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INSIDE:
OUR ANNUAL LANDSCAPE, POOL, PATIO AND DECK DIRECTORY
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Blinds, Shade and Shutter Factory

Providing homeowners with windows of opportunities *page 11*

Swimming in Style

Everything you need to know to have the perfect pool this season

The Perfect Space

How the right deck can enhance your outdoor living experience

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Amazing Decks

Extending the heart of the home with a stunning, usable outdoor space

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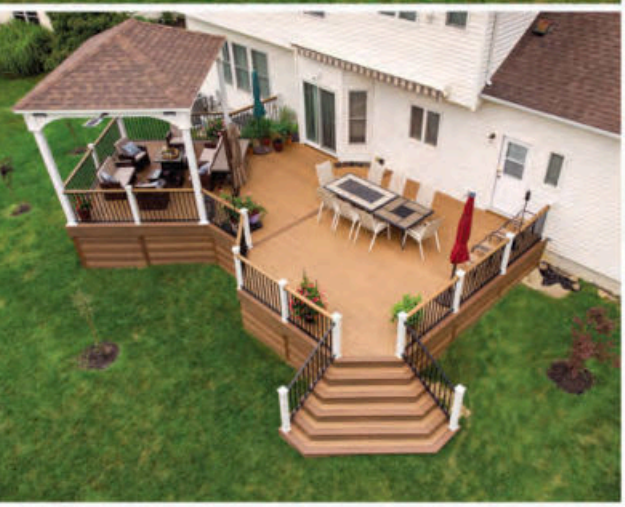
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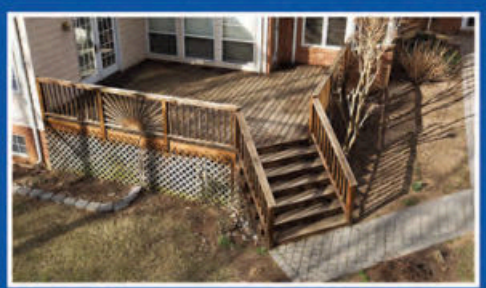


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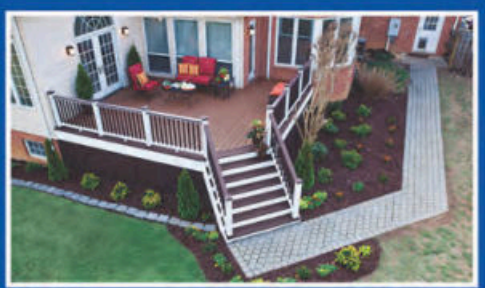
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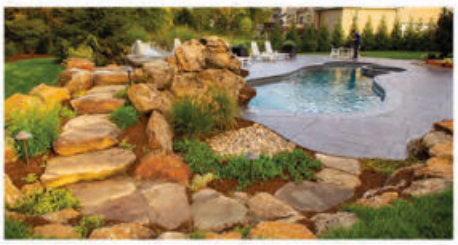


