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Volume 23, Issue 4

Spring PLANNING GUIDE



Imperial Marble & Granite

Providing dedicated customer service and exclusive products to more Pennsylvania homeowners *page 21*

Spring Cleaning

How to get your landscape ready for the season ahead

Exterior Upgrades

Outside improvements that add value, curb appeal and protection

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Five Star Contractors

Making dreams come true *page 11*

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As the company grows, it remains true to its roots of honesty, integrity and value *page 31*

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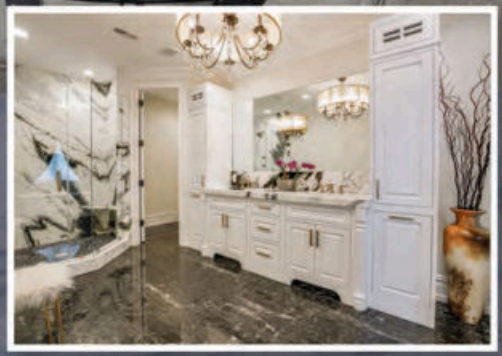
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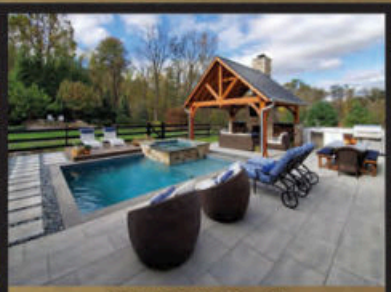
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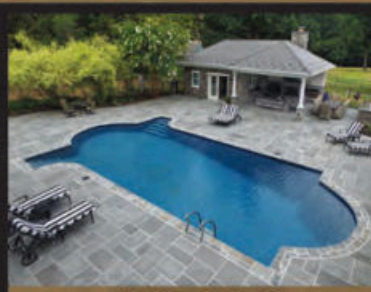
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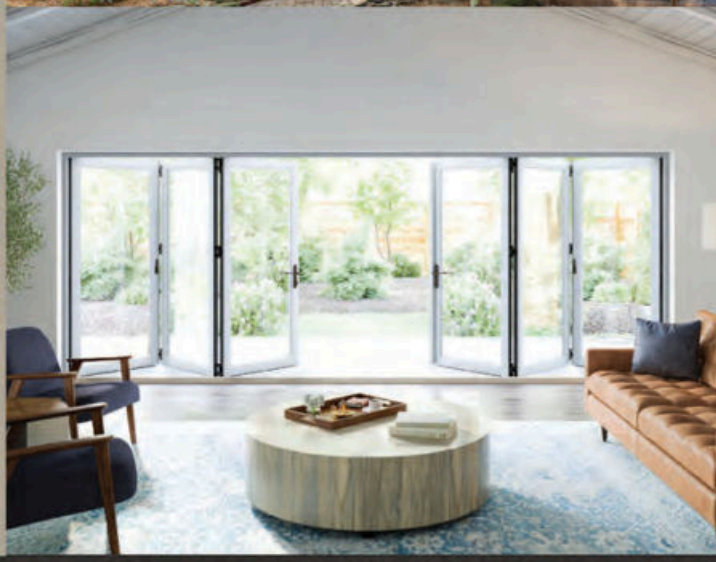
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For this kitchen, we opted for cottage white cabinetry featuring contrasting quartersawn red oak island and floating shelves on either side of the wood hood. A professional series gas cooktop with full height tile splash gives this space further elements of function and design.

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Our clients asked for a modern-meets-transitional master bathroom. We were able to accomplish this goal by having some fun with finishes and tile patterns. The 4x4 tiles on the shower wall in a straight set pattern mixed with the same tile in a diamond pattern on the vanity wall added additional interest to the space. The clean lines of the black hexagon tiles on the floor are a nice contrast to the warm wood herringbone look on the shower wall. The furniture style vanity in walnut adds an organic warmth to the space and the brushed gold and matte black fixtures tie it all together.

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At Five Star Contractors, we understand that a home is more than just a physical structure—it's a reflection of your personality, your style and your values. That's why we approach each home-renovation project with a personal touch, taking the time to truly understand the needs, goals and vision of our clients.

Who We Are

Five Star Contractors is a custom remodeling firm, specializing in exterior home systems, including exterior cladding (siding/stone/brick), windows and doors, hardscaping, decks and patios, structural alterations, additions and more.

We prioritize building science best practices, marrying form with function. We are dedicated to creating beautiful, functional designs that are not only aesthetically pleasing but also engineered to perform at the highest level.

With this in mind, Five Star Contractors has sought out an opportunity to partner with the country's top building science experts. The benefit of this partnership is a unique understanding of the exterior envelope in its entirety, and how we incorporate these building science best practices into a successful remodeling project.

