HOUSE & HOME

Bucks County

Your #1 Resource and Design Magazine

Volume 22, Issue 6

Spring Refresh

How to get your home ready for the next season

ASK THE EXPERT



LET'S FACE IT, QUALITY KITCHEN REFACING

How refacing your kitchen cabinets can save you time and money page 13

INSIDE: OUR ANNUAL LANDSCAPE, POOL, PATIO AND DECK DIRECTORY

Page 24

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Architectural Concrete Design

Bringing unmatched expertise and a designer's eye to decorative concrete projects *page 11*

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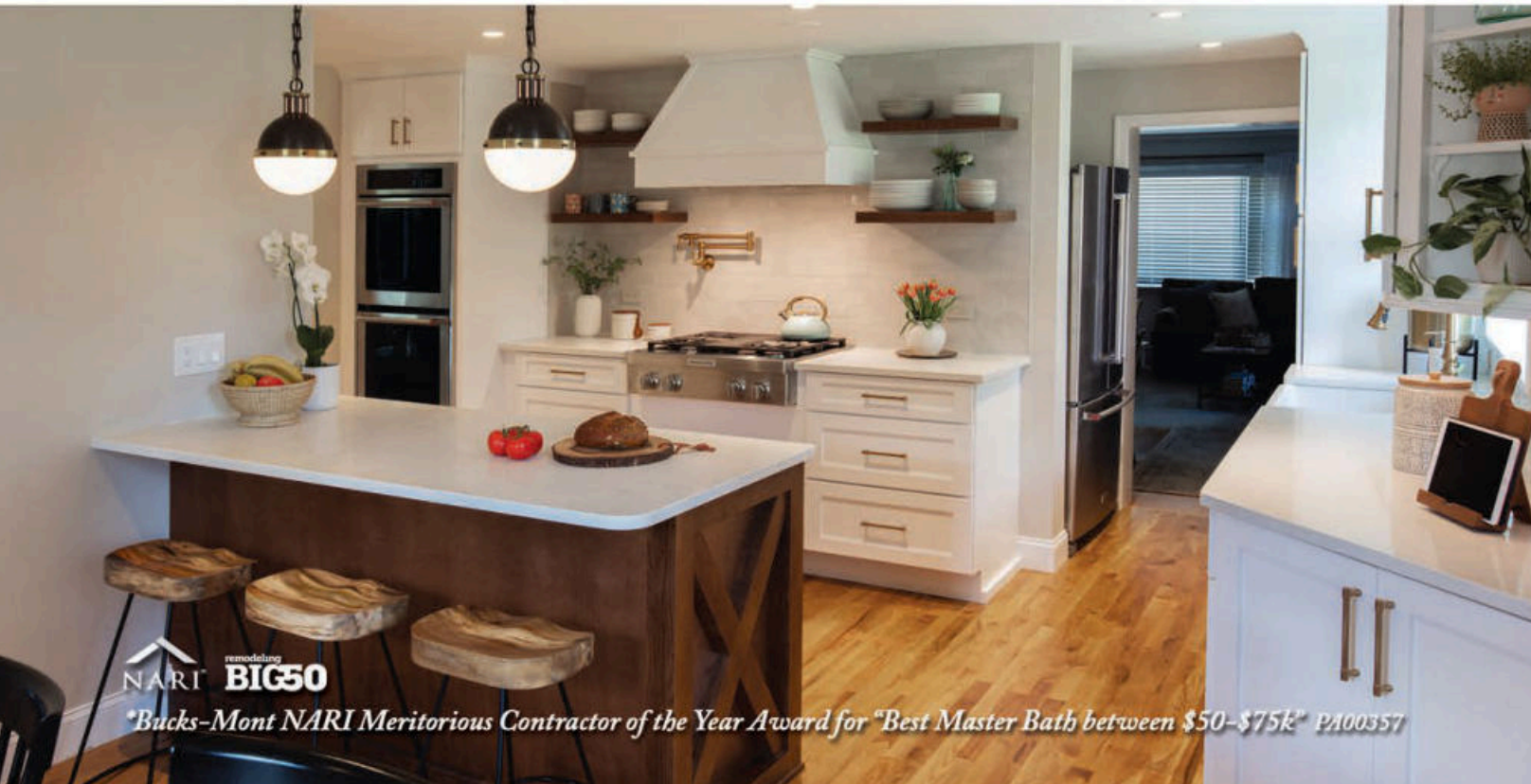
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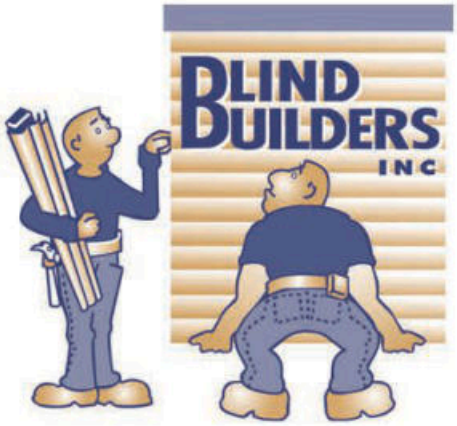