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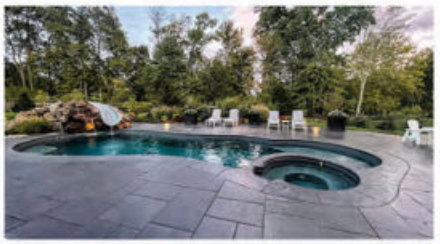
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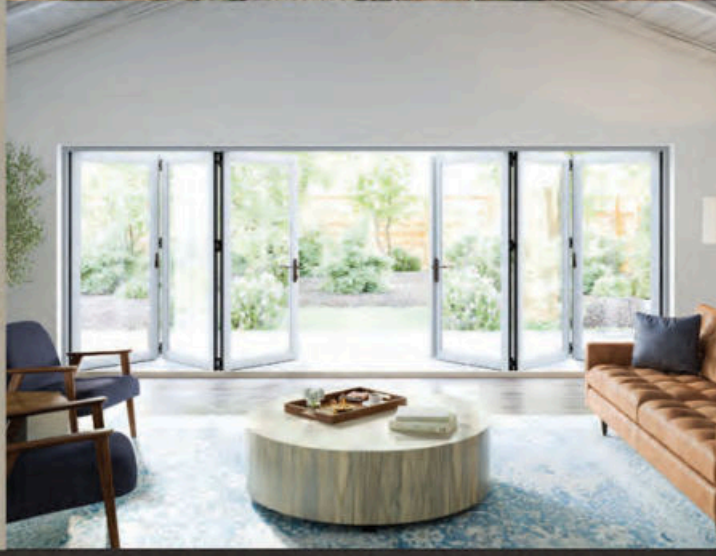
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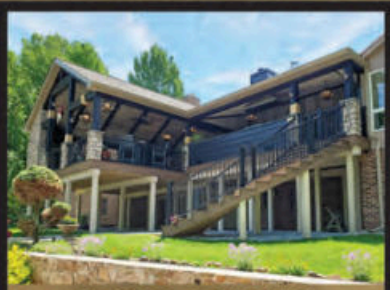
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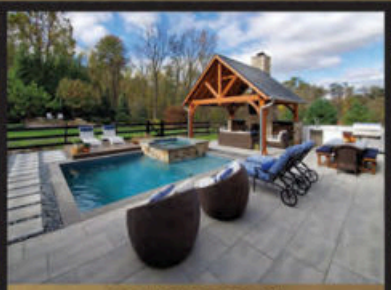
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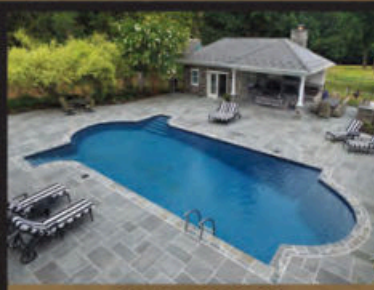
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"We have the best of the best," says Owner & Operator Bob Silver, who has spent his career building and maintaining the family business set by his great grandfather, now in its fourth generation with his son, Jordan. "Until you've been here, you haven't seen anything! There are so many various display options that you really have to come into the showroom to see all of the different physical working samples, how they operate with the different lift systems, and the latest in motorization and home automation."

Whether you are shopping for a single window treatment, purchasing a new home, or seeking a solution to a complex design challenge, Blinds, Shade and Shutter Factory has certified professionals with the right knowledge and expertise to help you put it all together.



"New home construction is actually the perfect time to visit and plan your designs, especially if you are considering motorization," says Silver. There's also the concern with privacy. We have so many customers come in worried about having little or no privacy in their new home. To help combat this, we provide FREE temporary shades for every window in your order. These white, light-filtering shades easily attach to your glass and can deliver the privacy you need until permanent treatments are installed. In addition to your free temporary shades, we are also offering a $200 voucher for all new home construction orders.

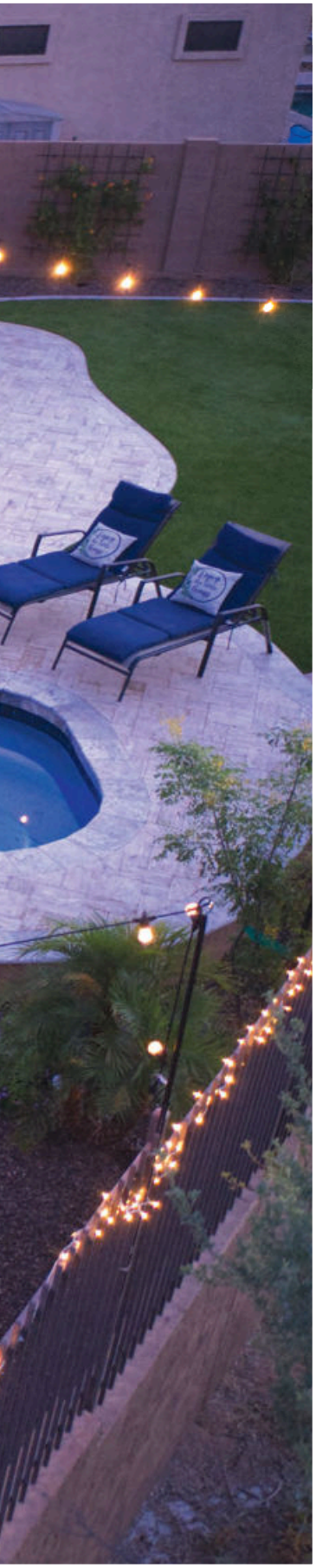
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SWIMMING IN STYLE

