

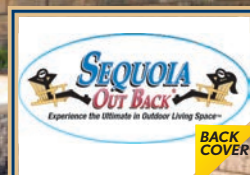
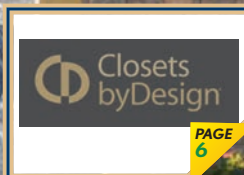
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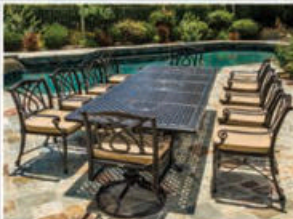
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H&H june 2020



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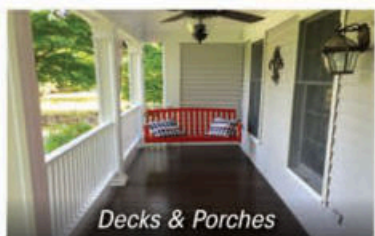
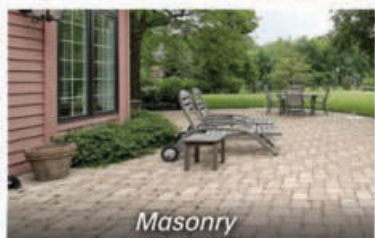
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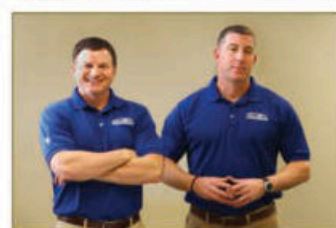
With vacations canceled and social restrictions still in place, people are homebound this summer. They've traded restaurant reservations for outdoor kitchens and weekly spa visits for peaceful garden settings all in their own backyard. This issue showcases the possibilities for your space, setting you up for a staycation you won't forget.

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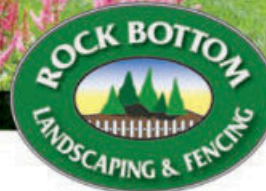
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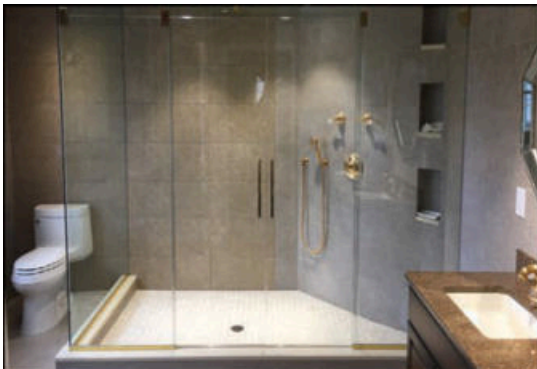
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Rock Bottom Landscaping & Fencing

by **Matt Cosentino**

Summer has always been prime time for vacations, as people look to leave behind their everyday stress for a week or two of relaxation. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, that escape is needed more than ever this year, but trips to Florida or down the Shore might be out of the question for a number of reasons.

Staycations have been rising in popularity in recent years, leading homeowners to transform their properties into sanctuaries they do not have to leave to find peace of mind. With a company like Rock Bottom Landscaping & Fencing—which has a proven track record of success over three decades—customers can create a backyard complete with a lush landscape, paver patio, fire pit and outdoor kitchen.

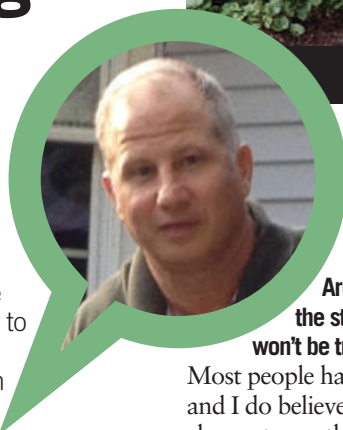
We spoke with owner Chris DeMato to find out how Rock Bottom is helping its loyal customers through these trying times.

How has the pandemic affected your communication process with customers?

It has affected our consultation process for design work. We offer a computer imaging service and we like to present these designs on a laptop computer to explain the details of every aspect of the job. However, we are simply emailing our designs now and discussing them on the phone or a Zoom conference call, and this has resulted in less time spent traveling. Less time means saving money, and we are able to pass that savings on to the customer. We are contracting a much higher percentage of our consultations because of that.