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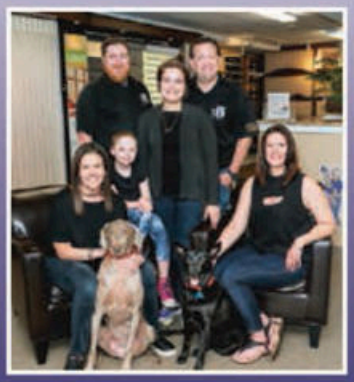
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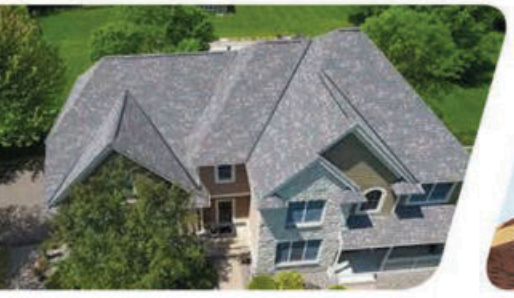
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contents

11 Breaking the Mold
Architectural Concrete Design brings unmatched expertise and a designer's eye to your decorative concrete projects

13 Ask the Expert
Let's Face It, Quality Kitchen Refacing

16 Ready to Relax
Pros weigh in on how homeowners can help their deck project progress and have them enjoying it soon

20 Pre-Season Preparation
Experts share advice for any homeowner looking to greet swimming season with a pool that's ready to beat the summer heat

24 *House & Home* Annual Landscape Directory

34 Set Up Your Space for Summer
At Sequoia Out Back, customers can find endless inspiration for their outdoor dreams







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PUBLISHER
Edward P. McCartney

EDITOR
Peter Proko

EXECUTIVE EDITOR
Liz Hunter

ASSISTANT EDITORS
Matt Cosentino, Madeleine Maccar

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS
Amy Kodrich, Erica Young

CREATIVE DIRECTOR
Hank Alspach

PRODUCTION MANAGER
Brian Mikulski

DESIGNERS
Abby Lurty, Dori Shields, Lisa Zollinger

ACCOUNTING DIRECTOR
Darlene Versak

SALES DIRECTOR
Lindsay Gonzalez

SALES MANAGER
Jim Romano

NEW BUSINESS DEVELOPER
Chuck McKane

MARKETING CONSULTANTS
Kristine Di Nardo, Rochelle Dodge, Frank Liantonio,
Bonnie Remmey, Lori Vorgang, Amy B. Weiss

ACCOUNTANT
Max Haggerty

DIGITAL MEDIA DIRECTOR
Leigh Stuart

PUBLISHER EMERITUS
Bob Doran

EXECUTIVE PARTNERS
Gerry Haggerty, Edward P. McCartney

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Breaking the Mold

Architectural Concrete Design brings unmatched expertise and a designer's eye to your decorative concrete projects. by **LIZ HUNTER**

Crafting the perfect outdoor space is a careful orchestration combining function with aesthetics. How the space will be used determines every material installed, especially for hardscaping, and it takes an experienced industry veteran to make the best recommendations and to ensure every detail is considered.

One such consideration homeowners should make in the planning stages is the beauty and durability of decorative concrete. The product checks more boxes than you can imagine, including being low-maintenance, cost-effective and able to withstand the elements of the Mid-Atlantic. Not only does it make sense from a functional standpoint, concrete is incredibly versatile, and can mimic nearly any material, such as flagstone, brick, tile, slate, fieldstone, cobblestone and granite pavers—at a much better price.

Working with a product like this and achieving a client's desired results comes down to expertise and technique. It's not as simple as showing up with a concrete truck and pouring a slab. There's a finesse to it, and one company in particular has built its reputation on exceeding expectations in the industry of decorative concrete: Architectural Concrete Design (ACD).

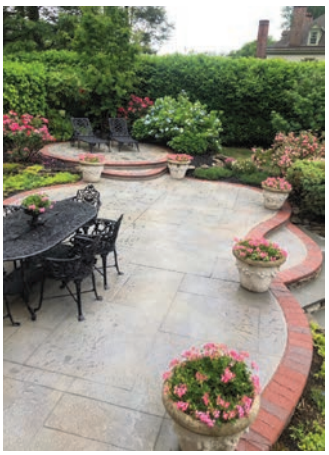
Founded in 1993 by Christopher McMahon, ACD has been the go-to company for major projects, from the Pennsylvania Turnpike, Philadelphia casinos and Longwood Gardens, to malls, schools, multi-family housing developments and more. Their ability to handle projects of this size and scale truly sets ACD apart in the residential space.

Clients have access to a comprehensive team that includes designers, foremen with over 100 years of collective experience and office staff dedicated to the process. Steve Abel recently joined the company as vice president of business operations and says the diverse backgrounds of the team members contribute to the customer experience.

"We have an eclectic team like myself who comes from a commercial banking background. We have designers with experience in interior architectural design and landscape architecture. We all bring a unique approach to the industry and our customers," Abel says. "We are obsessing about the customer experience. When customers call us, they can reach the right people on the phone.

"That has contributed to our high referral rate. Our installers are the best in the business and if and when an issue arises, we're there to handle it."