WITH THE RIGHT GUIDANCE, YOU COULD BE ENJOYING LIFE POOLSIDE FOR MANY YEARS TO COME.

BY PETER PROKO

Though it may be hard to recognize after the extremely mild winter we experienced here in the Northeast, spring is in the air. With the flowers in full bloom and the temperatures getting warmer and warmer by the day, we are all looking forward to spending increased time outdoors as we gear ourselves up for the sun-drenched days of summer that won't be far behind.

And while countless folks will enjoy tending to their landscaping or perhaps spending time enjoying a glass of wine on the back deck while watching the sun go down, many others will be eagerly awaiting the return of swim season and the chance to cool off by taking a dip in the pool.

It's no secret that pool ownership skyrocketed during the onset of the pandemic, with homeowners opting to create their own backyard resorts rather than travel on vacation. While the industry has seen that intense demand lessen somewhat, the fact is with each passing year, more and more people are looking to transform their outdoor living space into a staycation destination, and in many cases it all starts with the pool.

But there's a lot to consider and know about pool ownership, and if you're not fully prepared you could find yourself treading water as you desperately search for answers. Luckily, this region is full of skillful pool builders who can guide you through each step of the process, and in turn help make your visions of an outdoor oasis a reality.

We spoke to several industry experts to get some tips and advice on what you need to know to make a real splash this summer, no matter if you're considering a new pool for your yard or are simply looking for ways to enhance your current swimming experience.

SETTLING ON A STYLE

When it comes time to picking out a pool, the first place to start is deciding on what style is right for you between vinyl, fiberglass or concrete. Each one has their pros and cons—and price point for that matter—and what may be appealing to some may not necessarily be so for others.

Vinyl liners, which come in a variety of colors and styles, are by far the least expensive avenue to becoming a pool owner. As a result, vinyl pools remain popular and the advancements made in recent years have only increased their favorability in the marketplace.

But while the cost may be initially lower, depending on several contributing factors, the lifespan of a vinyl liner can vary dramatically and thus may need to be replaced more frequently. That could mean shelling out another $5,000-$6,000 periodically throughout the course of owning the pool.

"The cons of a vinyl pool is the liner is temporary. It could last 15 years or maybe five years," says Scott Payne, dubbed as the chief backyard fun specialist with Scott Payne Custom Pools. "At some point, what happens here in the Northeast with the freeze and thaw is that the liner is going to shift a little bit. And it's going to deteriorate [over time]. The sun's UV rays are going to degredate it and at some point

SWIMMING IN STYLE



you are going to have to replace it."

Meanwhile, fiberglass pools come in preformed shells allowing for a quicker installation process than other styles, with many pools being able to be completed in a just a day's time as opposed to the much lengthier process to install a vinyl or concrete pool.

Derek Blasker, president of (Fiberglass) Pool Designs, says the lifetime structural warranties and relatively low upkeep make fiberglass pools an attractive option for many.

"With a vinyl liner pool, you will always have the concern that you could tear the liner or the liner rots within five to 10 years. With concrete, you need to acid wash, paint, patch and resurface the masonry work. This usually runs at least $15,000 over a 10-year span. With the Latham fiberglass pools we install, you do not touch the surface," he says.

Blasker adds that fiberglass pools are a natural insulator, reducing the energy costs to heat and maintain the pool.

