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Central Jersey
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Volume 22, Issue 6

Sequoia Outback

Endless inspiration to set up your summer space *page 16*



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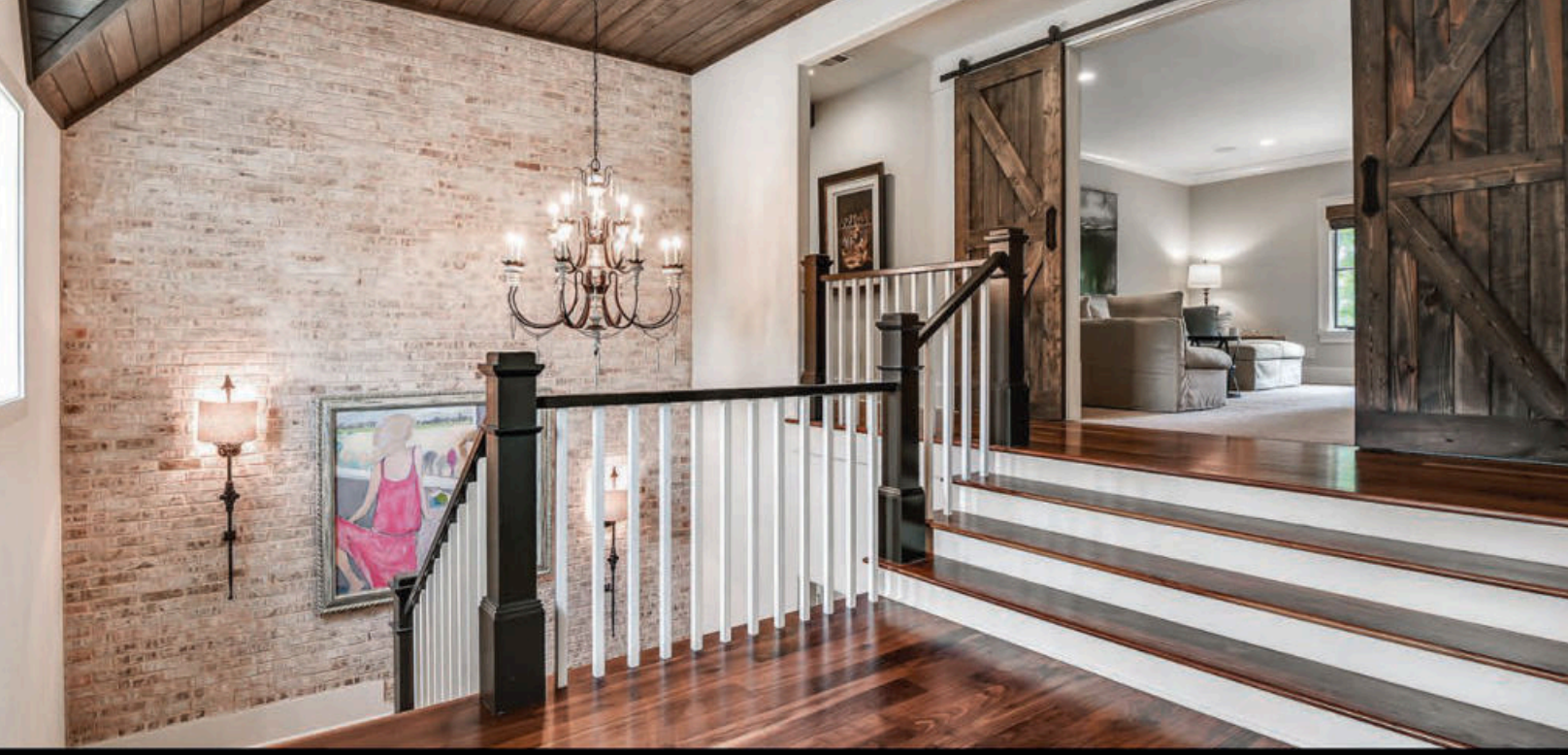