Has your workload been about the same as normal?

The workload slowed down in the early part of March as the uncertainty about the virus was clearly a concern for everyone.



Chris DeMato, owner

But work has picked up since then and is almost back to our expectations for this time of the season.

Are more homeowners looking for the staycation experience since they won't be traveling as much this year?

Most people have been working from home and I do believe they're really getting a chance to see their properties. There has also been a lot of outdoor grilling and dining at home, so people want to make their surroundings as nice as possible. We have seen a great increase in fence installations as well. People are spending a lot more time in their yards and a fence allows their pets to roam freely and keeps out the deer.

Do you think that a well-planned, beautiful landscape can add much-needed serenity?

During a time of stress, anxiety and uncertainty, the serenity that a well-planned landscape can provide is priceless.

What are some features you might suggest to a homeowner during the planning phase, in terms of specific plantings or hardscaping elements?

Adding features such as a fire pit or an outdoor kitchen with a grill, brick oven and smokers can add great fun for the family, and for the amateur chefs out there it can provide many more possibilities for the menu. Plants that will bloom, change foliage and provide different interests throughout the season are important for a well-planned landscape. There are also many different varieties of plants that can repel insects and germ-carrying critters, which is welcomed considering the outbreak.

Is your company offering any sales or special rates during the pandemic?

In early March there was a lot of uncertainty as to what the future held as it related to people's employment, the economy and most importantly health concerns, so we did make a conscious effort to lower pricing during these difficult times. We have also seen some great specials and help from a lot of our suppliers, enabling us to lower costs.

What else makes Rock Bottom Landscaping & Fencing stand out from others in the industry, especially during this trying time?

We are proud of our longevity in the landscaping business. I recall my very first truck and lawnmower, when I was cutting about 10 lawns a week while I was going to college almost 33 years ago. I am also most proud of the people we employ. I have watched them grow from young men to responsible fathers and family men who take pride in what they do. They are true craftsmen and are always willing to learn. They are eager to go to every trade show and take courses related to the products that we use, such as brick, block, fencing and lighting, to name a few. But especially during these hard times, I have noticed an increased sense of pride and loyalty as I think they realize the stability they have with employment.

When you call Rock Bottom Landscaping, you are getting true craftsmen as it relates to the specific work that you want done. We have separate divisions for lawn maintenance and cutting, masonry, hardscaping, fencing and plant installation. This means you are hiring someone who has been doing this type of work every day for years, not someone who may have one job a month and is figuring things out as they go. **H&H**

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It's not too late to have your **dream outdoor kitchen** come to life, and our experts talk about the must-haves to make your outdoor living space **the talk of the neighborhood.**





BY JULIE
SHANNON

With more time spent in the backyard the last few months due to COVID-19, you may be thinking about how you can spruce up your outdoor living space, especially with summer now in full swing. Adding an outdoor kitchen with all the bells and whistles—a grill, refrigerator, bar and a fireplace to complete the space—can change the way your family spends time together and might even make you an expert in the grilling department, after a little practice of course.

House & Home spoke to experts on the different outdoor kitchens available, the hottest trends and why a fire feature is a must in every outdoor living space.

It's no secret homeowners are paying more attention to their backyards and extending their living space, from creating outdoor living spaces such as outdoor kitchens, for example. According to Keith Frederick, owner of Environmental Landscape Associates, he finds more homeowners are educated on outdoor living spaces, with everything from the climate, to the elements and accessories.

"They know it can be done in a Northeastern climate, not just the West Coast or Southern climate," Frederick says. "Because there's ways to do things with exhaust hoods and heaters, things like that make outdoor living spaces more desirable, so outdoor cooking spaces are desirable. It goes hand-in-hand."

Meeting with the homeowner and putting together a design process for patios and decks is the first step when creating the space.

"A deck needs to be planned intentionally and properly so that the homeowner is able to fully optimize utilization of the space," says Brian Iwano, owner, Blue Tree Builders, LLC. "In order to accomplish this, the builder needs to be attentive and listen throughout the process.

