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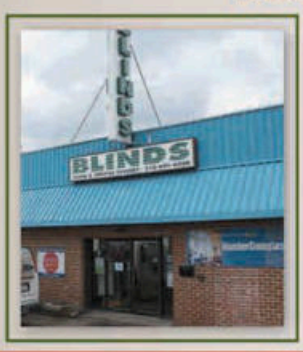
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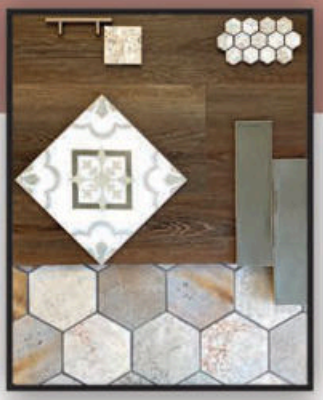
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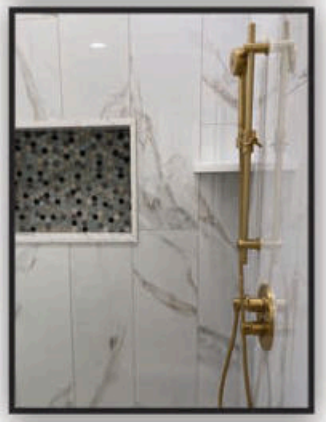
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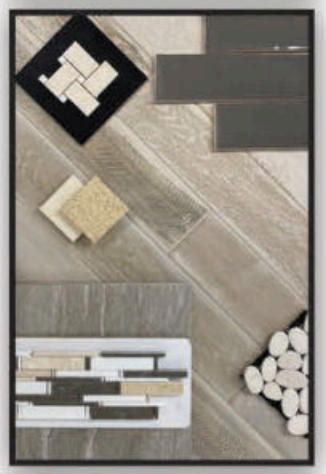
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contents

10 **Always in Demand**
While some industries ebb and flow with the seasons, kitchen and bathroom remodels remain a leading area of home improvement all year long

17 **Philadelphia Home + Garden Show Guide**

23 **A Legacy of Leading with Ethics**
Keystone Custom Decks has remained true to its roots of prioritizing honest, quality work and customer satisfaction

25 **Moving on Up**
Residential elevators from Total Access provide the solution to mobility challenges with added luxury and convenience

27 **Peace in Your Own Backyard**
Ponds by George shares what homeowners need to know about these popular water features

28 **Preparing for Spring**
Landscaping isn't just for the warm-weather months, and area experts have plenty of advice to ensure that the outdoor oasis of your dreams comes to life once spring has sprung

34 **What's on the Outside Counts**
As the snow and ice melt away, it's an ideal time to have your home's exterior refreshed



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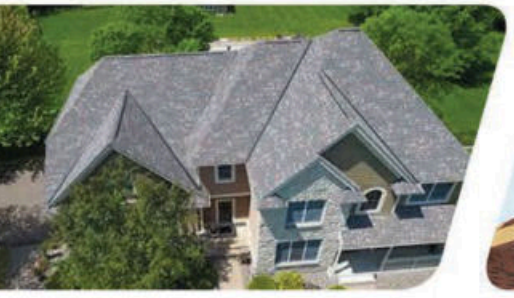
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ALWAYS IN

While some industries ebb and flow with the seasons, **kitchen and bathroom remodels** remain a leading area of home improvement all year long.



DEMAND

BY MATT COSENTINO



Photo courtesy of Amiano & Son Design-Build

When the ground is frozen and snow is in the forecast every other week, it makes it difficult for contractors to be building an outdoor living space or working on a pool installation. Conversely, the middle of summer isn't an ideal time to be replacing a roof given the extreme temperatures. Certain industries inevitably have their down times throughout the year, but there are two particular home improvement projects that never seem to come to a halt: kitchen and bathroom renovations.

"We dip down a little bit during the holiday season, typically mid-December to mid-January, but this year that dip was just around Christmas—it picked right back up in the new year," says Linda Fennessy of Kitchen Magic. "We've been seeing it continuously. We have a lot of work and our backlog is as big as it's ever been. The orders are there and we're working to get them installed as quickly as possible."

Increased time at home as a result of the pandemic has led to even more remodeling than normal, and kitchens and baths have lived up to their reputation as the most popular rooms to refresh.

"Now more than ever, kitchens and bathrooms … are a large part of our business," says Vic Fiore of Magnolia Home Remodeling Group. "It's a 12-month, steady flow of people looking to get prices, ideas and consultations."

The planning phase remains crucial to the process, and an experienced firm can assist greatly in setting the budget and expectations. *House & Home* spoke to several local professionals to get their tips and find out what trends to look for in 2022.

DEVISING A PLAN

Homeowners taking the leap to renovate a kitchen or bathroom have plenty of options, but finding a company that provides both design and construction services can make life a lot easier. That is especially true when it comes to a complete makeover of the space.

"A major kitchen remodel is not a straight A to B path," says David Cerami of HomeTech Renovations. "You need a plan and someone who can integrate everything into a fluid design and help you personalize it."

Sophia Amiano of Amiano & Son Design-Build believes education is an important part of the initial meeting with a customer. The average homeowner is not aware, for example, of the expenses involved when compiling a wish list for their new kitchen or master bathroom.

"Everybody goes into a project already having an amount in mind," she says. "We show them what we can do for the project and the work scope within that investment amount. We simply inform them on the market, on certain product costs, maybe how we can help keep costs down, just so that they're getting more realistic information. Sometimes Google can be very inaccurate and that will be a homeowner's first go-to when looking for information."

Fiore's first priority when meeting with a client is establishing a framework for pricing, which of course will ultimately be dependent upon their material selections. He also gets to know the customer's vision for the space.

"We always ask people what their needs and wants are, if they have any inspiration, pictures or examples of things they know they want or don't want," he says. "We put together a plan taking into account their feedback but also really what we think will work best. Then we work with the homeowner to fine-tune the plan, make sure it's their own and what they want."

"[The first appointment is] basically a fact-finding meeting," Fennessy adds. "We ask how they use the kitchen, are there multiple cooks, how big is their family, do they find it functional, what are the challenges, do they like the color, how long have they been in the home and how long do they plan on staying. Then we make our solutions

based on their budget. We have them pick colors and styles and give them a price quote."

Amiano wonders how any project could get accomplished without detailed planning in place. Her family's company follows long-held procedures for every job, to help prevent hidden costs or anticipate issues that may arise.

"The reason we've built our process to the way we have over the years is for that exact reason, because if you don't properly plan and put a project together from the get-go before jumping into construction, hiccups are bound to happen," she says. "Construction is already a process as it is and it's never 100% perfect, no matter how much upfront legwork you do, especially in today's day and age when you have delays. If we didn't do all that work in the beginning, I don't even know how you would get a project together.

"We pick out all the materials up front, we design the space as close to the measurements as we can get, we even do an onsite visit prior to signing the contract just to verify those measurements and that the layout is going to work properly. … We take pride as a company that we do those steps and we really limit those hidden costs that can happen in construction."

BUILDING THE DREAM KITCHEN

One of the most important decisions in a kitchen remodel centers on cabinetry. White kitchens have been popular for years and although color has been introduced more lately, Fennessy does not anticipate white going away.

"I opened up a Houzz 2022 report [recently] and it definitely mimicked what we're seeing: People are still choosing our whites—antique white, frosty white and satin white—and those are our most popular colors," she says. "While I hear the woods are coming back, I don't see it yet, only in our older demographics. Flat color is popular; we do sell a lot of colonial blue. Gray is second and we've just added a moss green to our offering, and that is by customer demand. Our in-house designer said we absolutely had to add it to our offering because it's everywhere and it's going to be very popular. But whites are still king."

Amiano saw a great push for colored cabinetry in 2021, particularly in the blue family. But the trend has not lasted long, at least with her clients.

"In this new year with all of the jobs we have coming in, we have a lot of people who want natural elements," she says. "I've done some research on it and that's where they're predicting everything to go. In the last couple of years more people have been working from home and they've been in the house more, so people want that natural and organic feel. I have people who want wood tones and soft gray cabinets, and natural or sage colors for the wall. I see it falling more in that direction than going too bold with color."