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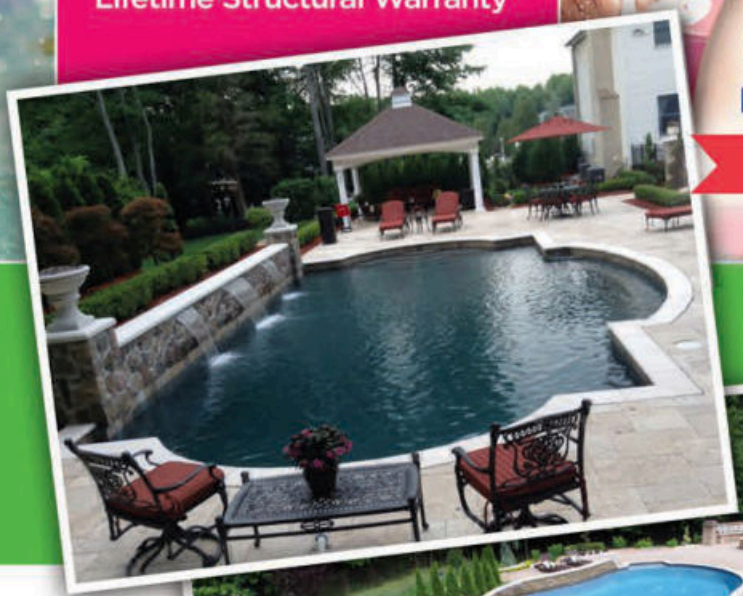
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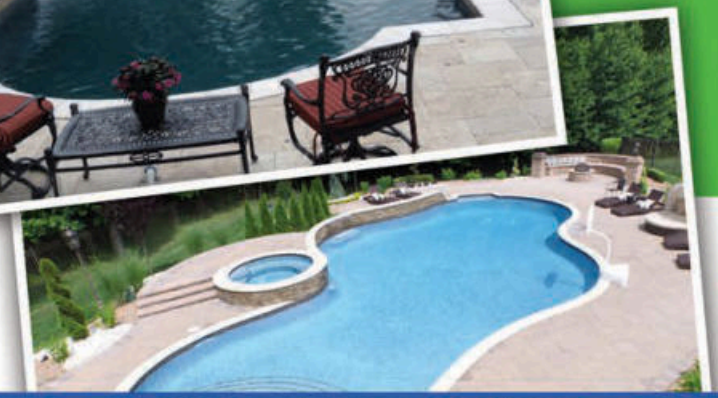
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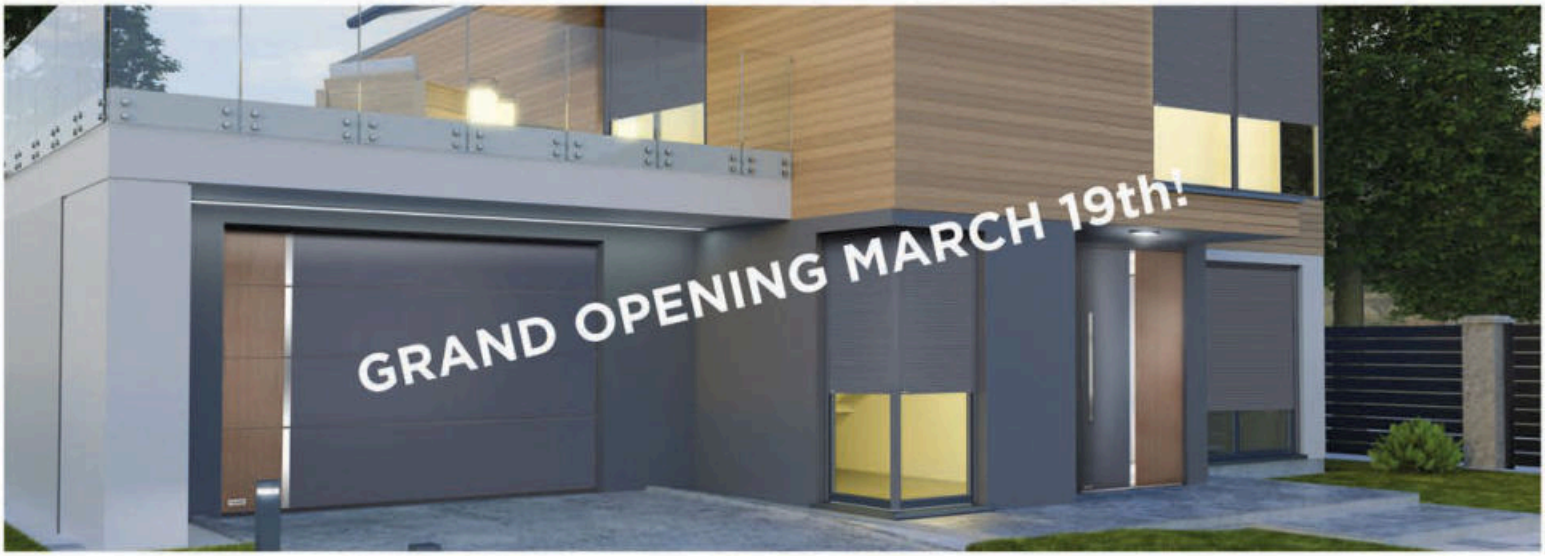
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On the cover:
Sequoia Out Back has everything you need to furnish your deck or patio. With the construction of a 40,000-square-foot retail location in Hatfield, Pa., Sequoia has created a total experience for those planning or furnishing a backyard space. For more information about the brands and products available, turn to page 16.
Cover image courtesy of Sequoia Out Back