Why We Love Working With Homeowners

We believe home remodeling is a deeply personal experience for both the contractor and homeowner. A home is where one creates memories, and it is a privilege to earn someone's trust to help them make their dreams a reality. With this in mind, we believe in crafting unique, personalized solutions for each client, and are committed to delivering exceptional customer service throughout the entire remodeling process.

At the end of the day, nothing is more rewarding than a trusted referral, and a partner for life. Creating this experience for our clients is what motivates us each and every day.

What Makes Us Unique

Home remodeling is a very crowded space due to the fact that there are few barriers to entry when it comes to starting a remodeling company. On the surface, flashy marketing and incentive-driven sales strategies can seem tempting to homeowners looking for value. Companies that are only a few years old can offer lifetime warranties with no consequence. The list goes on, and every year there will be many new entrants, and even more contractors departing from the market.

What homeowners really need is a true partner in every sense of the word. A partner who not only can adjust mid-project when the unexpected occurs, but one who is able to predict the unexpected prior to starting a project due to decades of experience and hundreds of projects completed.

An analogy we like to use is that contractors are like NFL teams. The NFL is full of teams who on the surface look very similar. They all have a logo, a stadium, a coach and 53 players, but for some reason only two teams make it to the Super Bowl each year. Just like contractors, who all have a logo, an office, an owner and employees. So why does a team make it to the Super Bowl?

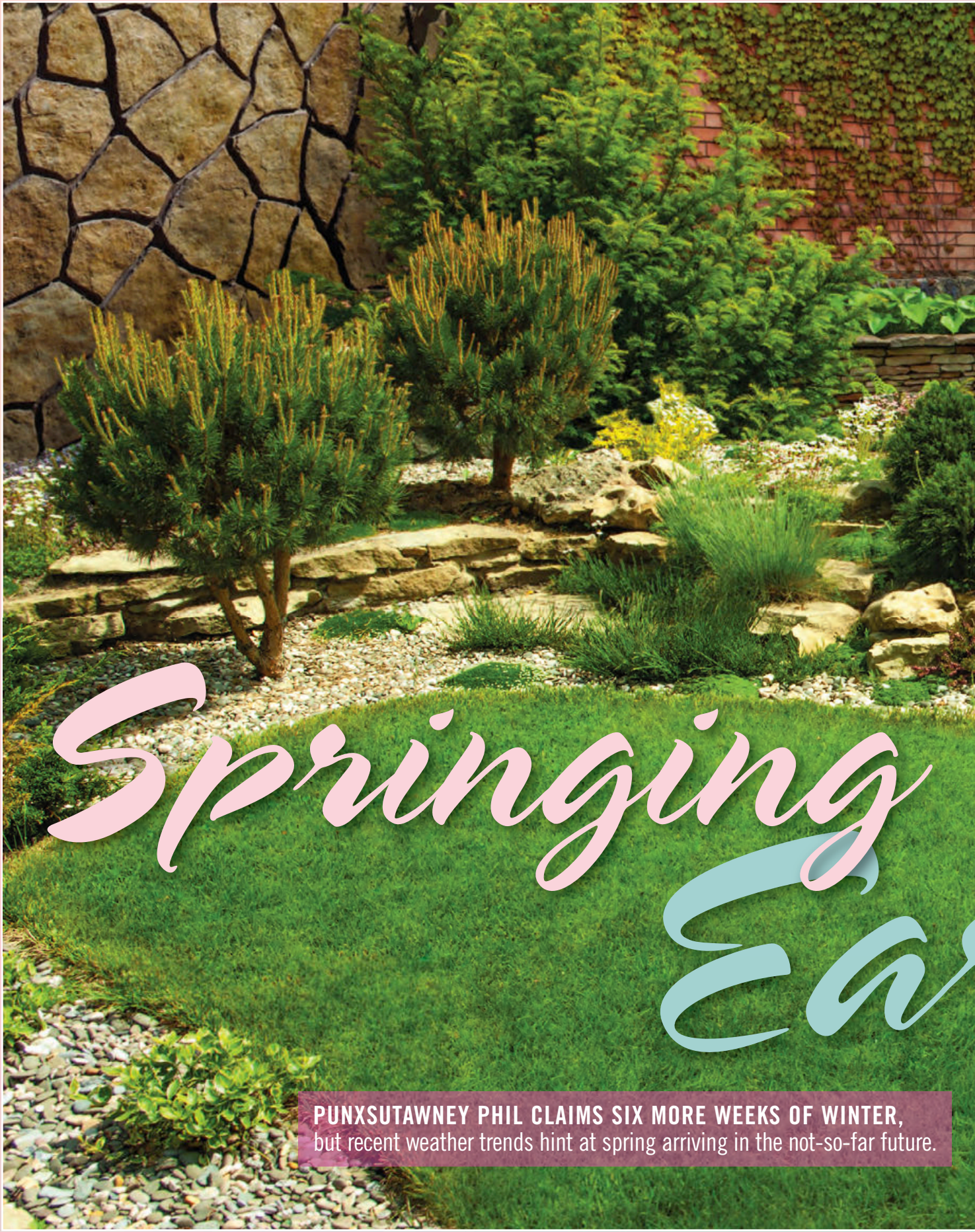
It is simple. They have better systems, better personnel and leadership that is heavily invested in long-term success of the organization. Their standards are exponentially higher, and they realize their fan-base, or in our case clients, deserve the absolute best with zero compromise. Every year, our goal is to win the Super Bowl.