Color can be used in a way where it does not dominate the entire room, however.

"We're doing color for islands," Fiore says. "Some people will do the perimeter in one color and the island in another, or they'll do different colors for the upper and lower [cabinets], which is becoming more popular. … We're also doing a lot of open shelving. Is it here to stay? I don't know, but you can incorporate open shelving into a traditional design and it works nicely. It breaks up a wall of all cabinets."

Amiano suggests that stacked cabinetry can have the same effect. "Maybe you have a 36-inch cabinet on the bottom with a 12-inch cabinet on top. It looks super elegant," she says. "A lot of people will make the top cabinet glass for a decorative design feature; I've had quite a few kitchens where we've done that."

For those looking to keep costs down, Cerami and Fennessy agree there are many benefits to cabinet refacing. "We've really seen an uptick in that," Fennessy says. "They'll reface it because they're sick of looking at their outdated kitchen, and refacing offers a cost savings as well as quick transformation in color and style."

Five to 10 years ago, granite was the hot word when it came to kitchen countertops, but quartz has replaced it as the go-to material. "It's mostly all quartz [because of] maintenance and consistency," Fiore says. "If you have veining, it's a consistent look, whereas granite has a lot more variation. You can get the look of a natural stone and it's amazing. The options out there are incredible."

Another kitchen trend is to create a statement with the backsplash, compared to the past when it was used more to complement other elements in the room.

"We used to sell subway tile all day long in the ceramic, but people are asking for more elaborate styles and patterns," Fennessy says. "So we're adding lantern and octagon and geometric shapes. People are getting the lighter quartz countertops, the whites, so they're not as busy and it's the backsplash that is the star of the remodel. … You can introduce color, you can do busy patterns. It's eye-level and people want to make it the showstopper."



Photo courtesy of Kitchen Magic

A SPA-LIKE RETREAT

For some time now, many homeowners have looked to recreate the feel of a spa or luxury hotel in their master bathroom. For Cerami, that usually starts with removing the large, builder's-grade tub that is rarely utilized and using that space for the shower instead.

"The No. 1 request we get is to increase the size of the shower and the functionality of the shower," he says. "Why wouldn't you want a shower that is more like a spa experience? It can have a rain showerhead, a handheld showerhead, body sprays or room to sit down. People want more of that human car wash experience with beautiful tile surrounds, a space that is

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Fiore is getting the same request from his customers, along with oversized vanities and heated floors. Cerami adds that those who still want a tub can opt for a freestanding one that is almost like a piece of art and has visual appeal. To that end, Amiano recently designed a master bath that certainly stands out.

"We just did a project where we actually incorporated the tub into the shower, so it's a drop-in tub in the shower," she says. "We did granite at the top to coordinate with the granite on the vanity top, and it looks really neat. I also do a lot of the freestanding tubs. Most people if they can fit it still want a tub, but the idea is to make a bigger shower so it's like a hotel or luxury feel to it."

She adds that no-entry showers are also in demand, especially for older homeowners who want to ensure safety without having to step over a curb. Linen cabinets within the bathroom are popular as well, so that towels can be accessible without walking down the hall.

THE FINAL WORD

Renovating a kitchen or bathroom is a major project and homeowners should know what to expect when beginning one. But with the right plan and team of professionals in their corner, the end result can be life changing.

"Understand that they are probably the two more costly projects to get involved with, especially if you're going to go all in, meaning you're going to strip the room and upgrade the plumbing, electrical, insulation, drywall and then start your finishes," Fiore advises. "But if it's done right, there is a return on your investment, not only in terms of house value but enjoyment and day-to-day use. The mistake that some people make is not setting a sufficient budget and not being 100% satisfied with the finished product. You really need to have a budget that is realistic in terms of the space and what needs to be done.

"You might want to wait until you can properly budget for a whole room renovation. You can minimize your cost and just do a little facelift until your budget allows for the full gut. You don't want to spend too much and you don't want to spend too little. We try to find a good balance of budget and scope, and you also have to take into account how many years you plan on living in the house and what your long-term goals are. Not everybody needs a custom gourmet kitchen with $50,000 appliances. Everyone has to make sure they're comfortable with the entire scope, budget and material selection." **H&H**

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This is where you can explore more than 200,000 square feet of exhibit space, delight in new features and solutions designed to meet your needs, gain insights from design experts and knowledgeable exhibitors, and even learn some new, hands-on project skills (and take home the results).

You'll see and learn about the newest ideas and products in home and garden improvement, get inspiration for your next project, and connect with experienced local providers who can assist you in achieving your goals. To enrich your Philly Home + Garden Show visit, we've added some fun special events, unique shopping experiences, and happy hours.

We hope that we will inspire and help you to try new ideas and ways to enjoy your indoor and outdoor space!

Sincerely,
Jenna Naffin, Show Manager

Don't Miss These Special PhillyHome Show Events!

The 2022 Philly Home + Garden Show is very excited to announce the Main Stage Guests and Speakers at this year's event! Friday kicks off with hit television and home renovation stars, Jeff Devlin from DIY Network's *Stone House Revival* and Matt Blashaw from the HGTV series *Professional Grade, Yard Crashers,* and *Vacation House for Free*. Get ready to hear from HGTV star, Mina Starsiak Hawk from *Good Bones* on Saturday, Chris Lux from *Harth Builders*, Chris Mattingly from *Backyard Eats*, and Jennifer Anderson from *Trellis for Tomorrow*. On Sunday, get expert advice from Collen Falicki from *Back to Earth Compost Crew*, as well as Jeff Devlin. For Main Stage schedule updates and more information please follow the link https://phillyhomeandgarden.com/ show-features/speakers-celebrities.

Celebrity Guest: Mina Starsiak Hawk

SATURDAY, FEB. 26, 1 PM



The HGTV series star, Mina Starsiak Hawk from *Good Bones* will be in attendance to share some of her best home improvement and renovation tips, as well as meet with fans of the show.

Celebrity Guest: Jeff Devlin

FRIDAY, FEB. 25, 5 PM;
SUNDAY, FEB. 27, 12 PM



Host of DIY Network's *Stone House Revival* and licensed contractor with more than 20 years of building experience, Jeff Devlin will be in attendance to share his passion for designing, creating, and building with attendees. Devlin will also have a booth set up all weekend demoing different tools and answering your questions.

Celebrity Guest: Matt Blashaw



FRIDAY, FEB. 25, 6 PM;
SATURDAY, FEB. 26, 11 AM

HGTV Host of *Professional Grade, Yard Crashers,* and *Vacation House for Free*, Matt Blashaw will be in attendance to share his experience as a licensed contractor and relator with the slogan "One Call Fixes It All." If you are thinking about starting your own DIY project, Matt is the guy to talk to.

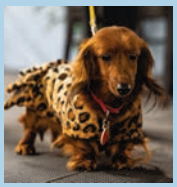
Make-It, Take-It Workshop Presented By Little.Tall.Rulers

VARIETY WORKSHOP TIMES THROUGHOUT THE WEEKEND



Take your DIY skills to a new level this year with a variety of DIY workshops presented by Little.Tall.Rulers. Attendees will have the opportunity to work directly with local designers on a variety of projects including candle making, mini sunburst wall hangings, clay earrings, the art of charcuterie, hand-stamped vintage spoon plant stakes, melt and pour soap, sugar scrubs, paint your own cookie, and a clean/dirty dishwasher magnet

Doggy Fashion Show



SATURDAY, FEB. 26, 3 PM

We've partnered again this year with our friends at the Pennsylvania SPCA to bring some of their adorable, adoptable dogs to the Philly Home Show. Support our four-legged friends as they strut their stuff in Doggy Fashion Show where a portion of sales will support PSPCA!

The Spirited Backyard Yappy Hour

ALL WEEKEND

2D Distillery has partnered with this year's event to set up the Whiskey Backyard where attendees can relax and check out some of the finest spirits. Guests are also welcome to join Yappy Hour on Saturday, February 26th, 4PM- 6PM with our furry friends from the PSPCA!