From the initial design to installation, there are quality checks in place to ensure a customer has the most functional design for the space, he continues. "Not only are our designers looking out for any potential concerns in the process, but the installers have 25 years' experience and have seen nearly every imaginable circumstance. They are the final layer to make sure nothing was missed," Abel says.



Concrete is unique in the sense that it can truly go as far as an installer can take it. "There is a wide range of approaches to making concrete look decorative, from applying stains and dyes, to using color hardeners, or coloring the concrete integrally. When done correctly, these various techniques can allow for concrete to stand out as a showpiece or incorporate surrounding colors and textures into the slab to complement existing stone, stucco or siding. The materials have certainly advanced over the years which makes the design possibilities even more expansive," says Abel.

"However, we truly believe the real secret sauce is the expertise of the installers," he continues.

It's something clients notice as well, including Bob Nonemaker, founder of OuterSpaces Inc., a high-end landscape architect. "Concrete is one of those things where if everything doesn't go right, it can end up really wrong, but with ACD, it's like a ballet for them," he says. "They know exactly what they're doing and they have tremendous productivity. It's pretty much impossible to find a flaw. They're just really good at what they do."

Abel says, in the residential space, the appeal and practicality of decorative concrete comes down to quality, value and maintenance. "It's the perfect low-maintenance complement to a well-manicured home. Time is scarcer than ever, and our customers continuously find the maintenance of natural stone to be either cost prohibitive or time consuming. This makes decorative concrete the perfect material for them."

With summer approaching, another benefit to using ACD is that their product is readily available. "Unfortunately, due to global supply chain issues you will find pavers and natural stone difficult to come by these days. Prices change monthly and the availability of the product seems to change by the minute. We have found ourselves insulated from most of these issues," Abel says. "We work with several suppliers in our service area who have moved mountains to keep their product available. This enables us to be there for our clients, which in today's market is very appealing." **H&H**

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ask the expert by Amy Kodrich

Let's Face It

WITH KITCHENS CONTINUING TO BE THE CENTRAL HUB OF THE HOUSEHOLD, homeowners are looking for a cost-effective way to enhance their living experience. Families may rule out a remodeling project and many are embracing cabinet refacing as a fast, clean and affordable alternative.

Since 1984, Let's Face It, Quality Kitchen Refacing, has been serving the entire Delaware Valley as the premier cabinet restoration company. With cabinet refacing, the process includes using the existing cabinet framework (if structurally sound) and replacing the doors and drawer fronts with designer-quality products. The process is meant for families to be able to have that remodel experience while not having the stress and worries of uprooting their family or making a major dent in their pocket.

Services go beyond just refacing, and homeowners can work with Let's Face It for granite countertop installations, additional cabinetry installations, flooring, tile backsplashes, lighting and more. "All these things are meant for us to provide the customer a one-stop shop so they can go directly through us and not have to worry about another contractor and other people coming in and out. We handle the whole project from start to finish," says Tom Grochowski, a designer with Let's Face It.

House & Home spoke with Grochowski about the time and cost savings associated with refacing.

BASED ON YOUR EXPERIENCE IN KITCHEN CONSTRUCTION, WHAT IS THE GENERAL COST DIFFERENCE BETWEEN REMODELING A KITCHEN VERSUS REFACING THE KITCHEN?



Tom Grochowski, designer

It's a very common question a lot of people want to know; refacing can be about half the price or less. Generally it can be 40 to 60% cheaper to reface than to replace the entire kitchen. For example, someone's complete new kitchen remodel quote could be around $60,000; Let's Face It could offer better quality designer doors and finishes at a cost of approximately $25,000, and include countertops, a new backsplash, sink and plumbing.

A lot of times when people remodel, they don't realize that through the process they will probably have to replace the floor and the countertops; with refacing, you can focus on one component.

IS YOUR COMPANY ABLE TO OFFER CUSTOMERS OPTIONS ON REPLACING SOME CABINETS OR ADDING CABINETS IN THE REFACING OPTION?

It's a great thing we can do. We maintain a full-custom wood shop and can add in cabinets, we even can add an island and alter the designs in the kitchen. We can add in new cabinets or replace just a few that are not usable or damaged and need to be replaced, but then reface the rest of the kitchen. We can match all the materials and colors and design to be identical and you'd never know the difference. We also custom make our own cabinets, that detail is one of our expertise.

GENERALLY, WHAT KIND OF TIMETABLE CAN CUSTOMERS EXPECT FOR A REFACED KITCHEN VERSUS A REMODELED KITCHEN?

When we are just doing cabinets, it can usually take about four to five days to reface the kitchen. If we are adding countertops and backsplashes and more, generally it can be a two to three-week project. When you do a remodeling project with our other division HomeTech Renovations, it can be about six to 10 weeks to fully demolish or remodel the whole kitchen. The timetable is a big difference and that is what is attractive to a lot of people.

CONSUMERS ARE LOOKING TO UPGRADE THEIR CABINETS, SO WHY NOT PAINT THEM?