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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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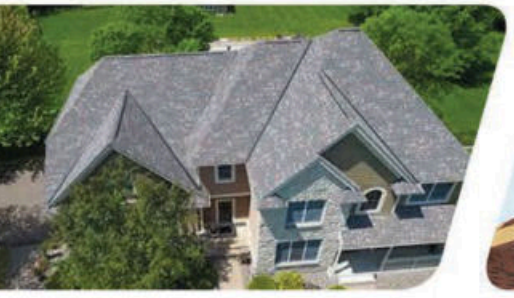
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Ready to Relax

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



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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 **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**

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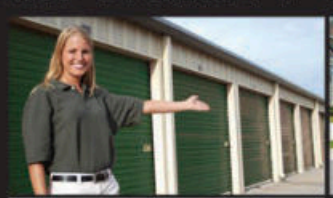
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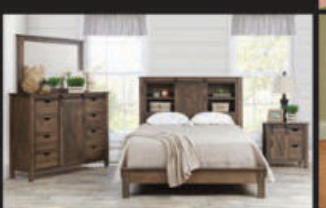













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With spring in bloom, homeowners across the country are preparing to spend the coming months in their own backyards, and chances are they would like to invest in some updates. Our annual landscape directory connects our readers with local resources 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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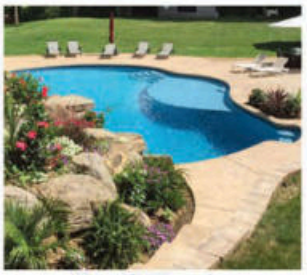
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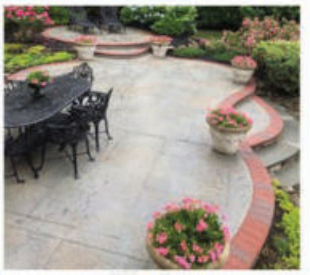
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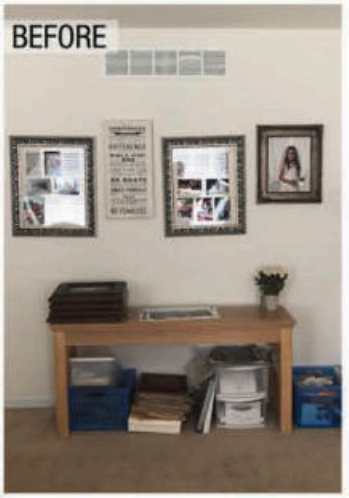


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Magnolia Home Remodeling Group has spent more than 30 years delivering high-quality work to New Jersey's homeowners, always with the goal of being their first call for that next interior or exterior project.







Building Strong Relationships

by Madeleine Maccar

In the more than three decades that Magnolia Home Remodeling Group has been entrusted with indoor and outdoor residential renovations throughout New Jersey, the family-owned and -operated company has seen design trends, preferred materials and even other contractors come and go.

But one thing has remained constant: No matter the project, a remodeler who can build solid relationships while offering equally strong craftsmanship will always be in demand.