In conclusion, the remodeling process should absolutely be a rewarding and exciting experience. With proper planning, preparation and professional support, your dreams truly can come true. Once you have partnered with us, you'll have a valuable resource for life and never have to search for assistance on future projects again.

How to Partner With Us

Simply have a rough idea of your desired outcome, and be prepared to openly share your goals. This will allow us to properly support you and collaborate on a plan that best fits your wants and needs. To get in touch, just visit our website and complete the contact form, providing as much information as possible. We're eager to connect with you and renew your trust in the remodeling industry. **H&H**





Springing Ea

PUNXSUTAWNEY PHIL CLAIMS SIX MORE WEEKS OF WINTER, but recent weather trends hint at spring arriving in the not-so-far future.

rly

by **Katie Francis**



WE'VE BEEN FORTUNATE THIS WINTER WEATHERWISE, with only a few snowfalls and some unseasonably warm days. Though relatively insignificant to us, fluctuating conditions take a considerable toll on our outdoor spaces, which haven't been adequately tended to since the fall. *House & Home* spoke with local experts to find out what proactive homeowners should be doing to get a jump-start on spring cleaning.

According to Keith Frederick, owner of ELA Outdoor Living, one of the biggest landscaping mistakes that homeowners make is not performing a proper fall cleanup.

"If you have a heavy buildup of leaves on your lawn and you let it sit there all winter and it gets snowed on and matted down, it'll effectively choke out your turf," Frederick explains.

As the owner of Rock Bottom Landscaping & Fencing, Chris DeMato sees people overlook the importance of fall cleanups often and says that this mistake could end up taking a huge toll on your wallet.

"If leaves are left to linger and sit on the lawn, they do more damage and therefore you'll need more repair work. If you don't address those leaves until April, it could end up costing a lot more in expenses," DeMato says.

An autumn cleanup is equally important for water features like ponds and their inhabitants. George Mihalchick, owner of Ponds By George, says that the decomposition of debris sitting in a pond throughout the colder months leads to excessive algae, which can decrease oxygen in a pond and block the sunlight aquatic plants need to undergo photosynthesis.

Even if you do tidy up your yard in the fall, leaves and debris inevitably build up over the winter, leaving you with plenty of work to do once the weather gets nicer.

Local experts agree that now is the best time to start fixing up your outdoor space, and the first step is going out and assessing the condition of your property.

"I would recommend that customers walk their property and make a list of any issues that may need to be addressed," DeMato says. This includes hardscape repairs, fencing repairs, dead plant materials and dead growth on trees, which could be dangerous if not addressed.

After surveying your property, DeMato recommends calling your landscaper as soon as possible, as it's never too early to get on their schedule for things like lawn repairs and tree removals.

It's best to leave these larger jobs to the professionals, but

Springing Early

there's plenty you can do right now to prepare for the spring. For one, the piles of leaves wreaking havoc on your once-lush green lawn and manicured flower beds should be removed to avoid further damage.

Secondly, perennials are in the beginning stages of revitalization. These plants can be cleaned up this time of year, but Frederick warns homeowners to be careful what they remove.

"If they prune off flowering plants, they're going to prune off all the flower buds for spring," he explains. Homeowners should only remove things like dead branches and dead plants, which take up space that could otherwise be room for the growth of healthy plants.

While flowering plants should mostly be left alone, besides a few small haircuts, now is a good time to remove any tree branches that snapped during the winter, as they could be extremely hazardous if not handled promptly and properly.

At this point in the year, there isn't much to be done about the hardscaping aspects of your yard. While it's important to note the state of your hardscape and fencing, experts advise homeowners to wait until the temperature remains steadily warm to address these issues. This includes the readjustment of rocks around water features, which Mihalchick says "could slightly shift" due to ice formation over the winter.

Whether you're thinking about making a subtle change or redesigning your entire backyard, now is a good time to start thinking about fresh ideas you want to bring to your space to ensure that it's ready to enjoy for the spring and summer.

There are so many different options for outdoor entertainment spaces today, from standard decks and patios to grand pools with flowing water features and outdoor kitchens with accompanying fireplaces.

No two yards are the same, and the same goes for households and their personal preferences. This has a huge impact on how to lay out a yard.

"Everybody's different, depending on the land and the size of your family," Don Panetta, co-owner of D. Panetta Contracting with his wife Tammy, says.