Many people think of painting, and that they're going to be keeping their doors—we don't simply paint the existing old doors and boxes, because in essence we believe this should be done in a professional finishing room environment. We used to offer this service 35 years ago, but due to the less-than-desirable results (and the labor intensity to sand off all of the old finish) it is actually less costly to simply replace the doors and drawers with new modern door designs and reface the cabinet boxes.

In short, a first quality paint job is not much different in cost as compared to a completely upgraded cabinet refacing, which offers brand-new, updated custom-sized doors with new soft-close hinges, decorative hardware, covering all exposed cabinet surfaces, new upgraded crown molding, etc. See our process at www.LFIKitchens.com.

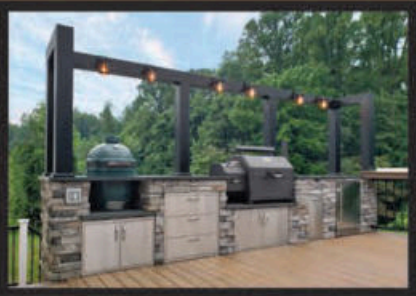
WHY SHOULD CUSTOMERS CHOOSE LET'S FACE IT FOR THIS TYPE OF PROJECT?

We have our own employees with local presence and a great working relationship and vast experience, which benefits the customer. There aren't too many people involved and everyone, from Barb the office manager to Ken our project manager and myself—everyone knows the project. Customers know all of us and that their project isn't something that gets sent down the hall to someone else that we don't know. We own the project and communicate and coordinate accordingly. H&H



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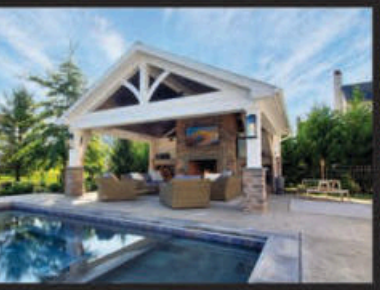
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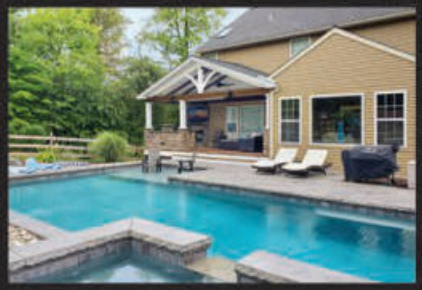
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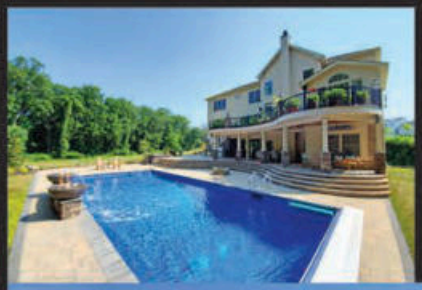
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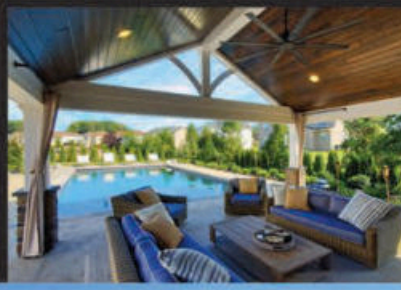
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Ready TO Relax

BY LIZ HUNTER

Pros weigh in on how homeowners can help their deck project progress and have them enjoying it soon.

As issues around the supply chain and inflation continue to dominate the news, many homeowners might think there's no hope when it comes to improvement projects, especially a new deck. However, they shouldn't be discouraged, according to local industry professionals who say their outlook is positive, especially when customers prepare properly. We asked a few local companies to chime in on the state of their industry and how homeowners can help move a project along. With the right professional by your side, you'll be relaxing on your new deck in no time.

For anyone who is ready to embark on a deck project, what should they know about where things stand in terms of supply chain for this industry?

"As far as I can see right now, supply chain for decking and other finishes is pretty good. Costs are up for sure, but vendor inventory of in-stock products seems to be mostly back to normal. Some of the special-order space is still experiencing longer than desired lead times but at least availability for these items seems to have mostly resumed. Our customers have been very understanding of how things are right now since literally everyone is experiencing the same situation; and we've all now become accustomed to the new ways we've had to operate." —BRIAN IWANO, FOUNDER/PROJECT MANAGER, BLUE TREE BUILDERS

"All items that we use on our projects are made in the USA and so while there are some material shortages, we have adjusted on our end and ordered materials sooner in the process than normal to ensure there are no delays. We also now stock many items in our warehouse to ensure the clients' projects are not delayed when it comes time to build."
—MARV ESH, OWNER, KEYSTONE CUSTOM DECKS



BLUE TREE BUILDERS





How can homeowners make good use of their time and get on a builder's schedule? What kinds of things need to be handled in the early stages of planning and design?