"Every house is different, so you're always up against a new obstacle or a surprise here or there, but we work through any issues that might come up and keep the homeowners informed while communicating effectively—which is probably the most important thing—and managing the projects proactively," says Vic Fiore, who shares the title of Magnolia principal with co-owner Chris Fontana. "We have project managers and then Chris and I oversee the projects to make sure that we're heading toward the best conclusion for everyone."

While the home remodeler has always done both interior and exterior work, Fiore notes that, particularly when it comes to the latter, "we now have the ability to lead with these products that look natural and are also low-maintenance or no-maintenance," as requests for such have seen a meteoric rise in recent years. And Magnolia's team of experts know exactly how to make sure a client gets the most bang for their buck, regardless of a project's scope or budget.

"If you have homeowners who are considering residing their homes, your starter product is a traditional vinyl, your next level is an insulated vinyl, and then you can take the jump up into polymer vinyl shake then fiber cement and composites," says Fiore. "The bottom line is there are a lot of options for people who want no-maintenance, long-term solutions for their exterior siding."

Much like demand, the variety and quality of those offerings have also increased tremendously within the past decade.

"For exteriors, those products have come a long way in the last five to 10 years," Fiore notes. "More recently, products have come along that are composite but look nearly identical to wood and might mimic the look and feel of fiber cement siding, such as [James] Hardie."

Magnolia works with the leading brands, like James Hardie fiber cement siding as well as Ascend Composite Cladding siding, Anderson 400 series windows, TimberTech composite decking and Cambridge Pavingstones. Providing products proven to stand the test of time means clients can enjoy the advantages of "brands we work with regularly and have great success with, in terms of durability and aesthetics."

"Aesthetically speaking, the house doesn't change its look: You won't get that fading, you don't have to worry about hitting the house with another coat of paint," Fiore points out.

The ultimate long-term benefits, though, include saving on costs and staving off headaches.

"The cost to have a professional painting crew come and repaint or restain the house is considerable, so if you have to commission a company every time, it adds up," says Fiore. "Your Hardie or your composite-siding investment pays off just because you're avoiding several thousand dollars every five to seven years. You're paying a little more initially but you're saving some money, you're saving some aggravation, you're saving the worry of having to locate a contractor to come in and repaint or do repairs."

But offering high-quality products doesn't matter if the installation crew isn't up to par, which is why Magnolia's teams comprise individuals possessing both the expertise and experience to match those top-of-the-line products.

"They're teams we've been working with for years because they're trusted, they're professional, they're knowledgeable," Fiore says. "They've also been working with these products for a while—that's the most important thing. They can work with fiber cement or composite products that might be a little more advanced and require a little more know-how than your basic siding."

Those teams' abilities to provide a full suite of services means limitless potential for repeat clients, who account for "a significant amount" of Magnolia's business.

"People who choose us one year for a bathroom might consider us for a siding project a few years later, which is really one of the benefits of developing a relationship with our clients," Fiore notes. "It's important to us that we leave off on a great ending and conclusion to that process.

"We have customers who always consider us for another project because it means everyone feels like their value has been fulfilled," he continues. "The goal is to have a successful outcome for all parties involved: The homeowner feels like they got their money's worth, and we've put ourselves in a good position for future success and maybe another project from that client down the road."

And for Fiore, happy clients and a job well done are what his job is all about: "The best part of my job is when these projects are finished and people's dreams have become a reality. It's great to see happy clients with huge smiles on their faces." H&H

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by Matt Cosentino

Legends Home Improvements

THE TERM "CUSTOMER SERVICE" MEANS DIFFERENT THINGS TO DIFFERENT PEOPLE. For Bill Lecorchick Jr., the second-generation owner of Legends Home Improvements, his company hasn't managed to thrive in a competitive industry for close to 50 years by taking that idea lightly. Consistently going above and beyond for homeowners has become just as much of a hallmark for them as the beautiful outdoor living spaces they design and build or the custom interior renovations they provide.


Bill Lecorchick Jr., Owner

That's why so many clients become customers for life, bringing Legends back for a bathroom or kitchen remodel after having an amazing experience with their deck project. Lecorchick is willing to lend a helping hand on a much smaller scale as well—delivering the type of service that can't be found with just any contractor.