According to Mihalchick, the best way to get the most out of a space, regardless of its size, is to be mindful of location during the design process.

"Allow yourself to walk two paces away from any door before steps start. When installing a water feature, keep it close to your living space to be able to see it, hear it, and interact with it," Mihalchick says. These simple layout strategies ensure that a homeowner maximizes both the potential and experience they can get from their yard.

Along with creating a functional entertainment area with the space you have, it's critical that you find a balance between hardscape and landscape to create a cohesive and aesthetic environment that you'll want to spend time in.

> "Allow yourself to walk two paces away from any door before steps start. **When installing a water feature, keep it close to your living space to be able to see it, hear it, and interact with it."**
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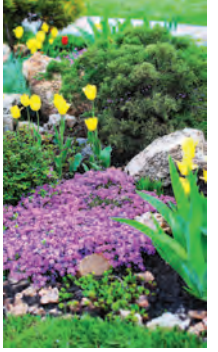


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Springing Early





People typically love installing hardscapes like porches and patios because they are easy to maintain, but DeMato says that too much stone and concrete can result in a "stark, cold feeling."

"It is very important that you allow space for landscaping to soften up the hardscaping. This will give you more of the garden-like feel that you want to create in your own yard," DeMato explains.

Creating thoughtful pockets of greenery breaks up the harshness of hardscaping, allowing color and life to complement and soften the space. Tammy Panetta echoes the importance of landscaping, calling it the "icing on the cake."

There are likely still a few more cold days ahead of us and maybe even a snowstorm, but before we know it, we'll be putting the winter coats away and breaking out the tank tops. It's time to stop dreaming about the warmer months ahead and start preparing for them instead. H&H

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Jeff Martin, a manager at the company's corporate headquarters in Myerstown, Pa., says, "The most common issues people want to take care of are hard water, taste, odors, staining and removing any trace bacteria or chemicals."

Martin highlights the following symptoms of these issues, many of which homeowners may not recognize:

- **HARD WATER:** contains dissolved calcium and magnesium. Hard water can result in dry skin and hair, spots on glasses and silverware, rings in the tub, dull clothing after washing and inefficiency of water-based appliances, such as a hot water heater.
- **IRON AND MANGANESE STAINING:** causes rusty-orange or black staining visible in sinks, tubs, toilets and clothes.
- **LOW PH:** blue-green stains most noticeable on white surfaces commonly found in tubs, sinks, toilets and clothing; can also erode copper plumbing and fixtures, eventually causing leaks.
- **TASTE AND SMELL:** water may have an odor or funny taste to it; due to a number of factors including chlorine—which is used as a disinfectant.

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The company carries a number of different systems, but Martin highlights the Kinetico system as a particularly unique option. "None of the Kinetico systems require electricity to run," he says. "All of the units function off of water pressure using kinetic energy. Kinetico offers both salt-free systems and salt-based systems. They are also twice as effective as anything else on the market … using very little water and a fraction of the salt needed for water softening compared to electric systems."

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FOR FOUR DECADES AND TWO GENERATIONS, THE TALENTED TEAM AT KEYSTONE CUSTOM DECKS HAS ADAPTED TO AND GROWN WITH INDUSTRY TRENDS, ENSURING THAT THE EXTERIOR EXTENSIONS OF CLIENTS' INDOOR LIVING SPACES ARE AS STURDY AS THEY ARE STUNNING. *by* Madeleine Maccar

EVER SINCE FOUNDER AMOS ESH WELCOMED HIS FIRST client to Keystone Custom Decks, the company has been building a reputation as sound and as impressive as the pools, pergolas, water features, hardscaping fixtures, outdoor kitchens and, of course, eponymous decks it has put its name on across four states for the past 40 years.

With the late Amos' sons confidently and capably steering the company they grew up in toward its promising future, the family-owned builder is in its second generation of turning homeowners' vast and varied visions for their outdoor living spaces into a fully realized, show-stopping space.

"The trend has really become turning your backyard into your sanctuary, your own personal retreat at home," observes Michael Esh. "It's been kind of gradual over the last 10 years, maybe a little longer, but it just exploded with COVID. We still do decks, but the scope of the project has become so much more than that. Now people want to relax outside with a fireplace and heaters, and have their TV there, and have a swimming pool out there, too."

But before a company can point to four decades of incredible work and satisfied clients, it needs to assemble a team capable of creating the high-quality, long-lasting and painstakingly individualized outdoor structures that especially today's clients expect.

"We like to push the envelope on what anyone else has done with these ideas that our clients and our sales team have come up with, and just figuring out a way to make them happen," Esh says. "That's what our company and our team thrive on, taking those challenges, those dreams people have, and turning them into a reality."