The Red Cross Blood Drive

FRIDAY, FEB. 25, 10AM- 3PM

This year's show has partnered with the Red Cross to put together a Blood Drive in Hall E of the Expo Center to support U.S. blood banks. Come out and support the American Red Cross by donating at this year's event! Pre-registration is required. Visit phillyhomeandgarden.com to register to donate.

Hero Day

FRIDAY, JAN. 25, ALL DAY



The Philly Home Show proudly honors our local heroes on Hero Day. All active and retired military, nurses, first responders, firefighters, and teachers will receive one free ticket with identification at the box office on this date.

The Factory In Oaks

FRIDAY, FEB. 25, ALL DAY

The First 100 people to come to the show on Friday, February 25th will receive a free ticket to the American Treasure Tour, and every attendee will receive a coupon with discounts for all the fun at Arnold's Family Fun Center.

THANK YOU TO OUR SHOW SPONSORS AND PARTNERS!

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PHILLY HOME +GARDEN SHOW

SHOW HOURS:

FRIDAY
February 25
11 a.m.–9 p.m.

SATURDAY
February 26
10 a.m.–9 p.m.

SUNDAY
February 27
10 a.m.–6 p.m.

WHERE:

Greater Philadelphia Expo Center at Oaks
100 Station Ave.
Oaks, PA 19456

TICKET INFORMATION:

ADULTS (at the door): $11
ADULTS (online only): $9
CHILDREN ages 12 and under: FREE

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Friday, February 25th is HERO Day!



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You've Gotta See This:



Get Growing

Over 3,000 square feet of garden inspiration for your outdoor space, as well as a relaxing wine garden brought to you by The Renegade Winery. The space includes an inspirational garden, a garden market, a flower shop, and a succulent bar.



Floral And Hardy Garden Market And Succulent Bar

Shop the Garden Market with some of the most unique décor and gift items to spruce up your yard and be sure to customize your own succulent at the DIY Succulent Bar.



Pop-Up Flower

Take home beautiful, fresh-cut arrangements by Cameron Peters Floral Design and register for one of the Cameron Peters Floral Workshops throughout the weekend to learn the artistry behind the floral design process.



Ask The Gardener

This year's event will feature an "Ask the Gardener" booth thanks to the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society in which attendees will be able to ask questions and get advice from the professionals.



The Barking Lot

Don't leave the show without visiting The Barking Lot pet market! Delight your fur babies at home with special treats, accessories, and more that you'll find from vendors in this specialized market area. And you'll feel good about a portion of all purchases benefitting the Pennsylvania SPCA.



The Spirited Backyard

2D Distillery has partnered with this year's event to set up the Spirited Backyard whiskey and vodka tasting area where attendees can relax and check out some of the finest spirits while playing backyard games with their family and friends.



Do You Dig It?

Join the experts to upgrade your gardening experience. Learn more about edible landscaping, composting, native plants, and more.



Homes That Roam

Drop by the Homes that Roam presented by Campers Inn to check out the latest and greatest in RV's including new adventure trailers that are perfect for bringing along your bikes and kayaks. Don't settle for a tent on your next camping trip, find out more about your new home away from home on wheels at the show!



Philly's Favorite Market

An open market featuring one-of-a-kind décor and gifts from local artisans and retailers. Shop anything from antiques to original art to homemade pieces to finely crafted items.

Reimagine Your Workspace

Remodel your work from home office space with traditional and modern inspiration from the design corner presented by Ethan Allen. Vote on your favorite design and be entered to win great prizes!