"These are my customers, so I'm not going to say no, even for something minor," he says. "We make time, we go out there and do the small job. I have one customer who asked me to come out and hang pictures whenever I was in the area and had a chance. So on my way home from work one day I stopped by and I hung them up.

"Once they're my customer, they call me for just about everything. They've stumped me a couple of times, asking me for things that I don't do. But I make a few phone calls and give them some answers and a starting point. We try to help everyone as much as we can."

Lecorchick spoke to *House & Home* about how he continues to make life easier for homeowners by expanding his offerings in outdoor living projects and acting as a one-stop shop for whatever type of project they need.

WHAT IS THE BENEFIT TO HIRING A COMPANY LIKE YOURS THAT HANDLES EVERY ASPECT OF THE PROJECT FROM START TO FINISH?

Customers just need to speak to me and I can make everything happen. I have relationships with the subcontractors—electricians, HVAC, plumbers, etc.—who I have worked with for years and trust to show up as scheduled to do quality work. Customers love it because it's less of a headache for them and they don't have to worry about holding a subcontractor accountable, because that's my job.

HOW HAVE YOU ADDED TO YOUR OUTDOOR OFFERINGS THIS YEAR?

This year I branched out to really offer everything, so we don't have to tell customers to search online. I have partnered with an outdoor kitchen company, so I can present options to customers for top-of-the-line grills or smokers from the likes of Sunstone Grills, Bradley Smoker and Louisiana Smoker. I have also connected with several pool accessory companies to offer flush mount umbrella holders that are perfect for around the pool, eliminating the need for a large umbrella stand. There are 60 different fabric colors and six different colored poles from which to choose, and we also offer lounge chairs for the sundeck of the pool.

WHY IS A SHADE STRUCTURE ONE OF THE FIRST AMENITIES YOU RECOMMEND FOR A DECK?

In general we're building these decks on properties where there's not a tree in sight. If you want to go out and enjoy the deck, you have the sun blaring full bore in your face. But there are options upon options when it comes to shade. We can do motorized pergolas and gazebos, but to me the gazebos are just decorative because they act as a sundial and don't provide much coverage. I like the roofs because we attach them to the house and you can just walk outside and be covered. They can have lights, ceiling fans, you can hang a TV on the wall, add infrared heaters and go outside and watch the game. If you're not getting enough use out of it, we can come back at a later date and put walls and windows on it, and now all of a sudden you're using that room 11 months out of the year.



WHAT ARE SOME OPTIONS WHEN IT COMES TO A FIRE FEATURE?

Fireplaces are fantastic because they give you a wall of privacy from your neighbor and that's another place to hang a TV. I like wood fireplaces because you can get a lot of heat out of them; the same thing goes for wood fire pits. But gas is easy—once it's there, you just turn it on and off whenever you want. Gas fireplaces look real with nice flames coming out of them.

WHAT ELSE IS UNIQUE ABOUT THE WAY YOUR COMPANY OPERATES?

I'm on every job. Customers don't just see me on the first day and then the last day—they get me every day. If there's a question or a change, it's very easy to deal with. That happens all the time because they're buying a vision. When you're hiring a contractor, you need somebody who can see what you're talking about and understand what you want. That's what we try to do—make their dreams come true. 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-

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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**

RESOURCES

Epoxy Floor Experts
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EpoxyFloorExperts.com

Fiberglass Pool Designs, LLC t/a Pool Designs
Yardville, N.J.
(609) 324-9900
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Serving all of N.J.
(732) 254-33301
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HOME SAFE HOME

BY MADELEINE MACCAR

With more and more people choosing to age in place at their longtime homes or in a dedicated in-law suite at an adult child's home, there are more and more options for doing so safely and comfortably.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, baby boomers will all be 65 years or older by 2030. And while 65 isn't as old as it used to be, the generation's elder members have already retired and are considering where they want to spend their golden years—and it's never too early to start thinking ahead for those who aren't quite there yet. Retirement homes and assisted care facilities are increasingly popular options that offer independence, a sense of community and the comfort of professional care while others hire an in-home caregiver, but those options aren't for everyone.