Keystone's dedicated, hand-picked team has helped ensure that the area's premier deck builder has been able to thoughtfully expand as trends demand an explosive growth of complementary outdoor-living services. With homeowners wanting their properties' exterior amenities to reflect the comfort of those inside, plus the benefit of doing it all under one roof so the client only has to deal with one company throughout the entirety of the project, adapting to an evolving industry's shifting needs long-ago emerged as a necessity to company leadership.

"When my dad started this business, an outdoor living space meant putting a deck out back that was big enough for a picnic table and your grill," Esh says. "Today, we're doing projects with outdoor kitchens, swimming pools and fireplaces because, as the idea behind outdoor living spaces has changed over the years, the backyard has become an extension of the home."

Both training and hiring hands-on talent to deliver the diligent details required of today's projects is just one way the "team has grown tremendously." In addition to knowing all the right kinds of supplemental staff when a specialized skill is needed, more front-facing staff have also been fairly contemporary additions to the team.

"Dad would come home after being on the job site all day and sketch out designs by hand; now, we have an entire team of full-time, in-house designers," notes Esh. "We put together these 3D renderings of the project before people even sign a contract, and we've had to hire people specifically for that, too. But then there are people who have been working out in the field for years, and we were able to bring them into a new role allowing them to use all that experience they've accumulated."

And while an ever-expanding roster of services certainly keeps the Keystone team busy, the meteoric rise of its pool installations accounts for some of its most in-demand projects.

"I think pools are the biggest thing we've really started promoting in the last couple years," Esh says. "We have a whole division now that's only doing swimming pools."

While their areas of expertise go well beyond the decks the company originally built its reputation on, the desire to take on new challenges that ultimately shape the expansion of Keystone's wheelhouse has always been a core tenet of the company.

"We've always tried to stay on the cutting edge and I think we've done that over the years—Dad loved to try new things and all the new ideas that came along," Esh affirms.

But for all the changing trends that come along, the company's cornerstones remain the same all these decades later, like cultivating a family feeling among the talented team making Keystone's exemplary work possible. Perhaps even more important, though, is simply leading with integrity, a lesson that Amos Esh instilled in his children and insisted on for the company he founded.

And it's a legacy that lives on in a company that operates on the unwavering principle of treating customers like they're part of the Keystone family, too.

"We've grown a lot but we're still very much, at our core, a family business," says Esh. "It's very important to us to invest in our team and for them to care for our clients." **H&H**

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Just a Stone's Throw Away

Debuting a West Chester showroom earlier this year has helped **Imperial Marble & Granite** bring its dedicated customer service and exclusive products to even more Pennsylvania homeowners. *by* **Madeleine Maccar**

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Main location: 200 Old Tinicum Island Road, H Complex, Essington, Pa. (610) 521-0130

Showroom: 1311 West Chester Pike, West Chester, Pa. (610) 738-5277 | **IMGStone.net**

Since 2004, Imperial Marble & Granite has been working with clients from all over eastern Pennsylvania to design, fabricate and install uniquely stunning natural stone and quartz furnishings, from residential kitchens and bathrooms to retail establishments' reception spaces and dining areas.

But owner Albert Kzelian noticed a worrisome decline in clients from Exton, Malvern, King of Prussia, West Chester and other areas for whom Imperial's Essington location was just a little too far away.

So, just like with every job Imperial puts its name on, Kzelian came up with a solution that prioritizes his customers' needs: establishing a showroom closer to them.

"I said, 'OK, if you guys don't want to come to us, we'll come to you,'" he begins. "An opportunity came up at this location in West Chester and I could not resist. We built a 4,000-square-foot, beautiful showroom, and it's right on West Chester Pike."

The result was a wide-open, thoughtfully designed space. Open since April, that West Chester showroom is already a resoundingly well-received success.

One of the most striking features of the Imperial showroom is that there are no tiny samples trying to approximate the full extent of all the colors and natural beauty that exist in one piece of marble or granite: The entire slab is available for client scrutiny, which Kzelian says is crucial in helping them fully assess a stone they're considering for their home.

"The sample certainly doesn't justify what the slab looks like," he explains. "The slabs have so many variations that a sample that's just six or 12 inches isn't going to tell you about the entire piece because that piece has gold, gray, white, beige, all these different colors that a sample can't show you. So when the customer sees the whole entire piece, they're like, 'Oh my God, this is beautiful!' or 'Wow, this is not what I was expecting, it's too busy.'"

But the showroom, Kzelian points out, "is not just for countertops." It's also where you can find an array of ceramic and marble tile, vanities, faucets and sinks, knobs, kitchen cabinetry, lighting and even sound systems. Imperial also outsources appliances so "we can give everything to the customer looking for a complete kitchen."

"We have a variety of different things," Kzelian says. "A homeowner could come in and purchase pretty much everything for every room all at once."