Jon Wilson, director of operations at Ordini's Best Fiberglass Pools, also touts the benefits. "Fiberglass pools are installed in one day, while vinyl and concrete pools can take weeks or months to build. The smooth gelcoat finish of our fiberglass pools are much easier to clean than the rough, porous surface of concrete pools."

With regard to concrete or gunite pools, while they are the most expensive choice for pool owners, they also offer the most customizable options in terms of freeform shapes and added amenities.

"With concrete pools, you can really go from mild to wild in terms of shape. And you could add sundecks, spas, loveseats; it's really only limited to your imagination," says Payne.

Speaking of shapes, the rumors of the death of rectangular pools have been greatly exaggerated, according to Andrew McFarlane, president and owner of California Pools Philadelphia.

"I thought [rectangular pools] were kind of a dead thing, but a lot of our higher-end customers are bringing them back," McFarlane says.

Payne has also seen an uptick in rectangular pools making a strong comeback, saying it's a matter of history repeating itself.

"Twenty-five years ago, people were tired of seeing rectangles and you saw the kidney bean and other freeform shapes, but I'd says we are close to 50-50 between installing rectangular and freeform pools now," he says.

Ultimately, the right shape should be dictated by each individual client's desire. Are they looking for a pool to swim in or is it more of a social gathering place? Do they want a diving pool? What will create a more seamless transition with the rest of the backyard?

"If clients want a clean look, they go with rectangles. And if they want more of the natural resort-type feel, then you see the freeform pools with the rock grottos and waterslides and that sort of stuff," says McFarlane.

A TOUCH OF SALT

Think back to your childhood days spent at the pool and you're likely to invoke memories of the smell of chlorine on your skin and irritated red eyes. And so it's no wonder that the industry has evolved over the years and in doing so has seen salt-generated chlorinator systems become the prevalent choice for pool owners. With benefits ranging from making the water gentler on the skin to reduced maintenance costs, salt systems have become the standard in the industry today.

"Just about every pool I install is saltwater; I haven't probably put in a chlorination pool in five years," says Walter Beyer, owner of Stardust Pools. "There's a lot less upkeep and the temperature doesn't affect it. It could be 105 degrees or 65 degrees; it could be sunny or it could be rainy; your pool is always going to have the same level of chlorine. … As long as the pool is running, it will be crystal clear all the time."

"Salt will also reduce your ownership costs dramatically. Instead of spending $500-$600 a year on chlorine, you might spend $40 a year on salt and achieve the same benefits," says Payne.

But while the salt systems make pools easier to balance and maintain, there can also be some negatives associated. "The upside is that you do not need to play with tablets and powders, the salt will be gentle on your skin, you can open your eyes underwater without the burn, the salt will not bleach anything, and blonde hair will not turn green," says Blasker. "The downside is that the salt will produce an alkaline effect that raises your pH and salt will have an adverse effect on steel railings, ladders, etc."

Also something to take into consideration is that "homeowners like the 'set it and forget it' aspect of a saltwater system, but it is an added expense, and the salt cell requires maintenance and eventually will need to be replaced every handful of years," says Wilson.

And no matter if you have a salt or chlorine pool, maintaining proper water chemistry is crucial. While some DIY-ers may attempt to handle balancing things on their own, it is truly best to get your water tested by a professional to assure you don't cause damage to your pool.

Tracy Bond is the president and owner of Great Valley Pool Service and says at the very least, weekly water testing is recommended. Sometimes even more frequent tests are needed if the pool is heavily used or has been recently built or refinished.

"There are many different things that can impact your water chemistry from the weather to the number of people using the pool to things like pets, pollen, fertilizer drift, grass clippings, etc.," says Bond. "It is important that your water is regularly tested and adjusted to avoid damage that can occur to your pool's finish, to your pool equipment and to ensure that your water is properly sanitized for your bathers to prevent illness. Proper balancing also prevents problems from occurring like algae and cloudy water as well."