Photo courtesy of Deck Remodelers

Living the Dream

“It’s part of the design right from the beginning,” he says. “We have to start with the end in mind and work our way backwards. We’re not building a deck to sit on the deck, we’re not building it to stand under the roof, we’re building it because that’s your outside living space. It means sitting down, relaxing and socializing, and you’re sitting on the couch. If it doesn’t fit or if it’s facing the wrong way, what good does that do? When I come up with a design, I fully furnish it when I present it to the client.”

One facet of the outdoor living area is the limitless possibilities homeowners have since they are not confined to walls.

“You can design it to how you want it to be done. You’re not limited like you would be inside of your home. You have more space in the backyard and can utilize it to make it what you want,” says Jenna Guldin, vice president of sales, Salter’s Fireplace Patio Grill.

This starts with the outdoor kitchen. “Being able to cook outdoors, have a pizza oven or gas grill, Kamado-style smoker; putting in a counter height bar area and being able to chat with the person cooking; it’s incredible what you can do,” Guldin says.

McAleer carries three kinds of kitchens—stone, mid-level outdoor cabinet and high-end cabinet. Stone kitchens are stone-framed kitchens with veneer and granite countertops, whereas mid-level outdoor cabinets are completely sealed.

“People can leave spare products and everything else there,” McAleer says. “They come in frosted glass doors and backlit doors, and are bear and raccoon proof.”

For high-end cabinets, McAleer carries NatureKast, which manufactures weatherproof cabinets and comes in all different wood options.

“They have soft-close doors plus drawers, so you can fill it with drinks and ice, and when your get-together is done, you pull the plug and let the water drain out,” he says. “Cabinets have evolved to such a state that I have a full-time, certified kitchen designer who designs the kitchens for us. They work with clients picking out cabinets and countertops, such as quartz and waterfall.”



McAleer says the basics for an outdoor kitchen are a grill, refrigerator, and one thing most people forget—a built-in garbage can.

Steve Cousins of Cousins Garden Design says he’s installing side burners for people cooking on the grill, as well as outdoor coolers that are built into

... We want to figure out what problems [the homeowners] are trying to solve and help them arrive at that decision.”

Also a “critical” part of the design process from the beginning, according to Sean McAleer with Deck Remodelers, is figuring out where the furniture will be placed, everything from the couches to tables, chairs and barstools.



the countertop to keep drinks cold.

“After those items, people want top-end grilling products,” McAleer says. “Big Green Egg Smokers is what we’re custom building now, and we’re also installing a lot of flat-top grills.”

Guldin, too, is seeing a spike in requests for smokers. “More people are trying different styles to cook,” she says. “Instead of just throwing hot dogs on the grill, they try to smoke some meat.”

Frederick says most people like the idea of built-in fixtures, which he says are more attractive and tie into the surrounding landscape.

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“They like the ability to have a countertop to prepare food or display food,” he says. “Some people do simple trash cans and storage drawers for cooking tools; others are more elaborate with refrigerators and sinks. With bars, it can also function as a cooking area. Quite often you have a cooking area where you’re serving counter-style or sitting at the counter with a bar and it’s all incorporated into one unit.”

Another popular feature incorporated in outdoor kitchens is fire, whether it’s a fireplace or fire pit, in many different styles. McAleer says almost 100 percent of his clients have some kind of fire feature and more people have multiple fire features, compared to five years ago when only a third of his clients asked for it.

“There are different kinds of blocks you can use; a veneer fireplace or fire pit for example, comes in round, block or square,” Cousins says. “We do wood burning and also do gas. Gas is a nice feature where we have nice glass beam finishes at the top. We’ll also build sitting walls out of the block around the fire pits. We make a lot of seat benches that have the sitting wall where you can lean up against it.”

“We can build a formal fireplace just like you’d see inside your house, it can be built exactly the same way,” Frederick says. “If someone is looking to have a fire feature but not spend as much on a fireplace, a fire pit can be raised like a table. A wood-burning one can be something as simple as a sandline pit in the patio with edging stones you burn fire with, or it could be gas burner, where it has a more formal shape.”

Top photo courtesy of Environmental Landscape Associates.
Bottom photo courtesy of Cousins Garden Design



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One unique feature McAleer installs, which is becoming quite popular, is tables with fire elements in them.

"It's called a social grilling table, a table with a grill built in the center so they can grill their own food," he says. "We take the unit and build a table so people can grill right at the table."