"We are currently booking our summer 2022 schedule. The best way to get the process started is for one of our team to come to your house to start the initial conversations about what you as a client wants to accomplish with your space. From there we can recommend different designs, features, and overall layout based on our experience and we take all of that and our design team designs your dream outdoor living space! If you move ahead with Keystone, we will take care of all permitting to make this a turnkey process for our clients." —MARV ESH

"Homeowners should plan six months to a year in advance as they look to explore adding an outdoor space. Go and visit their potential contractors' showroom; they will assist with design ideas. ... Timelines and budgets should be discussed up front ... to set reasonable expectations." —JOE KALNAS, GENERAL MANAGER, MY DECK

"A township zoning application with your plot plan or lot survey is the absolute first step in any project that alters the permanent exterior footprint of your home. Zoning approvals, unlike construction permits, are the responsibility of the property owner. Most contractors are happy to help with this step but it's the homeowner's name that goes on the application. Some towns even charge contractors more money to submit zoning applications on the homeowner's behalf. Zoning simply gives you the permission for the footprint of the project. Construction permits cover the actual building of the project and are handled by the builder. Construction office staff can also help guide you through the requirements and help with the form. Sometimes a zoning variance may be required for approval, and that always falls on the homeowners to get through. Townhouse or other association approvals needed? Then there's all that goes along with that too." —BRIAN IWANO

What kind of design expertise can a deck industry professional specifically provide to help the overall project?

"Building an outside/inside room takes a lot of experience. You have to know about gas appliances, fireplaces, water features, plants, landscape design, hardscaping, patios, different materials and textures, and find a way to put it in someone's budget. Most people limit looking at materials at [places like] Home Depot. Wouldn't you rather call someone who knows every material available?

"When I design backyards, I ask them if they want a pool. They may say no, but you don't want to shut your backyard off. You cannot build something now that will preclude them from having a pool someday; you don't want to limit your property." —BILL WILSON, CO-OWNER, AMAZING DECKS



"Every home is unique to its own property, topography, setbacks and restrictions. I recommend getting a licensed deck builder to visit your home. Hire a professional, someone you are comfortable with. They will usually do the right thing." —JOE KALNAS

Ready to Relax

When a homeowner meets with a deck builder, what kinds of things should they have prepared to show/discuss?

"Collect a bunch of pictures that show various features or design elements you're looking to incorporate in your project. There's no such thing as 'too many pictures.' You don't have to have it all figured out. Just a little direction will help us run with it and design something awesome for you. ... It's also important to be serious about completing the project, communicate your budget and have some ideas about what you're looking to accomplish and how you want it to look." —BRIAN IWANO

What features continue to be valuable additions to a deck project?

"When it comes to outdoor living spaces, we are a turnkey design/build firm. Most of our projects will have a deck and porch. From there we incorporate fireplaces, kitchens, patios, water features, hot tubs, pergolas and many features like that. We also have recently launched our pool division so we can now add a pool to complete your one-of-a-kind dream outdoor living space." —MARV ESH

"There are more options for finish materials out there now than ever before. Finish selections are purely driven by personal preference and budget. From exotic hardwoods to stained composites, lattice, covered or half-covered decks, motorized screens and privacy walls, to benches, custom fabricated stone accents, fireplace—gas or wood burning—and audio and electrical. ... There's a lot, and we've installed a lot!" —BRIAN IWANO H&H

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by **Madeleine Maccar**

Pre-Season Preparation

No matter the kind of pool you have or how long you've been taking care of it, area experts have plenty of advice for any homeowner looking to greet swimming season with a pool that's ready to beat the summer heat.

As the days get longer

and signs of spring start announcing themselves in blooming pastels and singing birds, summertime days spent enjoying your backyard pool are never far behind.

But before those idyllic weekends and poolside parties make their seasonal return, assessing and preparing the pool at the center of your summer activity should be your No. 1 priority—and one that you shouldn't delay handling, since professionals are still navigating an inundation of service requests.

"People should already be calling and scheduling their pool openings because everyone wants to be open by May 31, especially this year," notes Walter Beyer, a co-owner of Stardust Pools, one of the oldest pool companies in New Jersey. "We must have booked over 100 openings already for April and May. This year has already been like no other, and a big issue is not having enough workers."

Some local experts in what it takes to begin your summer with a masterfully repaired, refreshed or renovated pool spoke to *House & Home* about what you can do to head into summer with a pool that's as ready to greet the warmer weather as you are.

AVOIDING COMMON ERRORS

Having professional assistance in opening your pool, no matter the type, can be invaluable in helping a first-time pool owner avoid reinforcing bad habits, as well as ensuring that longtime owners are up-to-date on the best and newest ways to preserve their investment. But if you're calling on the experts, prepping their workspace is imperative.

"Basically, to prepare for someone to come out and open the pool, you need to pump the water off the cover, get the leaves off the cover, if possible, and put a hose under the cover to fill the pool all the way up so when we go out there, we can run the pool and it's ready to go," Beyer explains.

With a number of new pool owners opening their backyard swimming oases for the first time—Derek Blasker of Fiberglass Pool Designs says his company installed 131 last year alone—there's a lot of potential for beginner mishaps that could put your pool out of commission until the necessary repairs are made.

"A pretty big rookie mistake when you're starting back up for the year is draining all of your equipment, so when it comes time to turn everything back on, people forget to prime the pump by filling it up with water," Blasker says. "They just flip it on expecting it to be able to create the suction pressure, and then they burn out the motor before the season even starts."