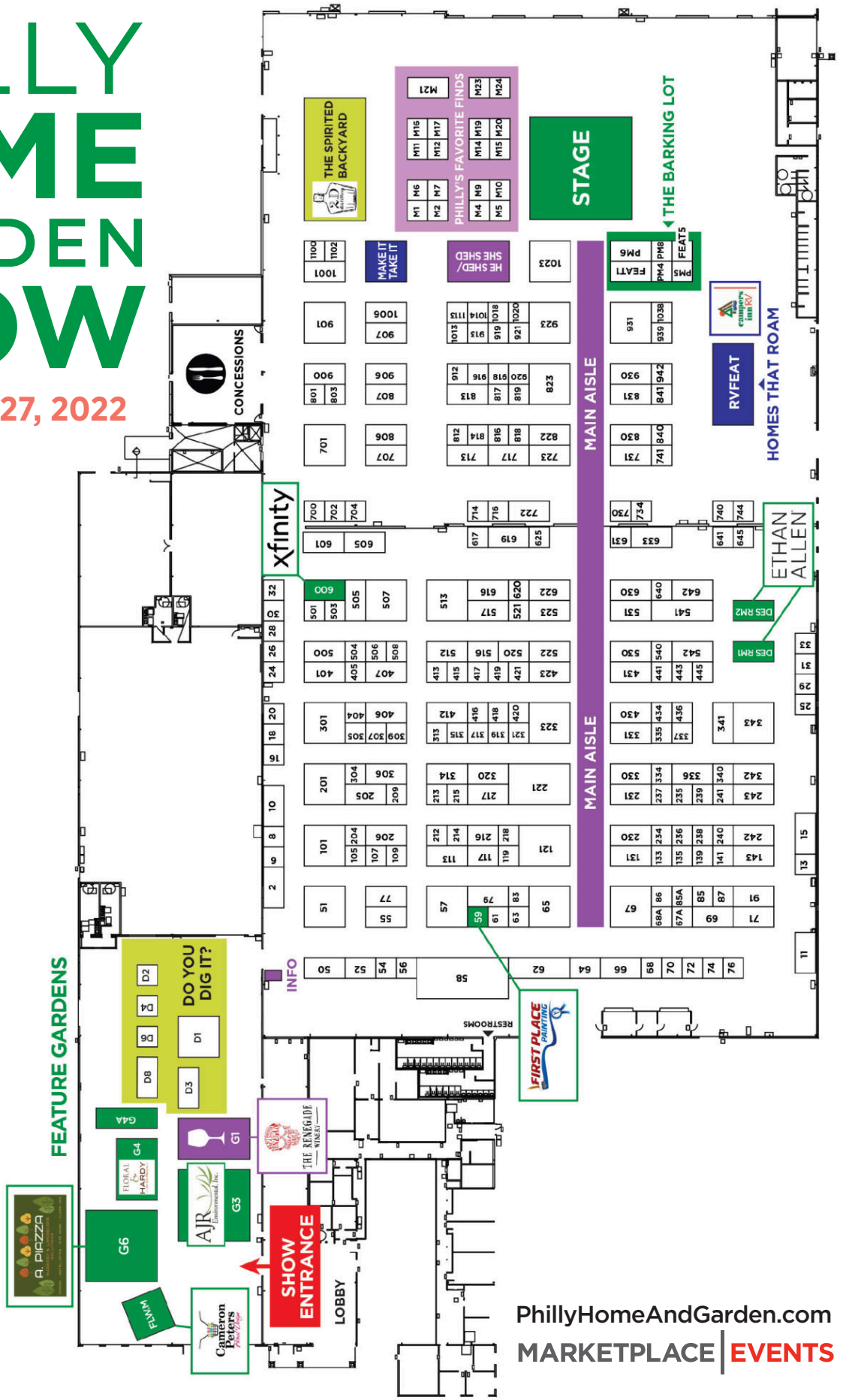


PHILLY HOME +GARDEN SHOW

FEBRUARY 25-27, 2022

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100 STATION AVE., OAKS, PA



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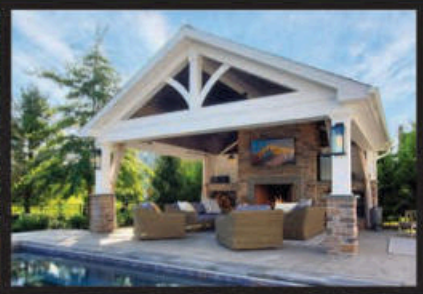
APPAREL/JEWELRY
Soldier Solutions LLC M9
APPLIANCES
Queen Appliance 541
AWNINGS/CANOPIES/PATIO UMBRELLAS
Paul Construction and Awning, LLC 530
Summer Accents 723
BASEMENT WATERPROOFING
'58 Foundations 216
Basement Systems USA, Inc. 407
Basement Waterproofing Specialists 62
BQ Basement Systems 436
DryTech Waterproofing Solutions 26
Rhino Waterproofing Solutions 54
BATHROOM REFINISHING
Bath Fitter 101
Modern Bath (Mid-Atlantic Remodeling) 52
BUILDERS
Harth Builders 401
Naturally Home Consulting 523
Rudloff Custom Builders 601
CABINETRY
CPOS Refacing 64
Custom Woodworking Cabinets 206
Gardner/Fox Associates, Inc. 79
Master Design Cabinetry 301
Unique Wood Creations 413
CABLE/SATELLITE/TELECOM/INTERNET
Xfinity 600
CLOCKS
Weil Clocks 11
CLOSET & GARAGE ORGANIZING & STORAGE
Closets Together 6
Victory Closets 217
CONCRETE/MASONRY/COATINGS/CURBING
Maintain It All 631
COOKWARE/CUTLERY
Cutco Cutlery 605
Kitchen Craft 714
CRAFT/HOBBY
Casa Ancora Creative-Chalk Couture M11
DECKS/REFINISHING/SEALING
Deck Craft Plus LLC. 512
DOORS/SECURITY DOORS
Tri-County Exteriors 51
ENERGY/CONSERVATION/SOLAR
Geoscape Solar 105
Green Mountain Energy Company 30
JK Renewables 508
NRG Energy 831
Orbit Energy & Power, LLC 506
Peco 441
Pinnacle Exteriors 640
Tint World - Philadelphia 237
Venture Solar 67A
FINANCIAL SERVICES/MORTGAGES
Currency Trade System 421
Metro Public Adjustment Inc 119
Tundidor Wealth & Investment Group/Voya Financial Advisors 317
FIREPLACE/MANTLES/INSERTS
Salter's Fireplace & Outdoor Living 901
FLOORING
Floor Coverings International Montco 321
Sandberg's Custom Hardwood Floors 8
FOOD & BEVERAGE
Double Dippin 942
Five Star Home Foods 133
Liokareas Premium Olive Oil and Imports 744
Passanante's Home Food Services 236
GAMING
Retro-Cade 10
GARAGE, GARAGE DOORS & CARPORT
Garage Experts 309
Monarch Door Co. 24
GARAGE FLOORING
Everstone Floors 734
GARDEN & OUTDOOR
A. Piazza Nursery and Landscape Solutions G6
AJR Environmental, Inc. G3
Cameron Peters Floral Design ..... FLW.M
Eco Green Lawn Care 420
Floral and Hardy G4, G4A
Holly Days Nursery, Garden Center, & Landscaping 630
Keystone Gardens 520
Robert E Little Inc 731
Spayd's Outdoor Environments 77
Vegepod 306
GAZEBOS/PERGOLAS/ARBORS
Struxure Outdoor 717
GENERATORS
Volpe Enterprises Inc. 74
GIFTS & GADGETS
GripStic – First 2 Market Products 337
International Housewares 143, 801, 445, 25, 33, 313, 625, 700, 730, 109
KC Essentials 215
Natural Balance 1100
Profashion 807
Purple Products 418
Quality Home Products 641
Sierra National Products 645
The Perfect Wine Opener 840
Walla International, DBA Click Heaters 1013
GLASS – PLATE, BLOCK, SHOWER ENCLOSURES
B & G Glass 906
GRANITE/MARBLE/TILE
Bucks County Soapstone Company Inc. 633
Colonial Marble & Granite 513
Granite Transformations 2
GUTTERS
All American Gutter Protection 213
American Construction Management LLC 57, 323
Elevated Remodeling, LLC 218
Greenawalt Roofing Company 822
Gutter Helmet by Harry Helmet 61
Leaf Pro Gutter Protection 139
LeafFilter North LLC 72, 20
LeafGuard 419
HEALTH & WELLNESS
Core Holistics 812
Hemp Mountain CBD 1113
HOME SECURITY AND AUTOMATION
Xfinity 600
HVAC
C & C Heating & Air Conditioning 113
Davis Modern Heating & Cooling 423
IT Landes Home Services 430
Orbit Energy & Power, LLC 240
INSURANCE
New York Life 504
NJM Insurance Group 85A
KITCHEN & BATH
American Kitchen Refacing, Inc. 85
American Remodeling Enterprises 336
Dilworth's Custom Design 121
Kitchen Saver 50
Kitchen Tune-Up 55
Luxury Bath of NJPA 65
Paradise Custom Kitchens 13
ShelfGenie 900
Unique Wood Creations 413
LANDSCAPE DESIGN/INSTALLATION/ARCHITECTS
Holly Days Nursery, Garden Center, & Landscaping 630
LANDSCAPING & LAWN MAINTENANCE
Green Lawn Fertilizing/Green Pest Solutions 70
LIGHTING
NiteLites of the Delaware Valley 28
LINENS/PILLOWS
MyPillow 117
MASSAGE CHAIRS
American Sleep Therapy 341
U.S. Jaclean, Inc. 531
MATTRESSES/BEDS
American Sleep Therapy 343
Gardner's Mattress & More 823
Superior Sleep 507, 505
MISC
All County & Associates 540
Neighborly 931
PAINTING SUPPLIES/SERVICES
CertaPro Painters King of Prussia 331
First Place Painting 59
Militello Painting and Powerwashing, LLC. 501
PATIO FURNITURE/GRILLS/ACCESSORIES
Paradise Grills 923
PEST CONTROL
Ehrlich Pest Control 235
Green Lawn Fertilizing/Green Pest Solutions 70
Mosquito Shield 212
Moyer 209
Ranger Ready Repellents 18
PET PRODUCTS & SERVICES
Innovation X of Michigan 32
Sit Means Sit Dog Training LLC 707
PLAY EQUIPMENT
Creative Playthings 67
POOLS/SPAS/HOT TUBS
Blue Haven Pools NE 713
Caribbean Clear 1001
Carlton Pools 76
Daniel's Lawn & Garden Center 221
Jacuzzi Hot Tubs SE Pennsylvania 58
Salter's Fireplace & Outdoor Living 901
RECREATIONAL VEHICLES
Campers Inn ..... RVFEAT
REMODELING
American Remodeling Enterprises 336
Bachman's Roofing Building and Remodeling, Inc. 314
Creative Contracting 912
Volpe Enterprises Inc. 74
ROOFING
A Plus Metal Roofing 617
Advantage Remodeling 2 LLC 416
American Construction Management LLC 57
Aspen Home Improvements 83
Bachman's Roofing Building and Remodeling, Inc. 314
Elevated Remodeling, LLC 218
G. Fedale Roofing & Siding 29
Green Star Exteriors, LLC 107
Greenawalt Roofing Company 822
J & S Family Roofing 307
Legacy Service 434
MR Roofing 66
Munn Roofing Corp 234
National Exteriors 704
Orbit Energy & Power, LLC 506, 240, 87
Pinnacle Exteriors 640
Romero Roofing & Siding 516
Tri-County Exteriors 51
SAUNAS
National Marketing Inc. DBA Good Health Saunas 642
SHEDS/ANIMAL SHELTERS
Pine Creek Structures 1023
SIDING/STUCCO/EXTERIOR SURFACES & FINISHES
American Construction Management LLC 57, 323
Greenawalt Roofing Company 822
James Hardie 412
SKIN CARE/COSMETICS
Nature Hill NV 542, 1106
TRAVEL
Sundance Vacations 71
TREE CARE SERVICES
Joshua Tree 16
WATER SYSTEMS & FILTERS
Orbit Energy & Power, LLC 87
WINDOW COVERINGS/TINTING/SCREENS/SHUTTERS
Tint World - Philadelphia 237
WINDOW WELLS & COVERS
Steelway Cellar Doors 722
Vinyl Window Wells 335
WINDOWS
Acre Windows 68
American Construction Management LLC 323
Aspen Home Improvements 83
Castle "The Window People" 131
De Finis & Sons Window & Door Co. 500
Elevated Remodeling, LLC 218
Glick's Exteriors 63
Global Home Improvement 201, 205
Green Star Exteriors, LLC 107
Homespire Windows and Doors 243
HomeStar Remodeling 91
Legacy Service 434
Pella Window & Door 522
Power Home Remodeling Group 622, 907, 69
Renewal by Andersen – Greater PHL. 701, 135
Think Windows 231
Tri-County Exteriors 51
Yeureka Home Remodeling LLC. 404
WINE/CELLARS
The Renegade Winery G1
PHILLY'S FAVORITE FINDS
Garden Metal Art M2
JC Damascus Knives M12
Jose Madrid Salsa M1
Major Flavor Seasonings LLC M20
True Honey Teas M15
Alchevibe Designs M10
The Country Loft M6
Loki and Layla Candles M17
Tastefully Simple M19
Home by Danielle M14
Kashmir Dream M24
Scentsy Independent Consultant M7
SportsBannersPlus M21
Puzzle Light Co ie Amazing Lights M16
Color Street – Stephanie Mowles M4
DO YOU DIG IT?
Back to Earth Compost Crew D3
PA Native Plant Society D6
Philadelphia Bee Company D4
Rent the Chicken D1
Trellis for Tomorrow D8
Wild Ones SEPA D2
THE BARKING LOT
SALES BENEFIT THE PSPCA
Brewscuit Inc. PM4
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A Legacy of Leading With Ethics