And for those who don't have the time to wait in line at the shop, Bond's crew will come to you. "We offer a recurring service where we clean and chemically balance the pool each week. This includes testing and balancing your water; emptying all skimmer and pump baskets; backwashing and cleaning the filter as needed; as well as skimming, brushing and vacuuming the pool," she says.

ENHANCING THE EXPERIENCE

While seeing the kids do cannonballs into the deep end or waking up early each day to swim laps may be a welcomed aspect of owning a pool, these days owners are looking to up the ante with plenty of bells and whistles.

"Maybe someone doesn't have kids and they want their backyard to be a place to gather with other adults for happy hour or dinner, and so they want a sitting area. And perhaps they don't want to have giant waterfalls, but would like to hear the sound of water, so we'll add a couple deck jets so they can hear the water trickle,"

Image courtesy of Scott Payne Custom Pools

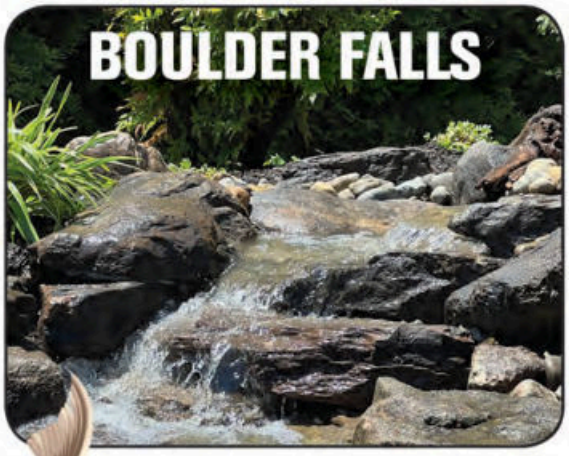
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SWIMMING IN STYLE

McFarlane says. "And then you have other people who say they want to have a water slide and a jumping rock for the kids."

And technology is playing a big part as well. Robotic cleaners, variable speed pumps and LED lighting have become the norm and growing automation capabilities are allowing folks to control many aspects of their pool's upkeep right in the palm of their hand.

"Automation is probably the most popular added element today. [These] systems allow the homeowner to control pumps, lights, heaters, deck jets and other pool accessories from their smart phone," Wilson says.

COVERING THE BASICS

Another area not to be overlooked is whether a mesh or solid safety cover is the right choice for you. Mesh covers—the less expensive of the two options—are lighter, easier to maneuver, but do allow some light and small debris into the pool, although recent advancements have increased their effectiveness in combatting these issues. On the flipside, solid covers do not allow any water, debris or UV light into the pool. This eliminates all algae growth during the winter, so you need less winterizing chemicals and the spring cleanup is easier.

Ultimately, it comes down to the preference of the homeowner on the level of maintenance they wish to take on.

"Solid covers are a little more expensive and there's also a little bit more maintenance involved. You have to manage the water on top of that cover because it's not going to go through it, so you have to maintain a surface pump on there and through the winter you have to make sure the pump is working," says McFarlane.

"The solid covers have a lot of benefits in that the way you close the pool is typically the way you open the pool," says Beyer. "When you have a mesh cover, when the leaves fall off onto the cover and they disintegrate and it rains, that filters through the cover and so the pools don't open up as clear."

Bond cautions that owners of solid covers remain vigilant on keeping an eye on their pumping system to make sure that all of the excess water is being funneled off of the cover.

"Excessive weight will cause the cover to sag," she says. "A saggy safety cover is more likely to fail over time."

No matter what kind of pool you purchase or what extra elements you consider, the key is to do your homework before you put pen to paper on a pricey contract so you feel confident you are hiring the right contractor instead of finding yourself with a money pit in the backyard for years to come.