Not all damage comes from a one-time blunder. Administering an incorrect chemical concentra-

Image courtesy of Epoxy Floor Experts



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Pre-Season Preparation



tion can cause the kind of slow damage that creeps in over time. Blasker notes that the very chemicals meant to sanitize your pool can produce issues in the long term, especially if you eschew professional advice and keep making the same mistakes.

"People like to put their chlorine tablets into the skimmer, and it's such a heavy concentration of chlorine flowing directly down that sometimes it will force the pipe itself to start to crush itself, so it starts to warp," he says. "That will slowly deteriorate the pipes in your pool. It's not going to happen instantly but, if no one ever tells you to stop doing that, it's going to cause problems over a prolonged period of time. If you start early with something like a floater or an automatic chlorinator, that will prolong the life of your pipes."

CHECKING THE BASICS

A visual assessment is a good place to start, which will help you identify any necessary fixes—including a clogged pool filter, floating winter debris, liner damage, chipped tiles, wear and tear to your pool decking, and broken equipment—as well as their immediacy.

"Liners and covers tend to get rips or holes in them, safety covers especially if storms came through and branches cut through the cover, which you'll need to replace," Beyer says. "If there's a hole in your liner, the water levels can get too low, and then the liners shrink. … A lot of people put off replacing or repairing their liners, and then they open up a pool and find out that this is the year they need to put a new liner in."

You'll also want to check your water's chemical balances early in your reopening schedule. A water sample is a critical assessment of your pool's health, and will guide you toward any necessary chlorine, calcium, alkaline or pH adjustments, especially since elements like sunshine and the acidity of rain can influence its chemical levels.

"When we open up a pool, we do free water testing," notes Beyer. "We'll take a sample that day, and the next day our office will call to tell you what you need to do to stabilize your pool and chemicals."

Of course, it's not just what's inside your pool that matters: The decking around it is an important part of your swimming environment that requires care and attention, too.

Jason Larsen at Epoxy Floor Experts says that even the highest quality concrete will eventually show its age once it's weathered enough cycles of seasonal extremes.

"The problem with concrete is that it cracks," he says. "There's

Image courtesy of Stardust Pools



nothing you can really do to stop that. You can keep the surface sealed as best you can, which might prevent some of the pitting, but as far as the heaving and the cracking, there's not much you can do. That's just the nature of the beast: When concrete cures, it shrinks, and when it shrinks it cracks."

REPAIRS AND RENOVATIONS

Harsh weather does account for inevitable maintenance projects, though substandard installation work can be the culprit, too. "We get people who call us because their concrete's looking ugly and want us to come out and assess the situation," Larsen says. "A lot of the heaving and the settling is usually because the substrate wasn't installed properly.

"There are sealers you can use," Larsen adds, explaining that certain options and upgrades can alleviate some of that repair onus. "We fix concrete with other products, so we'll resurface the whole area with either a stone or a rubber material, depending on the situation. If you have a lot of cracks or you can see that the slabs are moving constantly, then we'll use our rubber product because that's flexible: As the concrete moves, the rubber moves with it."

If you're eyeing your pool with a refresh rather than repairs in mind, custom features or architecture like waterfalls and lighting can certainly dress it up—though you'll also have to follow those extra maintenance steps at the beginning and end of every season.

"It's almost impossible to fully drain the waterfalls because you can't just cap them off," Blasker says. "A lot of the cascades are just a long strip with a bunch of little holes in it that the water flows out of, and there's nothing you can really do to seal it off for the winter. If you don't properly blow it out, and then cap it off at the valve, or you don't put enough antifreeze in it, it's all above-grade so you can really run into some issues there."

Beyer also notes that concrete pools' upgrades tend to focus on surfaces, like coping, tiling and finishes.

No matter your goals for your pool this summer, the guidance and hands-on know-how of the area's pool professionals will keep your pool running … well, swimmingly with a professional pre-season inspection.

"When I'm done installing a pool, I go over everything with them: how to do their maintenance, what they need to put in it, when to check the chemicals, opening the pool, closing the pool," Beyer notes. "We recommend a professional inspection right after your pool is open to make sure everything—your heaters, your pumps, your filters—is working and running properly. And, if you're buying a house with a pool, make sure you get a pool inspection along with your house inspection." H&H