The second-generation contractor Keystone Custom Decks has grown exponentially across four decades of operation, but the leadership team has always remained true to its founder's roots of prioritizing honest, quality work and customer satisfaction.

by **Madeleine Maccar**



Since Amos Esh founded Keystone Custom Decks in 1983, the company has operated under one prevailing philosophy: Treat customers well, fairly and like family.

"The company was built on making sure that every customer is well taken care of," says Michael Esh, one of Amos' sons who grew up in the family business. "There were even times when my father took a loss on a job to make sure that his customers were satisfied. That is who we are and what we do."

While Amos unfortunately and unexpectedly passed away last year, his legacy lives on in the four sons who are building on that reputation of strong ethics and ideals their father established.

"It's all about customer service: treating our customers well and providing a good customer experience," Esh explains. "That's very much a foundational part of our company. … Overall, contractors kind of have a bad rap, so we strive to be the opposite of that. We look at the pain points people have with contractors and we try to address those head on to make sure we avoid those issues."

Growing up in construction has ensured that the practical skills and know-how the Esh brothers inherited are just as deep-seated as the strong moral principles their father embraced as Keystone's guiding directive.

"We've been surrounded by this industry," says Esh. "I think the biggest benefit for me was watching the work ethic my dad had. He did a very good job of teaching us to work hard and treat people well. So not only being told that that's the right thing to do, but also seeing that lived out every day, I think is one of the great parts of growing up in a family business like this."

Befitting a team that's grown to include more than 100 employees, the company does a lot more than decks these days. Keystone's areas of expertise have expanded, making it a one-stop shop that also offers patios, porches, outdoor kitchens, masonry and, soon, pool installation, reflecting how homeowners have come to regard their backyards.

"Even though our name is still Keystone Custom Decks, that doesn't really describe what we do anymore," he notes. "We design and build outdoor living spaces. The backyard has become an extension of the home. When my dad started the company, the deck was something you stuck on the back of your house for a picnic table or a grill; now, it's almost like we're adding an addition onto the home. The concept around designing these kinds of spaces has changed. There's a lot more thought put into it and there's a lot more options."

And working with one contractor, especially one that focuses on all-encompassing projects rather than one-off standalones, ensures consistency and an intimate understanding of how every feature influences and affects the others.

"We are looking to focus on entire projects: a deck, patio, pool, pool house, the whole thing," says Esh. "The advantage of doing it all together is, for one, it's seamless in how it all fits together—and you know all the pieces will fit together. The other is that you're working with one company and one point of contact who knows your property."

As Keystone diversifies its offerings, its showroom has reflected that growth. Giving customers a place where they can experience a hands-on interaction with the fixtures they're selecting for their outdoor spaces "has been a game-changer," Esh observes, as has the coziness of its café.

"If you're looking at things like colors and textures, a web page or a catalog won't give you as true of an idea as coming into a showroom to touch it and see it in person," he points out. "The showroom has just really helped people visualize what a project will look like, as well as inspire them. It's all part of creating a good customer experience: We also have a coffee shop on-site so it's an educational, practical and fun trip for people."

The range of high-quality work Keystone is able to deliver by offering a range of services all under one roof is further supplemented by in-house experts being hands-on from the very beginning, starting with an on-site survey of the property that yields 3D models of the proposed project. Because while the company has evolved quite a bit in nearly 40 years, the things that matter most will always remain the same.

"Forty percent of our leads are word-of-mouth referrals, and it's because we listen to our customers," Esh says. "The best compliment we get is when clients tell us we visualized what they want better than they could. The business has grown tremendously but we're still very much a family business that just wants to treat people well. That's the legacy my father left behind." **H&H**



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IT'S TIME TO GET ORGANIZED



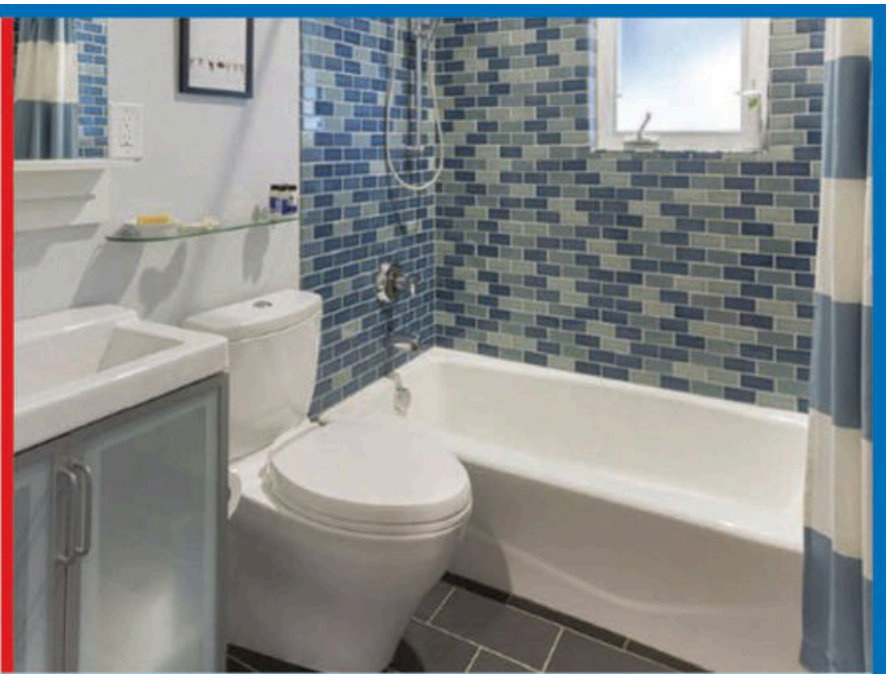
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Moving on Up

Residential elevators from **Total Access** provide the solution to mobility challenges with added luxury and convenience.

by **Liz Hunter**



We take for granted the fact that many appliances around the home were not always standard. Automatic washers and dryers were considered a luxury in the 1930s and microwaves didn't even become mainstream until the late '60s—yet we can't imagine life without them. And if you ask Curt Lampe, co-owner of Total Access Elevators & Lifts, residential elevators are poised to become the next must-have appliance in the home.

Lampe incorporated the company in 1991 with his partner Ted O'Neill. The market for residential elevators was still new, but over the past 30 years, Lampe says the demand has grown tremendously.

