and floor lamps, recessed or ambient lighting, and even candles. Warm temperature light bulbs will add to that comfortable feeling.

- Coordinate designs for each season. Crisp cotton and breezy linens are great for the warm weather, but when the colder temperatures arrive, it's time to swap for flannel or jersey. Folded quilts or throws

on the sofa also can be handy for chilly evenings. Make subtle changes to the home as the temperature changes to epitomize comfort in your spaces.

- Splurge on your sofa and bed. Much time will be spent lounging on the couch or sleeping in your bed. It's worthwhile to invest in pieces that are durable and, above all else, comfortable. While these items may be more expensive up front, the comfort they provide will be well worth it.

- Soften harsh lines. Tricks like incorporating round area rugs or using oval or round pillows can break up the straight line of rooms and even modern furniture pieces. Opt for soft and inviting textiles as well. Textural elements, such as woven decor baskets, also can soften harsh lines.

- Introduce organic elements. Home entertaining expert Julie Blanner says plants, flowers, fruits, and vegetables bring life to a space. Choose easy care plants if you do not have a green thumb, or swap out freshly cut blooms in vases as pops of color and fresh elements are needed.

- Utilize warm paint colors. Cool-toned paints can make a space seem colder and more utilitarian or clinical. When looking at swatches, select paints that have warm undertones. Eggshell and satin sheens will be more inviting and evoke a cozy feel more effectively than flat or matte finishes.

These are just a few ways to build a cozy and comfortable home. Working within these parameters, homeowners can customize their interior spaces to maximize comfort.

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Signs a roof must be repaired or replaced

The exterior components of a home, such as the siding and the roof, help to protect its occupants from the elements. While many roofing materials can last for decades, at some point in time homeowners will likely have to repair or replace the roof on their home.

Roof wear and tear may not always be so evident, particularly because most homeowners do not make it a point to get on their roofs very often. The first sign of roof damage typically is a leak that is noticeable from the indoors. It may include a browned spot on the ceiling or even pooling water in the attic. Leak from storm damage or something minor like a water intrusion through a nail hole or from a lost shingle typically can be repaired easily enough. However, additional indicators may necessitate a complete roof overhaul. Here are some signs a roof is in need of repairs or replacement.

- **Sagging roof:** If the roof is sagging, it could be due to excess loads, such as water-damaged shingles or even weakened roof structure. A professional will need to restore the integrity of the roof.

- **Cracking and buckling:** It is likely that shingles will have to be replaced if there is cracking or if shingles are buckling and warping.

- **Exposed nails:** Exposed nails may rust and contribute to a leaky roof, says Family Handyman. How long the nails were exposed could indicate if the roof can be repaired or if everything should be redone.

- **Lost granules:** Asphalt roofing shingles have small granules on the surface. Over time these granules will slowly degrade and fall off. If there are many granules in gutters or if one can see that portions of the shingles are bare, it is likely time for a new roof.

- **Visible light:** Homeowners who can see light streams coming into the home need roof repair. This is indicative of holes, cracks or spaces in the roof.

- **Growth on the roof:** Mold and mildew on the roof is a sign that the roof needs to be repaired or replaced. Such growths contribute to rot that jeopardizes the integrity of the roof.

A durable roof protects a home from the elements. Various symptoms signal that it is time to repair or replace a roof.



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