The Imperial team stays on top of current trends and client-demographic preferences—Kzelian notes that customers under 40 tend to gravitate to the manmade quartz but those 40 and older still prefer more natural stone like granite and marble, while neutral colors are staging a comeback in demand across the board—that guide their offerings.

And for much of those in-stock options, Kzelian adds that Imperial is the only place in the state where they can be purchased. "There are specific products or colors that we're the exclusive dealers of in Pennsylvania. Nobody else carries them or has them."

While the West Chester showroom gives clients a chance to get an up-close, hands-on look at all the pieces Imperial has in stock, one of the biggest advantages to them is the cost savings that comes with making a purchase directly with Imperial.

But what really differentiates Imperial from the rest is the kind of dedicated, attentive client support that drove Kzelian to open up a showroom to better assist his customers in the first place.

"Customer service is No. 1, No. 2 is craftsmanship and No.3—which is the most important thing—is turnaround," he says. "From template to install, it's a 10-day turnaround.We have the technology and machinery to back us up. Everything is done by digital measurements and laser measurements, so that helps us make things more precise and accurate."



It is that determination to deliver high-quality, skilled and minimally intrusive work to clients that Kzelian believes will ensure that Imperial keeps growing so it can keep finding new ways to ensure all their clients' needs are met.

"We started out in 2004 with six employees and now have 43," says Kzelian. "Our second location is helping us to continue helping clients with a warehouse experience that has all the beautiful lights and design of a showroom." H&H

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Fortunately, local exterior company Reaction Exteriors has the exceptional skill, talent and knowledge of exterior construction to repair those issues while maintaining the integrity of your home. Together, owners Steve Bonatsos and Marcos Jara work closely with each client and focus on the end goals for every individual home, which includes a design consultation demonstrating what the final result will look like.

Reaction Exteriors stays current with products in the construction marketplace, meeting with manufacturers and distributors to make sure they are providing exactly what the market demands regarding materials, while also communicating with the homeowner throughout the duration of a project to provide high-quality installation. With our wide range of superior exterior products for siding, windows, doors, hardscaping, decking and more, as well as being premier authorized installers for both James Hardie Plank siding, we can design it all while offering the best installation at the best pricing!

We're not just a stucco-remediation company, though—in fact, Reaction Exteriors comprises an in-house team with a range of skills and areas of expertise, which is just one aspect that makes us stand out from the rest. Plus, our dedicated designers will walk you through the entire process from consultation to cleanup, while project managers for each crew oversee their specific aspect of a job. One call to us means one team is handling your home's entirety of exterior needs, but you don't only get the hassle-free, streamlined benefit of working with one company: You'll also see the affordable pricing, harmonious result and incredible quality of one experienced team handling it all.

And the talent we attract doesn't end with our Reaction Exterior team. Your home's best advocate is a home inspector who'll diligently identify the source and extent of any hard-to-spot damage, and we can refer you to a qualified, knowledgeable inspector with a proven track record of thoroughly and attentively examining residential properties.

As Reaction Exteriors continues to grow, our focus remains on delivering a superior product that's constructed with care by talented craftsmen at competitive pricing in an ever-changing market. We're ready for your home's exterior needs!

For more information on remediation, visit RemediationDoneRight.com or see some before-and-after photos at ReactionExteriors.com. H&H



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H&H EXTERIOR

OUTSIDE INTERESTS



Spring is usually an opportune time for homeowners to consider exterior projects, including the installation of new roofing or siding. *by* **Matt Cosentino**

Although this winter has certainly been mild by typical Northeast standards, it still makes sense for homeowners to head into spring by taking stock of their property after the ice and snow have rolled through. Whether certain exterior projects are on tap out of necessity or just because of the curb appeal they can bring, it is wise to seize the opportunity now to ensure the house is in its best condition and small issues do not become worse.

"As the weather changes and people start coming outside, they should walk around the house to see if any shingles have fallen down, if any screens have ripped or the gutters are loose, anything like that," says Gary Selleck, owner of C&C Family Roofing. "If somebody is having a problem, we work all winter long, especially this year and last year when there's hardly any snow and the temperatures are pretty good. But the ideal time is March and April to start assessing what they need done."

An added benefit of addressing any concerns early is getting on the schedule for the premier roofing and siding contractors in the area, especially since spring and fall are the best times to complete such projects because the weather is not extremely hot or cold.

"If homeowners want to get the work started and completed in the spring, they're probably better off considering which direction they want to go and which products they might want to use, and which companies they want to have in to give estimates," says Vic Fiore, co-owner of Magnolia Home Remodeling Group. "You start the process now so that when the weather breaks, the work can begin and before the spring is over all of the construction work is completed."

House & Home spoke to local professionals about the most common exterior projects and the advantages of certain products over others in regard to roofing and siding.

PROTECTION FROM ABOVE

The roof obviously plays a significant role in protecting the rest of the home, so it is crucial to have an understanding of what kind of condition it is in, especially after the winter. A regular inspection by an expert is always a good idea, but there are also clues that homeowners can look for themselves in determining if a new roof may be needed.