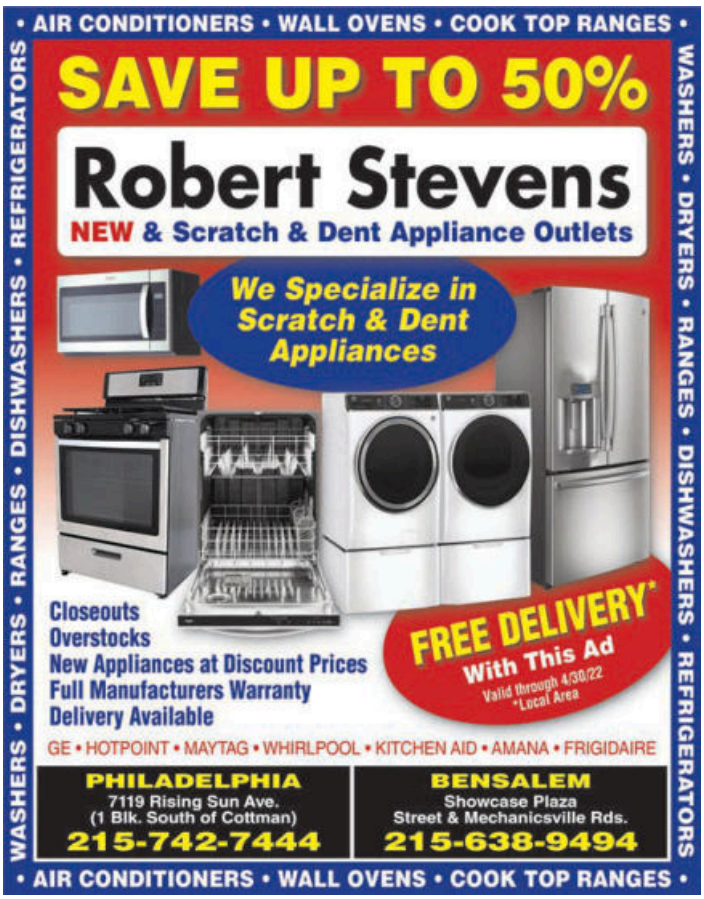
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LANDSCAPE DIRECTORY



2022

With spring in bloom, homeowners across the country are preparing to spend the coming months in their own backyards, and chances are they would like to invest in some updates. Our annual landscape directory connects our readers with local resources to consult on any project related to the outdoors. This comprehensive list includes companies that can create an oasis with a pool, patio or deck, not to mention hardscaping, water features and shade elements; or professionals who maintain landscaping, provide furniture or install fences and much more. No matter what you need, your outdoor space is in good hands.

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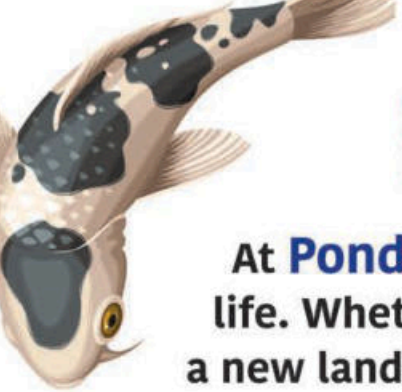
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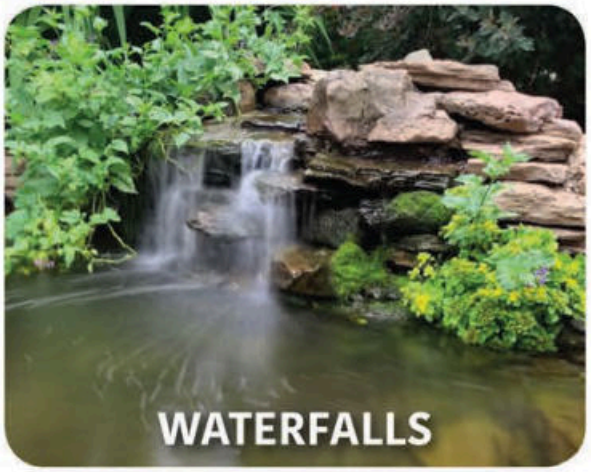
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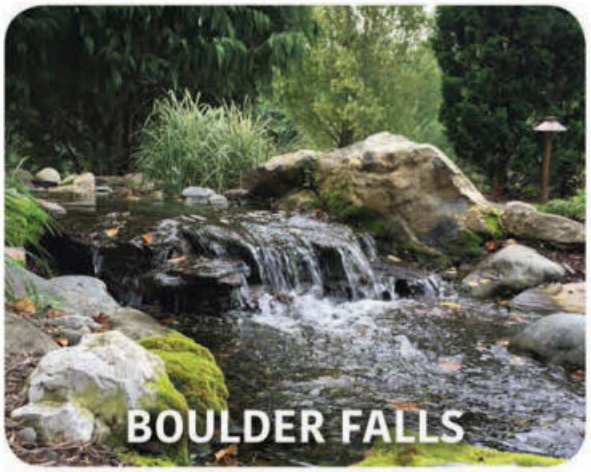


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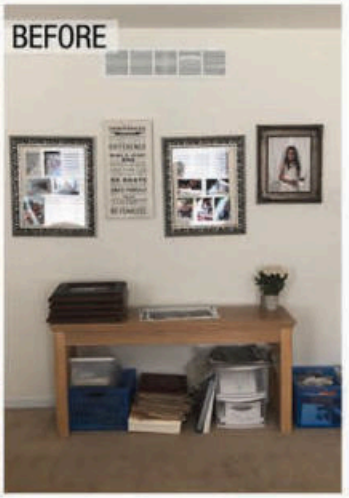


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by **Lindsey Getz**



Set Up Your Space for Summer

At **Sequoia Out Back**, customers can find endless inspiration for their outdoor dreams.



It's safe to say that the pandemic has taught us to appreciate the outdoors even more. While backyard outdoor living areas have been soaring in popularity for years now, for many, the stay-at-home orders and the experience of being stuck indoors for so long have made homeowners absolutely crave these spaces more than ever. They are truly a must-have—a fact that's been increasingly evident at Sequoia Out Back, where owner John Keller says that he's seeing even more people come into the showroom than ever before.