In addition to building matching sitting walls as Cousins mentioned, there are many options when it comes to furniture and accessories in all kinds of styles, from traditional and contemporary to modern, which adds texture and a pop of color.

"We usually help guide the customer to the style of furniture they want and we may also look at the materials," Guldin says. "Some furniture can be made out of milk jugs and 100 percent recyclable materials. Most people don't know what to do with a beautiful patio set with a blank wall behind it. Adding a beautiful colorful piece of artwork adds a nice touch, as well as outdoor rugs which add color and different textures. And one of the nicest accessories is an umbrella, it's a necessity. We sell umbrellas that have rotating handles and special bases."

Extending your outdoor living space with an outdoor kitchen is the ultimate way to host large gatherings and create lasting memories with your family and friends. From learning new tricks on the grill to ending your day with your feet

up by the fire, you may never want to leave your home.

"Adding comfort to the home, inside and out, that's what we love about it," says Guldin. "It's exciting when you can fulfill someone's needs when doing an outdoor kitchen, putting together a patio set hangout and roasting marshmallows over the fire. It's pretty neat." **H&H**



RESOURCES

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ExperienceBlueTree.com

Cousins Garden Design
Berlin, N.J.
(856) 981-3100
CousinsGardenDesign.com

Deck Remodelers
Sparta, N.J.
(973) 729-2125
DeckRemodelers.com

Environmental Landscape Associates
Doylestown, Pa.
(800) 352-9252
ELAOutdoorLiving.com

Salter's Fireplace Patio Grill
Eagleville and Hatfield, Pa.
(610) 631-9372
SaltersFireplace.com



This recipe was selected from a group of submissions for its simplicity and taste.

Summer Grilling: No-Spin Rotisserie Chicken

Ingredients

Whole chicken (3 - 4 lbs.)
½ cup Italian dressing
Garlic powder
Salt
Pepper
Parmesan cheese

Directions (as always when handling poultry, please read the instructions on the packaging for safety and wash your hands before and after)

1. Rinse your chicken and thoroughly pat dry with paper towels
2. Turn chicken breast side down and using kitchen shears or sharp knife, cut straight up the back and remove ½ inch on either side of the vertebrae and discard pieces
3. Press down on either side of the opening to flatten chicken; if needed for leverage, place cutting board on top of open chicken and press down firmly
4. Place chicken into a large freezer bag or baking dish and add Italian dressing; cover and marinate in the refrigerator for one to two hours
5. Remove excess marinade and season both sides with salt, pepper and garlic powder to taste
6. Turn grill on low temperature (325 to 350 degrees)
7. Place chicken on grill breast side up, turning every 15 minutes to avoid burning
8. Cook a total of 1 hour or until wings can easily be removed
9. Finish with a (liberal) sprinkle of Parmesan cheese and enjoy!



Submitted by:

Frank Boyle, service manager
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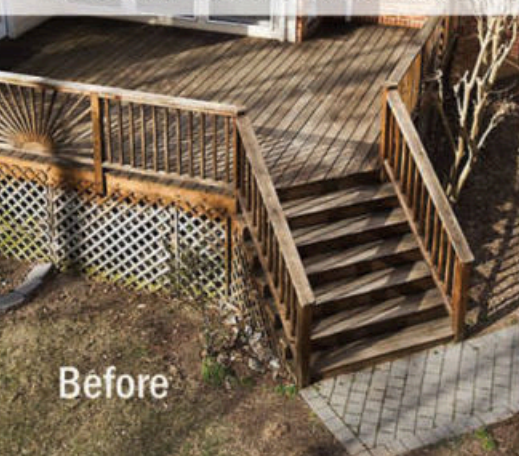
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Finding Peace

in your own
Backyard

By **Liz Hunter**

Additional reporting by
Sydney Kerelo

IT WOULD BE AN UNDERSTATEMENT to say 2020 has been a challenging year—and it's only halfway through. The world around us has changed and people are staying in the comfort of their home for work and recreation. Backyards offer a retreat from our day-to-day activities. Those working and learning from home can find a break from the screen while sitting in a

peaceful corner of the garden, listening to the trickling of a fountain or watching koi swim around a pond.

There are many options, as discussed by local professionals, that can rejuvenate your mental health without leaving the house.