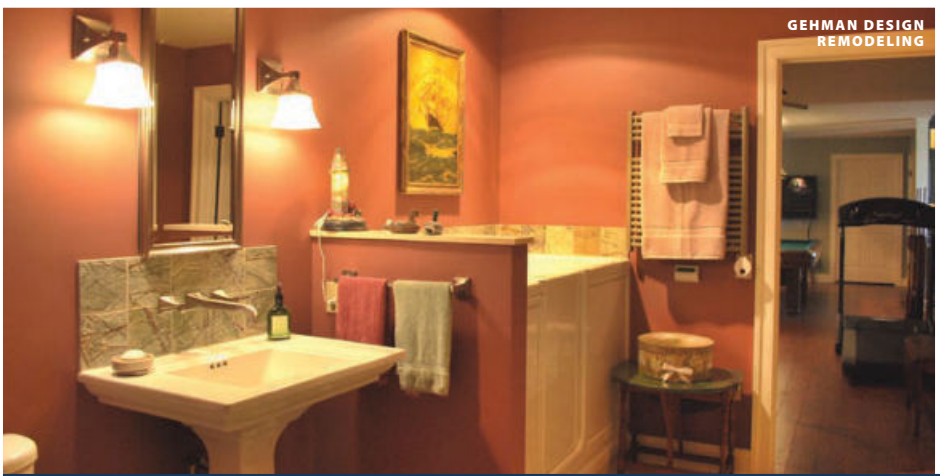
Many wish to assert their independence by growing older in the homes they've filled with a lifetime of memories; others prefer moving in with family. A familiar home retrofit with safety features is an attractive and accessible option, just as it's becoming more common for multigenerational households to rely on converting or adding a dedicated "in-law suite" to accommodate aging loved ones' needs while offering the peace of mind that comes with being close by in the event of an emergency.

And there will be emergencies, though external hazards can be minimized by consulting experienced professionals.


GEHMAN DESIGN REMODELING

"One of the most common mishaps is falling, so you need to really look at the space and eliminate those risk factors," notes Dennis Gehman of Gehman Design Remodeling.

Whether you're planning to age in place, you're the caretaker providing a living area to keep elderly loved ones nearby or you're just now starting to explore your options, how you proceed depends on personal preferences, influencing factors and individual situations. But one thing remains the same: Safety always comes first.


GEHMAN DESIGN REMODELING

A Safer, Comfortable Space

Taking the proper precautions begins with minimizing the potential for falling and tripping.

"The most common room in the house for falls is the bathroom. People are getting up and off the toilet and might be off-balance, they're stepping up over the side of a bathtub to get in and out, and then you have wet feet, and so there's slippery surfaces to watch out for," Gehman explains. "Adequate lighting helps since our eyes don't see as great as we get older, and you'll want to identify tripping hazards, such as area rugs on hardwood floors."

A daily tripping hazard are both indoor and outdoor steps. But installing a residential elevator can be a surprisingly easy potential solution, according to Todd Trovarello of Personal Elevator. He notes that it's often to clients' pleasant surprise to learn that an elevator only needs five square feet of interior or exterior space and tends to be more affordable than they anticipate.

Trovarello has specialized in installing and retrofitting home elevators for three decades, and he's noticed a significant uptick—he used to annually average six or seven retrofits a year and says it's now up to nearly 30—over the past two years of the pandemic.

With area real estate prices soaring and the lack of available properties, Trovarello has seen how reluctant older homeowners are to move, even into an adult child's home with dedicated space and amenities. It has contributed to a surge in outfitting a family home with safety features specifically designed for the elderly.

Of course, people who age in place want to be surrounded by the cozy familiarity of the homes they love and those moving into a suite created for them don't want to feel like they're relocating to a medical facility that's more coldly functional than warmly inviting.