From the moment that homeowners walk through Sequoia Out Back's front doors, the experience is really unlike any other. The 30,000-square-foot showroom has everything you could want for your personal oasis on display so that you can envision it in your own backyard.

When you walk through a typical patio store or a big-box store, items aren't usually set up or paired together the way they would be in your backyard so it can be difficult to visualize your finished space. At Sequoia, you can see an entire outdoor living space the way that you might set it up on your own patio. It inspires so many ideas.

The goal of the showroom has always been to make homeowners feel like they're stepping into a real-life outdoor space. This helps homeowners to make the best choices when it comes to furniture and decking supplies that will work for their own projects.

Pair these gorgeous displays with the knowledgeable and helpful team members who are ready to assist—and homeowners can really appreciate the showroom visit



[H]ere, you can see an entire outdoor living space the way that you might set it up on your own patio. It inspires so many ideas."

—**John Keller,** *owner*

experience. Customers always leave Sequoia with a lot of great ideas and information.

Of course, in general, inventory has been a major issue since the start of the pandemic. Homeowners who have tried to purchase furniture and decking may have noticed limited stock. But Sequoia Out Back has been fortunate to be able to keep a lot of inventory in stock thanks to its relationship with manufacturers and its purchasing power, as well as having a large quantity from the start. Even so, with so many people coming through the doors, now is the time to start planning for the spring while inventory is still available.

After all, before you know it, the weather will be consistently warm, and we'll all be spending even more time outdoors. Homeowners want to make sure their space is ready now!

"The sooner you can start planning, the better," urges Keller. "The number of visitors coming to the store right now is higher than ever for this time of year. It's definitely not too early to start thinking about setting up your outdoor space."

As you start planning, Sequoia Out Back has all of the amenities that you might want to consider. This includes fire pits, patio furniture and all of the material supplies including decking and railing and hardscaping. Sequoia works with all of the leading manufacturers including TimberTech, Wolf, Trex, Zuri and Fiberon—all of whom continue to offer innovative products.

Whether you're a do-it-yourselfer or someone who was sent by their contractor to look for materials, Sequoia's showroom can accommodate everyone.

It's all about making the experience as easy and as enjoyable as possible for homeowners. As the true outdoor living experts, Sequoia and its team are ready to help make homeowners' backyard dreams come true.

"Outdoor living has been a trend for a long time but it's hotter than ever," Keller sums up. "I think we're all ready to start spending more time outside." **H&H**

Sequoia Out Back

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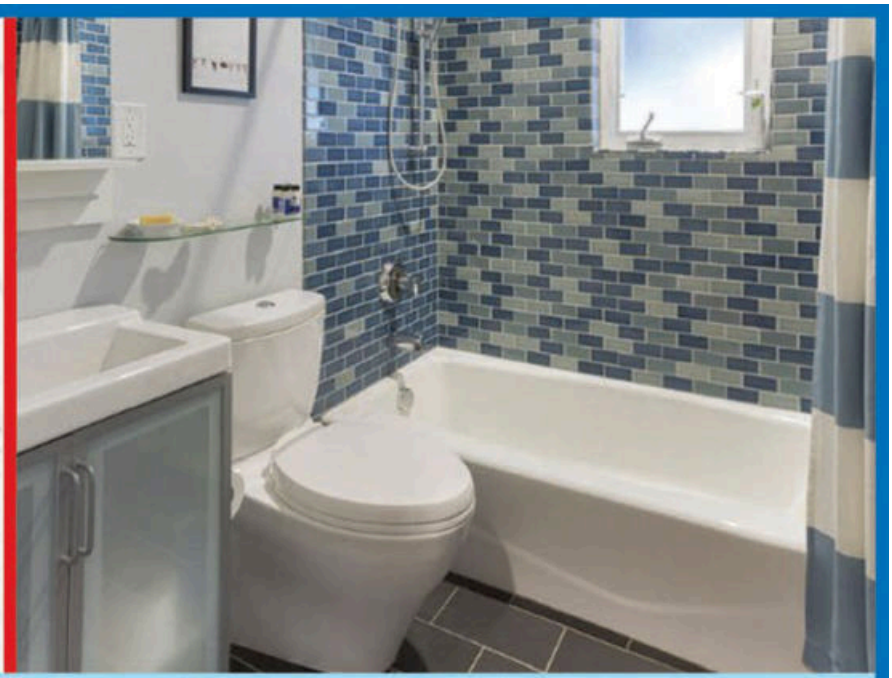


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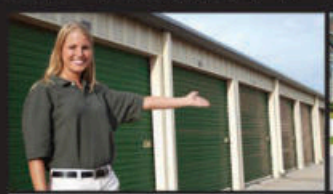
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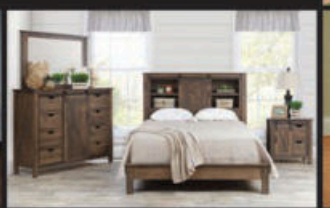













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