“Now that people aren't going to the office anymore, projects they thought they could put off until next year are bothering them because they are tired of looking at a yard that isn't perfect,” says George

Mihalchick, owner of Ponds by George. “When the pandemic started we thought we were going to be in for a tough year, but the trend is that everyone wants it now, so we're very busy.”

With many restrictions on construction now lifted, landscaping companies are expecting a full load of projects this summer. “Instead of investing money on a family vacation, people are investing that money into their own properties,” says Steve Compton, owner of CKC Landscaping. “Construction was shut



Image at left courtesy of Ronni Hock Garden & Landscape. Image above courtesy of PondWorks.



Finding Peace in your own Backyard

down for 60 days in Pennsylvania so now I think it's moving fast and furious and if people are looking for a contractor, make sure it's someone who can deliver on the dates they give you and also take their time through the process."

Water Features

There's nothing more relaxing than the sound of water. "The sound is everything—it's the whole focal point and purpose of a [water feature]. ... You have to get it just right for the clients—the relaxation, hearing the sound, and the visual as well," says Ronni Hock, owner and landscape designer at Ronni Hock Garden & Landscape.

Water features range from large ponds, koi ponds, garden ponds, pondless waterfalls, fountains, rock fountains, and can cost anywhere from \$5,000 to \$25,000 for something truly out of this world, says Rich Cording Sr., owner of CLC Landscape Design. "Any kind of water is just inspiring," he says. "Birds come for a bath and when the sunlight hits the moving water it creates a beautiful ambiance for the backyard."

A rock fountain is one of the most affordable and something that could be installed quickly, says Cording. "For rock fountains we drill a hole through a big rock where the water comes out at the top and trickles down into a gravel bed," he says. "This has become one of the most popular features we install."

Consumer education about ponds has changed over the years, adds Mihalchick. "They used to be afraid of a pond because it was a lot of maintenance. Back in the day everybody would go

to Home Depot and Lowe's and buy a preform one and that is one of the worst cases because it is so much harder to filter a small pond than it is a big pond—so much maintenance. ... I think the biggest thing now is education on the internet. And people are seeing some great pictures out there and are starting to understand that it isn't a lot of work."

More often, people are asking for pondless waterfalls. "Pondless (or basinless) features are the most popular," says Michael Pasquarello, degreed landscape architect at Elite Landscaping. "These features don't actually have a visible collection basin such as a pond and are much easier to maintain. Bubbling urns or boulders, waterfalls, etc., give the illusion the flowing water just disappears into the ground through stone. It actually is recirculated from an underground vault and pump."

Homeowners prefer this over a regular pond because of the level of maintenance required, but Brian Bucholtz, owner and founder of PondWorks, says a completely maintenance-free water feature doesn't exist. "We can make them maintenance friendly," he says. "I think customers have to be honest with themselves and decide if they can dedicate 15 minutes a week or more, depending on the feature, or get on a maintenance program with a company."

Finding a company that specializes in water features is crucial to their success. Mihalchick says 40 percent of their work is re-doing what someone else did, so the homeowner ends up paying twice.

"Since we design, build and maintain water features throughout the year, our experience lets us



know what works," says Bucholtz. "It allows us to tweak features with more extensive filtration or products to make them more user friendly. That's the biggest difference between a specialty company and someone who does a little bit of everything."

Landscaping

Plants and flowers are the finishing touch on any water feature and attract life to the yard.

"In the East Coast area, particularly Mercer County, we have a lot of deer," says Hock. "So it's a big challenge for us, but there are some wonderful perennials and plants that do really well and that also are not only deer-proof but they also attract the pollinators and they can be entertaining."

She highlights garden phlox, which blooms from July through September, for its ability to attract butterflies. "Butterflies entertain the kids and the adults, and it's always a big plus if you are giving back to Mother Nature, having those plants and feeding the butterflies and the hummingbirds and regular birds with their seed," she says.

Mihalchick says a good landscape planner will make sure a

yard has something blooming from spring to fall. "You always want one blooming then another blooming. And you want to tie these in, so if you're walking down a walkway to your pond, you make sure there's some by your walkway, and there's some by your pond because your eye is drawn to that color," he says. "One of my favorite plants is a variegated red sweet dogwood. The bush has a variegated leaf and in the winter when it drops its leaves, its branches are bright red. I call that a four-season plant that gives you some flowers, but you're full of color, and your twigs are brilliant. In the white snow those bushes pop even without leaves."