"No company is perfect, but the difference in contractors is made when an issue arises, and how that contractor handles that issue," says Blasker. "You want a contractor who is going to take your call, present you with a plan and execute upon that plan in a timely manner." H&H

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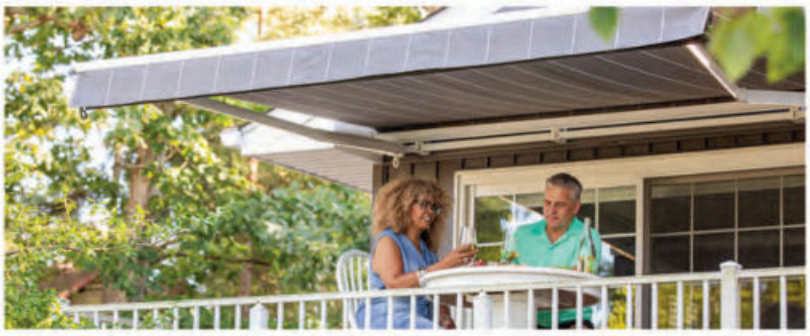
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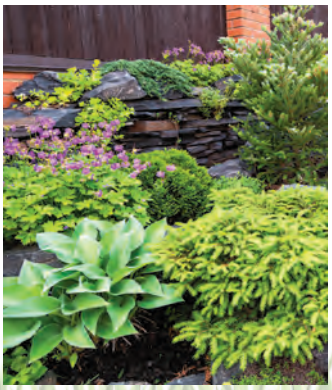
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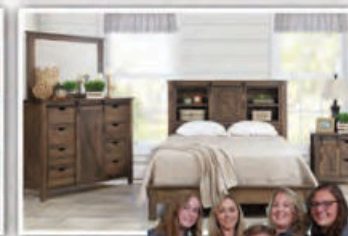
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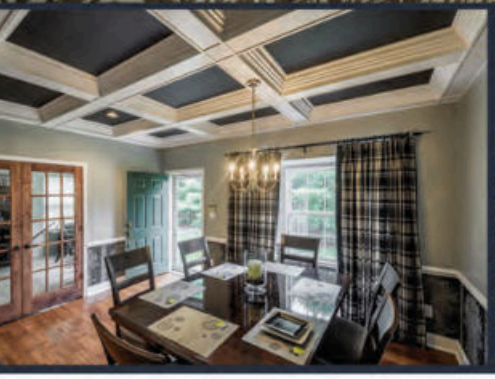
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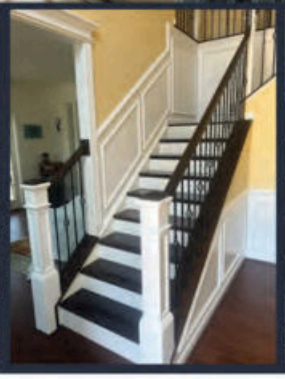
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Beautiful Inside and Out

Using integrated design, the team at **Amazing Decks** can take the heart of the home and extend it to the backyard with a stunning, usable outdoor space.



As they approach their 32nd year in business, it would be easy for Amazing Decks co-founders Bill Wilson and Keith Fry to become complacent in their work or to rest on their accomplishments from three decades in the industry.

But anyone who encounters the pair soon realizes that the opposite is true. They continue to be passionate about designing and building backyard oases that their customers can enjoy for years to come, and they can draw on their vast experience to avoid common pitfalls.

"When you've been in business this long, it becomes easy, because we've already made the mistakes and we've learned from them," Wilson says. "We were part of this industry long before it became what it is now. We watched it change from people just having a simple wood deck to now adding a space that can be amazing. It's a lot of fun and we love helping people out."

The philosophy at Amazing Decks centers on the idea of integrated home design. This comprehensive approach aims to extend the heart of the home to the outside, creating a large, livable space that can be utilized for everything from a big graduation party to a simple family get-together.

"There's a fine line between a project that gets used and a project that never gets used," Wilson says. "It would be heartbreaking at the completion to have a homeowner say, 'I wish we would have done this or that.' That's why the design is crucial. It has to be inviting; people want something that feels personal and something that will help them relax."