"The shingles lifting, shingles breaking off, the granules of the shingles wearing off the face of the shingle and sitting in the gutter. All of those are good signs, and of course a leak," Fiore says.

"Age is probably the thing you want to keep an eye on the most. If you have a roof that is 20, 25 or 30 years old, you're nearing the end of its life expectancy."

Because a new roof is a major investment, some homeowners may want to put if off as long as possible, and in certain cases a repair will buy them time.

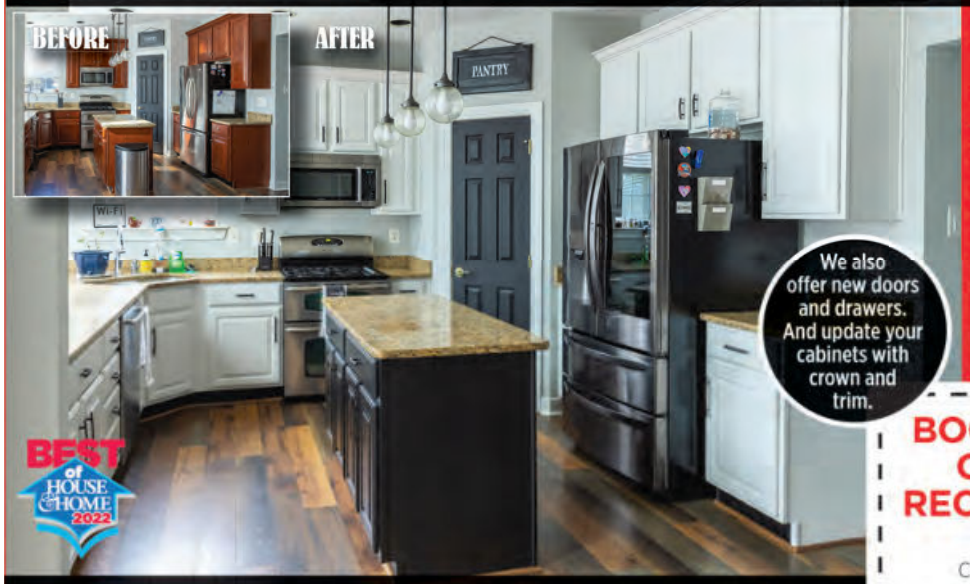
"We don't replace every roof," Selleck says. "If one part of the roof is bad and some shingles blew off, they're wearing a certain way or there's a flashing that's not right, we do a lot of repair work and they can last for years and years. You don't necessarily have to put a whole new roof on. The good thing is, we're a family company, so if we tell people we can get them through a repair and it will last another three or four years, then they'll call us back when they need a new roof because we were honest to begin with."

When it does come time for replacement, there are several options available, with a large majority of homeowners choosing traditional shingle roofs.

"We do shingle, we do some metal, we do rubber and there are some synthetic products that we can work with," Fiore says. "A shingle roof is the most cost-effective. The warranties are excellent and there are some real solid companies like

Photos courtesy of Magnolia Home Remodeling Group.

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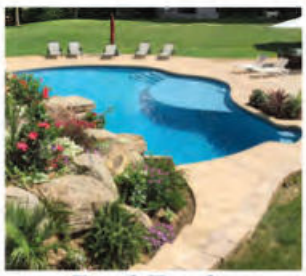
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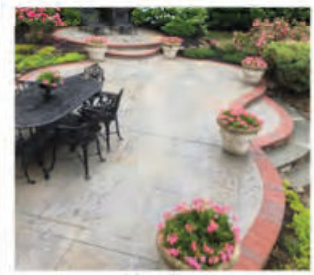
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GAF and Owens Corning that we work with that offer all different colors, designs and styles."

Global Home Improvement has had great success over the years with the installation of metal roofs and recommends that option because it is more durable than a shingle roof. Instead of having to be replaced in 25 years or so, metal roofs will usually last a lifetime for a homeowner.

Metal roofs are also eco-friendly and add an aesthetic appeal.

"Asphalt roofing can show its age quickly," says Adam Parnes, marketing manager for Global Home Improvement. "It may last 15-plus years, but typically after five it will show discoloration and staining. Metal roofing has no discoloration issues and will last longer and look better on your home. Metal slate roofing turns your boring asphalt roof into a dynamic and aesthetically pleasing focal point of your home."

Fiore agrees that metal adds a nice decorative touch.

"A lot of people want to use metal as an accent on a front porch roof or something along those lines," he says. "Once in a while we'll do a whole house in metal but it's expensive and the cost becomes prohibitive."

Because it is a one-time job, metal roofs make financial sense for some, but others do not want to pay the extra money up front compared to a shingle roof.