Cording says layering plants is the most aesthetically pleasing. Bigger ones should be placed in the back and they step down in size. He recommends barberry, spireas, knockout roses, rozanne geraniums, golden spirea, quick fire hydrangea—a new variety—and the variegated Iris.

Finishing Touches

While a big chunk of your attention may be paid to the plants and water features, there are other



Image at left courtesy of CLC Landscape Design. Image above courtesy of George.



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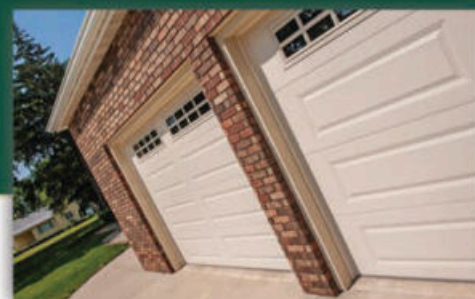
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Finding Peace in your own Backyard

elements such as shade and lighting that can ensure the space is enjoyed any time.

“Technology always seems to be the front-runner on the latest and greatest additions to outdoor entertainment spaces from year to year. The integration of WiFi-driven outdoor audio, color changing LED lighting and irrigation systems is becoming much easier and more user friendly to control right from the palm of your hand,” says Pasquarello.

LED lighting has reinvented outdoor lighting. Mihalchick loves using lighting to accent water features. Small LEDs can light up rock walls and ponds, and a new effect is called down lighting. “If there’s a tree or branches over a pond, we’ll hide a fixture in the tree and at night it looks like a full moon and it’s so cool,” he says. Lighting can also change colors, making a water feature festive for Halloween, 4th of July and Christmas.

Having a focal point in the yard adds to homeowners’ enjoyment, says Hock. “I always like to try to have a focal point so when you’re sitting there having your glass of wine or relaxing with the kids, there is a big beautiful tree that’s uplit at night or a beautiful urn or some kind of garden ornament. Or it could just be a garden that’s lit softly—it comes alive at night.”

Hock keeps her lighting approach conservative. “You can always add more, but you want to be considerate of the night sky and the beneficial bugs in your yard,” she says. “If you overdo it, it makes you feel like you’re living in an airport. ... You definitely don’t want to be blinded when you’re trying to enjoy your backyard.”

Overhead coverage is another element to incorporate. “Fans, water misting systems, solid roof structures and even pergolas with canopy systems help achieve relief from the sun,” says Pasquarello.

In the end, the finished product is going to be that sanctuary you need. “When you stick with all the senses and bring in the

sound with the ponds and the waterfall, or the fountains and the visual with the lighting in the evening it extends that period for you to be able to enjoy it,” Hock says.

And since we don’t know what the future holds, these projects are an investment not just for a summer staycation, but for years to come. “We’ve got all these months ahead of us where there’s a likelihood that we’re all kind of stuck back inside again,” says Compton. “It is much better to reach out to your contractor right now and get on the schedule for a few weeks from now. Build it so you can enjoy it because God knows what is around the corner for us.” **H&H**



RESOURCES

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We will continue to follow these practices for the foreseeable future. Following instructions from the State of New Jersey, we are hoping to invite customers back into our showroom in the coming weeks.

If one of your employees gets COVID-19, are there certain steps you will take to keep the rest of your employees safe?

Our employees have been advised that under no circumstances should they come to work while feeling ill, having a fever or cough. If anyone on our team should unfortunately be diagnosed with COVID, we have plans to bring in a professional cleaning service to sanitize all working areas. We have the capacity to allow our staff to work remotely during this time. We will never put any employee or customer at risk. The affected employee will not be allowed to return to work until he or she has appropriately quarantined and tested negative for the virus.

Are you currently offering any specials to your customer base during this pandemic?