To achieve this goal, Amazing Decks puts a great emphasis on the planning stage. While some potential customers will ask for estimates over the phone or through email, it is important for the designers to personally visit the site and get to know the homeowners.

They will ask questions regarding the size of their family, how often they entertain, whether they plan to add a pool, etc.

"We're interviewing them just like they're interviewing us," Wilson says. "Our initial meeting is very easy-going. We get to know the client and find out how they're going to use the space. Then we're able to tie everything together and design something in the backyard that they're going to use. It doesn't have to be expensive; it just has to be designed right."

Amazing Decks has often been called upon to fix mistakes by other companies that did not design a backyard space properly. Wilson and Fry are determined to design a space that will not only work now, but in the future, should the homeowners want to add to the space or decide to sell the home.

The many successful jobs the company has completed also tend to stand out in the neighborhood.

"Our designs are unique," Wilson says. "We do a lot of curves—we have the equipment to curve boards, so a lot of our decks are free-flowing curves. We also integrate other materials, like paver patios or bluestone. Maybe the backyard doesn't just call for a deck; maybe it calls for a combination of the two. Even though we're a deck company, we have to be honest with the customer and tell them what will work best.

"We can do patios, walkways, plantings, outdoor low-voltage lighting, grilling stations and fireplaces. Shade is huge as well—every outdoor project should have some sort of roof structure for people to sit under and get shielded from the sun."

As one of the first companies to install maintenance-free composite boards, Amazing Decks has a longstanding relationship with Trex, perhaps the most well-known name in the industry.

"That's not to say we won't work with another manufacturer, but we are primarily a Trex dealer," Wilson says. "We've been using Trex ever since we started the business. They always come out with new products, but the product we're using now is approximately 11 years old, the Trex Transcend line, and it doesn't seem like anyone has ever been able to compete with it.

"I like how durable it is; you can drag a chair across it and it won't scratch. If you spill something on it, you can just wipe it off. Some products will scuff and scratch, but Trex doesn't. If you look at a Trex deck that's five or six years old, it looks like we just installed it."

With the right materials and the right design, a deck built by Amazing Decks can make a major difference, both now and in the future.

"We had a customer who just bought a new house, and we had put the deck on his old house," Wilson says. "There were four other houses on his street for sale, so he was nervous about putting the house up. But it sold within two weeks of hitting the market. He had offers from every person who saw the house, and they all said it was because of the deck. That was a proud moment. It wasn't extravagant, it was just designed right." H&H

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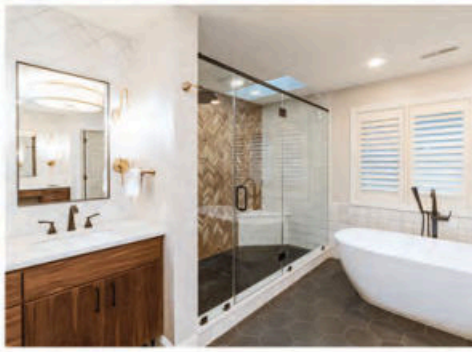
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by **Madeleine Maccar**

WELL BEFORE HE BECAME PRESIDENT OF LBK DESIGN BUILD, NICK KORNEA WAS A BOY WHO LOVED LEGOS.

"I've always liked building things, ever since I was a kid," he recalls. "I grew up in a blue-collar area, and I'm the son of two immigrants whose families have always done blue-collar jobs. I've just always been attracted to that, specifically the building industry. It's been my focus for my entire career, it's been nothing but construction and design."

That interest blossomed into apprenticeships in both welding and carpentry, as well as general construction jobs, with Kornea realizing that he especially "liked working with companies that also work with architects, designers and clients, and watching the process of things being designed all the way through construction and that final hand-off to a client."

That passion for nurturing a richly imagined vision into a breathtaking reality drives him and the similarly inspired LBK team to be the one-stop-shop going above and beyond for homeowners entrusting them with all manners of interior remodeling jobs, especially those bread-and-butter kitchen and bathroom projects.

And getting to know those potential customers is as meticulously thorough as everything else LBK does.