"In a lot of new construction, especially at the Shore for the multi-level properties, elevators are being put in automatically," he says. "We're also seeing people who want to age in place investing in an elevator instead of moving out of the home where they raised a family. They can install an elevator without the hassles of selling, packing and moving, and they can stay in their home comfortably."

Elevators appeal to people for a wide range of reasons, whether they want added luxury to their property or have mobility challenges. They can also be used to transport groceries, laundry and other bulky items as well, taking the physical burden off of people and encouraging more independent living.

There is a product to fit any lifestyle and budget, says Lampe. One of the most popular styles right now is the pneumatic vacuum elevator (PVE). Using only air, PVEs require less space and less energy than the traditional in-home elevator with a shaft.

"The PVE uses the same technology as when you go to the bank and send your money through the cylinder. One of the best features of this product is that construction is minimal. It doesn't need to be in a shaft, and we don't need to dig a pit in the basement," O'Neill says. "Technology has come a long way."

These units are also eco-friendly, only using power when going up. Coming down is all gravity. Lampe says some models can connect to your smart home setup as well.





In areas where water might be a concern, the elevators have float switches and homing devices included. "If the unit comes down and hits water, it automatically shuts off. Also, after you take the unit down to the lower level, a homing device brings the unit back up to the highest level after five minutes in the event water could become an issue. It's safest up at the top," Lampe says.

Additional safety measures include light curtains, which can sense if something is operating incorrectly and stop the unit automatically. Doors must also be fully shut for it to run, and if a unit loses power, it can still lower itself to the lowest level so a passenger could exit.

If the design of a home does not allow for a clear passage for the elevator on the interior, an exterior installation will soon be available, says O'Neill. Currently, the company has its first beta test exterior elevator attached to the side of its building, and it's expected to be available for residential installs by October.

Lampe says the time from when the product is ordered until installation is approximately two months, and if it's new construction, the elevator is one of the last things installed.

Throughout the process, homeowners can expect to have any question answered by a knowledgeable team of professionals. "We pride ourselves on the longevity of our employees and sales consultants. Most have at least 14 years' experience each, and both myself and Ted are actively involved in the business every day," Lampe says.

Total Access services all of New Jersey and Delaware; Eastern Pennsylvania (out to State College) and Maryland (down to Baltimore). H&H

Total Access Elevators & Lifts (877) 333-LIFT | TotalAccessCo.com

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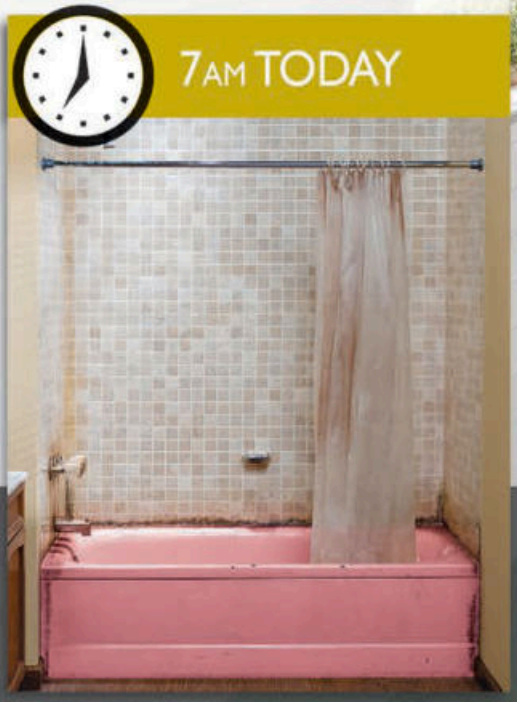
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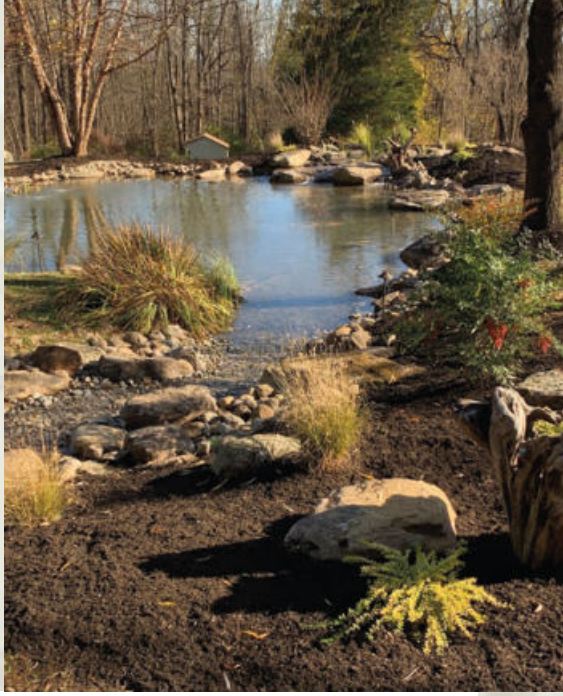
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Peace in Your Own Backyard

What homeowners need to know about building a pond



For nearly three decades, George Mihalchick has been helping people connect with nature through water features. From fish and koi ponds and bubbling fountains to disappearing waterfalls and all the accessories in between, Ponds by George can bring a wealth of creativity to any space.

As spring approaches, it's a great time to consider bringing these features to your own yard. If you're contemplating a pond project, Mihalchick says the following topics are some of the most important to consider.



Location

SHOULD IT BE CLOSE TO THE HOUSE, PATIO, PORCH, ETC.? You definitely want to see and hear it from a comfortable location. Don't put a pond in the lowest area of the property as outside water can enter the pond and harm the fish, and/or put pressure under the pond liner and possibly lift the liner and rocks inside the pond. Sun or shade have some impact; water plants will perform better in the sun allowing more root growth, which in turn filters the water better. Shade means more leaves and debris can fall into the pond causing more maintenance.

How Big?

BIGGER IS BETTER! The bigger a pond is, the easier the maintenance. A bigger pond allows for more water movement and more filtration which results in less algae. A depth of 24-to-30 inches is plenty. Most townships require a fence around the pond over a 24-inch depth.





Dirt

A LOT OF DIRT COMES OUT OF THE HOLE DUG FOR A POND. Most of the dirt will be used around the waterfall, some will be used in the landscaping around the pond as well. Sometimes you will need to find places to put any excess dirt.

Water Line

A DIRECT WATERLINE IS NOT NEEDED TO HAVE A POND. Once you fill the pond, however, you will need to top it off due to evaporation. You will need to use a garden hose to add to the water level if there is no rain for a while. If this becomes troublesome, then an autofill can always be added.

Filtration

THIS IS THE MOST IMPORTANT STEP. The bog or wetland filtration is the best type. This is created with gravel and plants and no filter pads. This is completely natural allowing the water to move up through the gravel into the roots of aquatic plants growing in the gravel. The fish waste is absorbed into the roots and turned into usable nutrients for the pond, keeping the water crystal clear. Cleaning can be as little as once every one to two years depending on fish load.

Cost

THIS IS RELATIVE TO SIZE AND TYPE OF FILTRATION. Extras such as lighting, landscaping, driftwood and fish caves will add costs but have an amazing impact on the final project. H&H

Ponds by George

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LANDSCAPING

LANDSCAPING ISN'T JUST FOR THE WARM-WEATHER MONTHS, and area experts have plenty of advice for all the ways you can use the rest of winter to plan, prune and prepare to ensure that the outdoor oasis of your dreams comes to life once spring has sprung.



Preparing for *Spring*

by **Madeleine Maccar**

It's tempting to regard the winter as a temporary reprieve from outdoor projects, especially when the cozy indoors become more and more appealing with every cold snap and snow storm.

But being too lax with your property in the dormant season can come back to haunt you in the spring. By sitting out the winter, you lose out on valuable designing time, an optimal place on professionals' client schedules and staying on top of necessary yard maintenance, to say nothing of the extra work winter neglect can make for you in the spring.

Even just using this time to plan ahead can be a proactive approach to kickstarting your property's yearly transition from cold-weather dormancy to spring's reawakening. "Winter is probably the most ideal time of the year to plan these projects," says Mike Pasquarello of Elite Landscaping. "There is much more added time and attention that can be given to the design phase, with actual installation construction slower due to weather constraints."