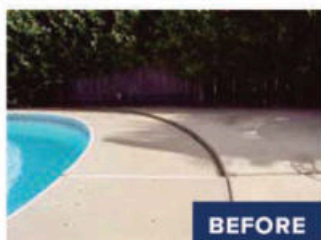
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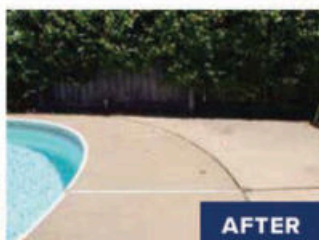


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On the company website for Architectural Concrete Design—one of the East Coast's leaders in decorative stamped concrete for more than 20 years—there is a vast collection of photos from the thousands of residential jobs they have completed.

The portfolio of driveways, walkways, patios and pool decks is stunning to see, until founder and president Chris McMahon makes one very important observation. "Pictures don't do it justice," he says. "It looks even better in person."

McMahon made that discovery himself when he was introduced to stamped concrete while working in high-rise construction in San Francisco in the late 1980s. He immediately fell in love with the possibilities, and made up his mind to return home to the Philadelphia area to start his own company specializing in stamped concrete.

Architectural Concrete Design (ACD) was officially born in 1993 and has since become a staple in the industry.

"We are the go-to company for stamped concrete for all the major architects and big firms in the tri-state area," McMahon says. "We do all the heavy highway projects; in fact, we're working on the Pennsylvania Turnpike right now. We do all the malls, we do high schools and elementary schools and we've worked on every Philadelphia-area casino except one."

But the best part about ACD is that the same passion for the design and construction of those massive projects is applied to private residences in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware and northeast Maryland to boost

curb appeal or spice up an outdoor living space. "So that experience and that level of expertise that is demanded by those other projects, you get at your home with the same crews," McMahon says.

Most of the crew members, as well as the designers and foremen, have been with ACD for almost two decades. Their craftsmanship and knowledge in the field is something you can't find everywhere.

"Our salespeople are landscape designers, so they'll come out and create the design for you," McMahon says. "They'll look at your home, your patio and your pool and give you ideas. When I do work at my home—and I consider myself a pretty good designer—I still have one of my designers come out just to see what his ideas are."

Stamped concrete is a popular option for homeowners because it can be made to look like a number of materials—including flagstone, brick, tile, slate, fieldstone, cobblestone and granite pavers—at a much better price. ACD offers an almost endless list of styles and colors.

"We can pretty much create any surface," McMahon says. "The product is used in theme parks throughout the world to mimic every material there is."

"It's more affordable [than natural stone], it's more durable and it doesn't chip or settle. Weeds don't grow through it and ants don't live in it like pavers. Natural stone requires a lot of maintenance, but with stamped concrete all you have to do is seal it every two or three years."

Bob Nonemaker is one of the founders of

Outerspaces Inc., a company in Glen Mills, Pa., that designs and builds high-end water features. He has used ACD for multiple projects and has always been more than satisfied with the results, including a large pool deck the company recently installed at a retirement community.

"The fact that they can produce thousands of square feet in a day with something that looks really, really good, that's pretty amazing," Nonemaker says. "Most masons are lucky to get down a hundred square feet of material in a day. Everybody is always being pushed in construction to get things done. These guys get it done, and they get it done well."

Of course, with that sterling reputation comes a great demand for ACD's services. That's why McMahon encourages homeowners to start the process now, during the winter, to make sure they can have that dazzling new patio or driveway in time for spring.

They won't be disappointed in the end result, Nonemaker promises.

"Concrete is one of those things where if everything doesn't go right, it can end up really wrong," he says. "But with Chris and his guys, it's like a ballet for them. 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." **H&H**

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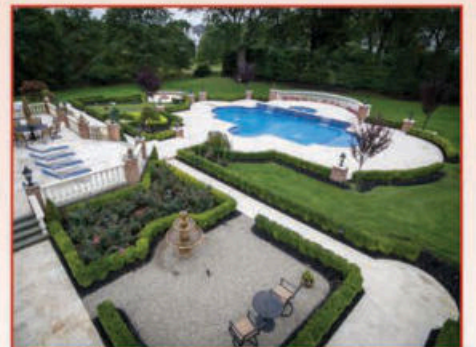
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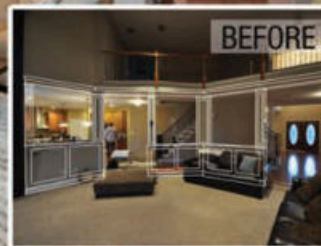
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