"We're careful as we onboard clients just to see if we're a good fit for one another," Kornea says. "Our clients tend to be folks that are professionals, that are busy with life, busy with work and they're looking for good communication, good project execution, cleanliness, and someone to hand them over a turnkey project with as little fuss as possible, where design decisions can be proposed by thoughtful and clever designers. We only want to build projects that we design."

Befitting a company that also employs his father Illia and wife Joanna, Kornea and the LBK team effortlessly extend that warm, family feeling to everyone who hires them. "Our ultimate goal," Kornea affirms, "is to make all of our clients feel like our only client."



Facilitating open, honest and frequent communication is key, Kornea notes, and LBK has its own app directly connecting homeowners with the team. That 24/7 access allows for peace of mind and minimizes surprises, thanks to putting progress photos, project costs, remodeling selections, job logs, contract information, direct chat options and more directly at clients' fingertips.

"You simply open up the application, ask questions or send messages, and since the entire company sees them, the appropriate party will respond," explains Kornea. "The majority of clients give us the greatest feedback about it. They say they always feel like we're tip-top on communication and that their voice is heard. This is how we make sure everyone's on the same page, and there's no chain of command with communication."

To further ensure clients are active participants in their homes' redesign, LBK is set to open its brand-new, state-of-the-art showroom and design center in Doylestown on April 22.

"It's like a design and experience center because we have certain rooms set up like rooms of a house," he says. "The idea is to show people the newer appliances and how they work and perform. We have a couple of bathrooms and wet rooms; we have a fully functioning kitchen with a working sink, dishwashers, refrigeration, range, ovens, a microwave, and that's also going to be used for networking-type events."

The LBK team started working on the design center after restoring the historical structure serving as company HQ: "The building we're currently in is a late-1800s building, and it was originally a creamery. It was structurally dilapidated and technically condemnable, but we restored the structure from the ground-up after we fully designed it, and then it was a collaboration between our own skilled people and also trade partners. Our offices took a year to renovate with all-new elements and everything, and then we started the showroom/design center renovation in August of '22."

That kind of dedication to a project, demonstrated work ethic and commitment to a grand vision has secured LBK numerous Contractor of the Year awards from the National Association of the Remodeling Industry, most recently 2023's regional win for Residential Bath $75,001 to $100,000 and 2022's quartet of kitchen and basement best-ofs.

And while the awards are certainly a feather in LBK's cap and validate the team's hard work, nothing beats knowing that they have loyal, happy customers all throughout Pennsylvania and New Jersey who've found out firsthand why the company's motto is "Dream it. Build it. Love it."

"The awards say that we have people on our team who are career-oriented, focused people that are family-minded and team-cultured," Kornea observes. "The heart of our focus is our relationships with our clients. Last year, around 62% of our business was repeat clients and referrals—and any time we get a referral from our clients, that's one of the highest compliments they can give us." H&H

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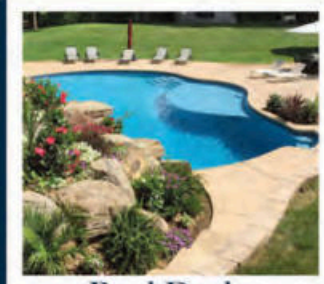
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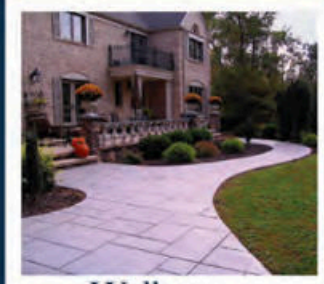
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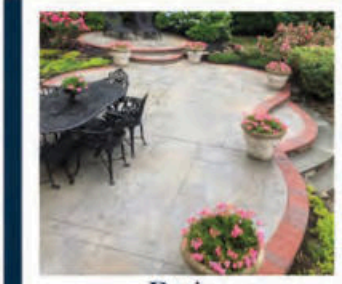
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