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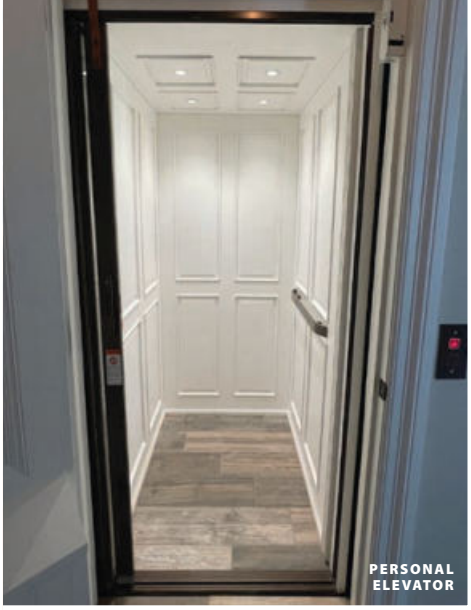


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Installing grab bars is a must no matter what, though they don't have to be permanent and, with modern manufacturers reliably combining safety and style, they certainly don't have to feel clinical.

Gehman emphasizes how crucial grab bars are in outfitting older loved ones' living spaces, although there are some options that can be easily removed. "People are often hesitant about grab bars because they don't want their house to look too institutional, like a hospital or a nursing home, but there are some good-quality grab bars out there nowadays that work with a suction cup if you have a smooth surface—they won't work as well on walls with smaller tiles or a painted surface," he explains. "That's a do-it-yourself project where you wouldn't have to pay a professional to install it."

Something as simple as switching out round door knobs for levers and handles can make a huge difference for people with arthritis. On a larger scale, wheelchairs and walkers need to be accommodated so an older loved one has enough room and stability to navigate corners and elevated areas. Replacing existing hinges with offset ones, which allows a door to swing clear of the inside frame to widen the entry space, is a common solution.

Technology has been a huge asset in creating accessible spaces. With the touch of a button, assistance of a remote or voice-activated commands, it's easier than ever for individuals with limited mobility to have complete control over the comfort of their homes. "Anything that's electrical or electronic these days, there's an app for it," Gehman points out. "Your thermostat, the WiFi, locks, security cameras: It can all be controlled from a smartphone."

Aging in Place at Home

Those spending their later years at home will benefit from being surrounded by a familiar, cozy environment, but their homes will need to undergo potentially extensive remodeling and retrofitting.

"An existing space can certainly be modified but it's oftentimes a whole lot easier if we're designing an addition, because we're keeping those [safety features] in mind right away," Gehman says.

The most important thing, Trovarello says, is ensuring that modifications make the entire house accessible.

"A lot of people are trying to stay in their homes—they're not trying to move or downsize," he observes. "When they want to age in place, my main goal is always to give them access to every floor."




GEHMAN DESIGN REMODELING

Creating an In-Law Suite

Whether you're converting an existing space or building an addition, designing an in-law suite means being cognizant of any potential restrictions.

"Every municipality has different zoning classifications. … We have found that they will permit an in-law suite, with a caveat about the kitchen," says Gehman. "If all you need is a bedroom, living room and bathroom space, it's not a big deal. But if they want a kitchen and it's not zoned for it, what determines that it's a kitchen is a built-in cooking surface."

There's also the additional demands on a home's plumbing to consider.

"Sometimes we run into issues if they do not have a public sewer because on-lot septic systems are sized for the number of bedrooms in the house," Gehman adds. "And so by adding another bedroom, sometimes that means you'll have to address your sewer capacity."

You'll also want to consider privacy measures like separate entrances—with ramps, a gradient sidewalk or even lifts rather than steps.

Additional Advice

To ensure that you're creating a space with current and future needs in mind, Gehman advises seeking input from a physical or occupational therapist during the construction or modification period, especially one who knows an individual's specific limitations.

No matter the approach you take, the upfront cost can be daunting, for sure. But, as Gehman points out, that's a one-time upfront payment, versus the ongoing costs of relocating to a retirement community.

He does caution that, no matter the approach you take, prepare for delays, especially with the ongoing material shortage creating unusual snags in the process.

"It's always going to take longer than you think," he notes.

Whether you're looking to age in place or break ground on an in-law suite, Trovarello emphasizes the importance of working with an experienced professional who's just as invested in the occupants' safety and comfort as you are.

"We've done elevators to accommodate people's parents, handicapped people and even disabled children and aging animals," he says. "I just have a passion for helping people and helping them get around their homes as they age." H&H

RESOURCES

Gehman Design Remodeling
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