As more and more people are bringing the comfort and personal flourishes of their home's interiors outside, they're casting a keen eye on its landscaping and hardscaping potential. Whether your upcoming outdoor projects are major overhauls, more about simple updates or anywhere in between, the region's landscaping professionals have plenty of advice about how you can embrace the winter months to get started, maximize the lifespan of your yard's features and boost your home's overall curb appeal.

Your Property's Plant Life

With the pandemic entering its third year and people still spending more time at home than ever before, they've been able to focus on truly personalizing their living spaces. Some already tackled their major landscaping goals a season or two ago and are focusing on maintenance and upkeep, while others are just now getting around to their outdoor overhaul.

"Homeowners spending more time at home has given us more opportunities to create healthy, beautiful, pest-free living spaces to beautify their property more," confirms Madison Malik of Joshua Tree Experts. "Winter is very important as the beginning of a project's planning stage. We arborists have more time in the winter to really nurture our clients' property and create a great maintenance plan with them moving forward."

Winterizing a living yard actually begins in the fall. That's when it's crucial to lay down a protective layer of "compost or high-end mulch that doesn't introduce new weeds to your garden" to protect plants' root systems from the cold and prevent their soil from drying out in the harsh weather, says Ronni Hock of Ronni Hock Garden & Landscape.

"Snow is actually great for your garden: A blanket of snow on the ground is marvelous because it acts as an extra blanket protecting it from the winter winds, and those winds are what's most damaging to your plant life and soil," she notes.

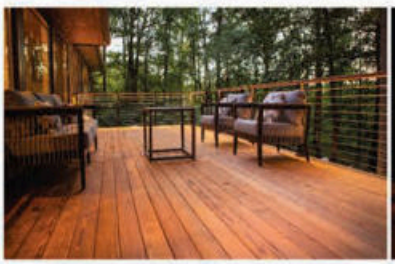
Unsurprisingly, your yard's soil is a crucial component in determining how exactly your landscaping goals will come to life, as its composition will indicate what kind of foliage will thrive there. Hock points out that

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winter is a great time to get your soil tested, and says that all kinds of resources offer testing kits, like the bigger tree companies, any county office of Rutgers University's New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station Cooperative Extension or a local gardening center.

"It's all in the soil: If your soil's not right, nothing is going to grow no matter what you plant in it," she says. "Once you test your soil and send out your sample, you'll get your results back and an explanation of what they mean and what you should be planting."

Ryan Panetta of D. Panetta Contracting says the winter can be a great time to study your property's relationship to the elements.

"Do some research to see how the sun travels across your property," he suggests, adding that websites like SunCalc.org can help in determining things like daylight duration, shadow lengths, average solar paths and more to ensure you're designing natural elements that are harmonious with your unique geographic location and its features.

Take Advantage of the Dormant Season

With winter's bare branches and dormant plant life making parts of your yard more accessible in the cold months, it's also an opportune time to get hands-on and reshape some of your more unwieldy overgrown landscaping elements.

"Winter pruning is great to do during the late winter months, as you really can easily see and evaluate branching habits of a deciduous shrub or tree," says Pasquarello.

"Some tree pruning is optimal to perform in the winter, despite the common misconception that springtime is best," Malik adds. "This includes pruning fruit trees because they become dormant or pruning diseased trees. When it comes to accessing hard-to-reach trees, winter is an optimal time to perform that service—plus, the soil conditions often create a more compact ground, which supports heavy equipment without damaging the lawn."

She also suggests removing dead or dangerous trees, as well as any unsightly stumps. "You'll want to look at mature trees with hazardous deadwood, as well as hazardous oak trees. Tree removals and stump grinding also become ideal in the winter if you are looking to plant a new tree in its place, since it provides plenty of time to prep the area to plant again in the spring. If you wait until spring, the optimal window for planting will have passed."

Panetta notes that a little winter landscaping TLC can be hugely beneficial for plant life once spring returns, whether it's tidying up or introducing native species to your landscaping.

"Starting in the fall through now, it's nice to get all your plant material properly trimmed and pruned back to make sure the snow doesn't do any damage to your plant material," he explains. "Make sure your grass is all cleaned up and there's no grass clippings or leaves on it so when spring comes, it has a better chance to germinate and a better chance to thrive."

"If you're OK with digging through the frozen ground, you can do transplants," Panetta continues. "They'll just kind of stay dormant until springtime, which is when you'll have to revisit them and make sure everything's coming in properly. We've done a lot of pine plantings and spruce plantings this time of year. They're all in their element, so they'll be dormant until they start thriving in the spring."

Some Final Words of Advice

The frozen ground, snowy runoffs, soggy daytime conditions that refreeze at night, and the overall harshness and unpredictability of Northeastern winters make it a suboptimal time to break ground on a new walkway or steps. It is, however, a good opportunity for examining cement, concrete and other hard fixtures for signs of weathering and wear so you know exactly



what you need replaced or repaired.

Most high-quality construction should be fine after just one winter, though the introduction of salt and other de-icing agents can be what rapidly ages those features. "The one thing that really hurts everything in the winter is the chemicals and salt you use, which could do damage to certain materials," Panetta explains.

The kind of winter weather we have will definitely impact the kind of spring maintenance you'll have to do. To minimize the damage of harsh winds, driving snow and inclement weather that can kill plants, Pasquarello has some proactive tips to ensure your yard's plant life lives to see another spring.

"Protect trees and shrubs from snow and ice, which can bend and break branches," he says. "Many evergreen varieties of trees and shrubs become extremely weighted with snow and ice and become damaged beyond repair. Simply tying outer smaller branches to inner central leaders will give an added strength to withstand the stresses of snow and ice load."

With the uptick in landscaping services' demands, now is the time to start talking with professionals and snagging your place on their schedules before it's too late.

"In a normal year, if you called in January, you could probably expect to get your work done by late spring or early summer but now, with the pandemic and the volume of calls and leads, I'm working on projects that I started last summer," notes Hock. "And it's not just me: It's across the board with anyone in the business and construction because there's been such a big explosion of demand, which is a blessing and a curse."

No matter what your landscaping goals are, the size of your property or the features you want to personalize your outdoor space with, the must-dos remain the same, according to Malik.



"If there's one thing every homeowner should keep in mind when it comes to caring for their homes' outdoor spaces, it's to prioritize preventative maintenance and yearly inspections," she says. "They are both extremely important." **H&H**

RESOURCES

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DPanettaContracting.com

Elite Landscaping
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EliteLandscaping.com

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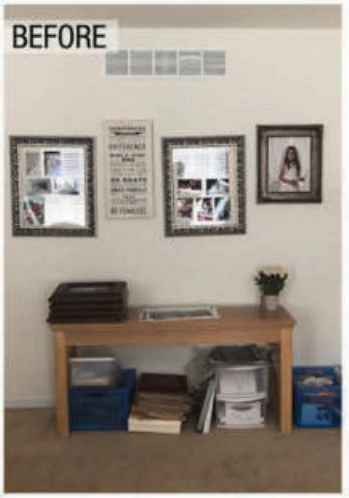


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WHAT'S ON THE Outside Counts

As the snow and ice melt away, it's an ideal time to have your home's exterior refreshed.

BY **LIZ HUNTER**

Although Punxsutawney Phil may have predicted six more weeks of winter, there's no reason to wait on exterior remodeling projects that could save you money and have your home looking in tip-top condition for spring.

In fact, the harsh winter weather can expose our home's inefficiencies and exterior weaknesses. "This is the time of year when you'll see the roof possibly leaking when the snow sits on top and doesn't run off due to ice damming and clogged gutters, as well as air leakage in windows and doors from broken seals," says Barbara Carranza, president of Carranza Roofing and Remodeling.

Jane Alfaro of Alfaro Enterprises says it's not uncommon to notice water leaking through windows caused by incorrect flashing, or missing shingles, fascia and siding that blew off in a storm.

These issues can quickly be identified by professionals who can recommend repairs or replacement.

Ace Bajrami, co-owner of Ace-Pro Construction, says an honest contractor will tell you when a repair is enough to address the current issue. "We'll recommend a repair when it makes sense, and sometimes they need a little bit of time to prepare for a full replacement," Bajrami says. "Roof cleanings on a regular basis can be an important preventative maintenance measure that can reduce the pres-



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ence of mold and mold spores."

"We go out and inspect during a scheduled consultation," says Jeff Kay, president and CEO of East Coast Roofing and Siding. "We're trained by manufacturers in products and installation. We look for signs of moisture. Bugs and spiders are telltale signs of moisture. … Homeowners may also notice increased utility bills due to energy insufficiency with windows or attic insulation. They crank the heat to compensate, but without proper attic ventilation, it creates condensation when that heat hits the cold attic space. If they check up in their attic and notice water droplets hanging from the nails, that's a sign of inadequate ventilation. This is really only resolved with a full roof replacement and installation of proper intake and exhaust."

As William Suarez, owner of Revolution Roofing and Remodeling, has learned, not too many homeowners like going in their attic to check things out. "You can find out a lot about the roof from inside the attic but eight out of 10 people don't do it regularly. We recommend taking a look up there when you're putting away the holiday decorations," he says.

Certain clues tell these experts about the age of the roof. "We walk the roof and check the age of the shingles, the condition of the pipes and the chimney," says Alfaro. "With the 35 years' experience that we have, we're usually right on when it comes to quoting the time left that the roof will last before the customer needs to think about changing it."

"We'll find out how old the entire home is and check the different penetrations. Sometimes those can be fixed up to extend the life of the roof for another five to 10 years, but if you notice nail pops or loose shingles, the roof is most likely at the end of its lifetime," Suarez says.

Carranzo says, "Depending on the age, we would recommend repairing if there are missing shingles and the roof itself is in good shape. Pipe collars are another area to check for leaks, but those can't be repaired, they have to be replaced. If a roof has nail pops, they can be hammered in but if there are too many it's best to replace the roof."

Roofing installations and products have undergone vast improvements in recent years, and companies that have been properly trained and certified by leading manufacturers can install entire roof systems.

Carranza, whose company is GAF Master Elite-certified, installs roofs all the way from the wood deck with ice and water shield and leak barriers, to shingles, new pipe collars and CapMaster vent pipe caps. These elements were not always part of roofing installations.

> *"You can find out a lot about the roof from inside the attic but eight out of 10 people don't do it regularly."*
>
> —**WILLIAM SUAREZ**
> REVOLUTION ROOFING AND REMODELING

A roof is nothing without proper installation, advises Alfaro, whose company works with Timberline. "All these products are good and have excellent warranties, however, it's all in the installation of the products to get the maximum life expectancy out of them," she says.

Improper installation could even disqualify you from the warranty protections, Suarez adds. "Be aware of who you're using and if they're certified by the manufacturer. They can only achieve that certification by being vetted by the manufacturer and that is what allows the company to offer the upgraded warranty."

If your issues lie elsewhere on the exterior, such as siding and windows, Alfaro says you may want to consider replacing them at the same time. "Once you have siding off it's a great idea to replace your windows so that you can get a good coverage of the plywood and around the windows with Tyvek weatherproof barrier and Tyvek tape, which is perfect for flashing your windows to get that extra protection."

James Hardie is one of the most well-known siding manufacturers in the industry, and



homeowners will find many companies offering their products. "Their warranties are extensive and the [fiber cement] product is durable and provides a unique look to a home that traditional vinyl doesn't give," Carranzo says.

Alfaro adds that the current color trends for James Hardie are the charcoal blue or night gray with arctic white trim/flashing.

East Coast Roofing and Siding has partnered with CertainTeed. "We can show homeowners a complete 3D model of their home and what it will look like with the different siding designs," says Kay. Cedar Impressions is one line of siding that people are using for interesting accents. "They tend to stick with the traditional horizontal siding on a majority of the house and then accent the front with board and batten or Cedar Impression or stone veneer. It gives it a real designer touch."

Bajrami says stucco is another visually appealing option that people prefer to maintain if it is currently on their home. Bajrami would first ensure remediation efforts are not needed. He says homeowners like to mix textures with stucco accents and siding.

On the window and doors end of the spectrum, there's no shortage of options, although every company has their preference. At Global Home Improvement, it's Marvin Windows and Doors, specifically its line of Infinity Fiberglass products, says Adam Parnes.

"Infinity Fiberglass windows from Marvin are custom-built using Ultrex® fiberglass, which allows us to measure and order windows to the exact size," he says. "Infinity Fiberglass is eight times stronger than vinyl, and has low expansion/contraction to prevent seal failure. They are also non-porous and 100% moisture resistant."

He adds that, for a true modern look, black window frames are emerging as a go-to trend. "Not only are they an exciting change from a traditional white window frame, but they can offer your home contrast and elegance with a modern aesthetic."

No matter which area of the home's exterior you may be considering repairing or replacing, industry professionals advise homeowners to do their research. "Reading online reviews should be one of the first steps," says Bajrami.

"An educated customer is a plus," chimes in Carranzo.

Suarez suggests comparing products and installation techniques, and not just numbers in the estimate.

"My final advice would be, with the way the world is going today, prices are only going up, so procrastination is going to end up costing you money," says Kay. "Getting a detailed estimate will let homeowners know what they have to prepare for, and maybe an inspection will reveal something they didn't know about." H&H

RESOURCES

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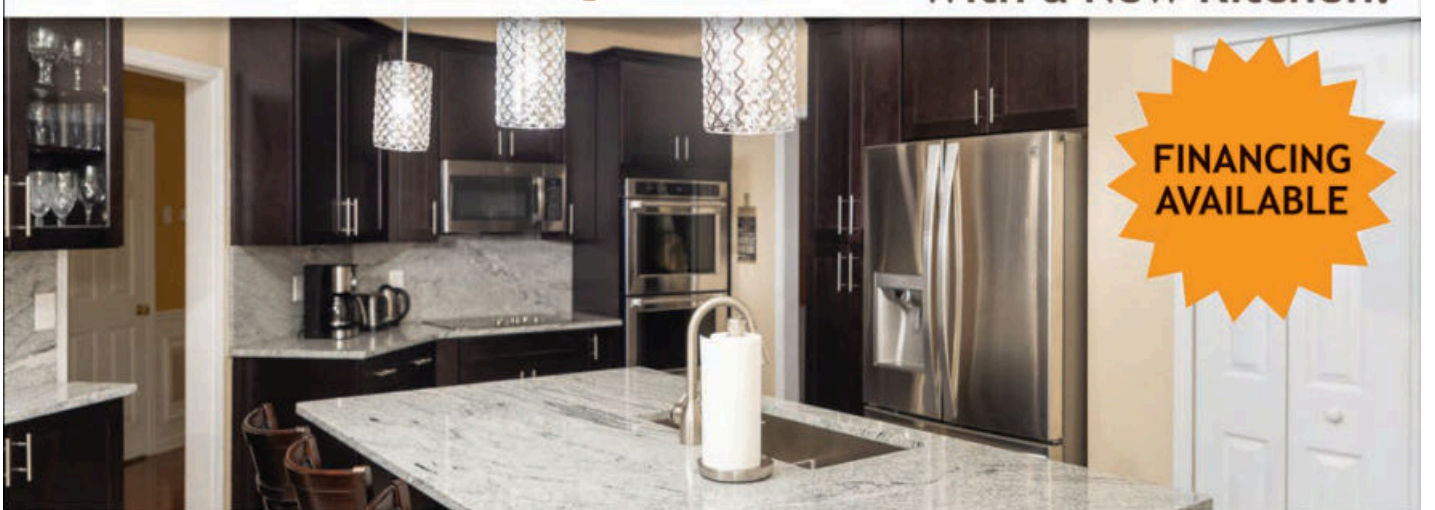
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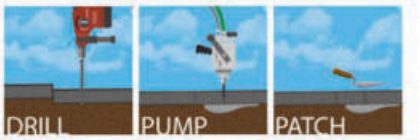
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