"It's expensive and when it rains, it's very loud," Selleck says. "When the snow lies up there, it slides off at a fast pace, and if you don't have the snow guards at the bottom, it can really do some damage if somebody is walking under there. There's not much call for it—in the suburbs, people want to replace the roof with shingles because it's cost-effective and the shingles now are a 50-year shingle, which they call a lifetime shingle. The price is right and you can get the job done on most houses in a day."

WOW FACTOR

Just as with the roof, the siding is important to keep a house protected from harsh weather, but a new project can also provide a much-needed facelift to a home. There are plenty of options to add curb appeal, including the always in-demand vinyl siding along with James Hardie fiber cement siding.

"[People love] the look and the durability of the James Hardie fiber cement, but the downside is that it's very expensive compared to vinyl siding," Selleck says. "And if vinyl siding is put on right, it will look beautiful and stay for years to come, especially if you put insulation behind the siding. There's only a certain amount of homes that we ever put the Hardie on—it's all very upscale homes because of the expense."

If homeowners can afford it, Fiore is a big fan of the fiber cement siding and other products from James Hardie. He also has high praise for Ascend from Alside, which he explains is a composite siding that is installed similarly to vinyl, making it a quick project at a lower price point than James Hardie. Magnolia also works with well-regarded companies like CertainTeed and Azek.

"There are lots of options that work well with any budget," Fiore says. "It's just a matter of budget, style and color—those are probably the things that factor into the decision the most.

"If homeowners are purchasing a higher-end product, they also need to make sure that





the install is done by somebody capable, knowledgeable and well versed in what the manufacturer is looking for, so you're not voiding warranties and creating a problem down the road."

As for colors, Selleck says grays, whites and earth tones are popular at the moment, and Fiore has had clients ask for darker hues lately.

"The last five-plus years, the trend has been toward these darker architectural colors—the deep blues, the dark grays, there's even some charcoal and black options now," he says. "[Manufacturers are] able to roll those colors out now because of the technology—they don't have to worry about the color fading because of the advancements in their manufacturing process. Years ago, they weren't able to put out a dark color and guarantee against fading. Today, they're able to do that."

THE FORGOTTEN EXTERIOR PROJECT

While roofs and siding will get most of the attention, Selleck warns homeowners not to forget about another aspect of their house's exterior.

"People really overlook the gutters, but gutters are kind of the lifeline of the roof and siding, and over the years they start to drop a little bit," he says. "If the water is not being taken off quick enough, or the gutters are clogged, then the water backs up and it rots the fascia out and it can get underneath the roof. Not to mention, when it snows and the gutters are not pitched the right way or the gutters could be clogged, the snow builds up and you get ice damming, which could get into people's houses."

Repairing or cleaning gutters can be a dangerous DIY project, but fortunately there are experienced professionals ready to help.

"We have thousands of customers who bring us in to clean their gutters and get the leaves out," Selleck says. "We tighten them, we clean them and we make sure the downspouts are all clear. Gutters are very important for a home." H&H

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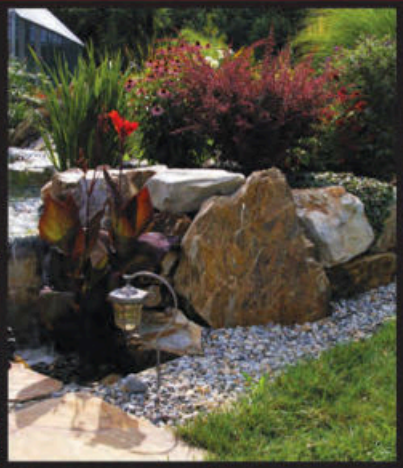
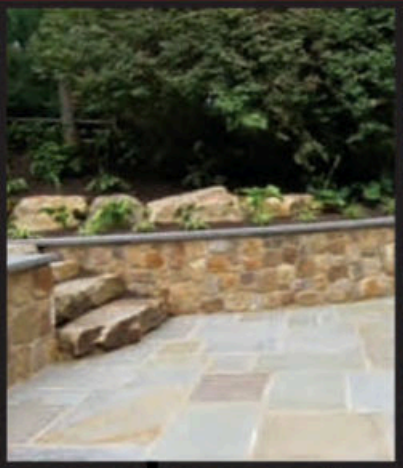
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STONE MATERIALS ARE ESSENTIALLY THE ICING OF ANY KITCHEN OR BATHROOM PROJECT, PROVIDING BOTH THE FUNCTIONAL VALUE OF PULLING THE ROOM'S COMPONENTS TOGETHER AND SOMETHING PLEASING FOR THE EYE.

Choosing the perfect stone takes careful consideration, and the guidance of someone who knows the product. At AAA Hellenic, customers can turn to professionals who have decades of experience designing and installing stone in kitchens, bathrooms, foyers, fireplaces and even in outdoor living spaces. Mike Werner, sales manager, is one such expert who has been with the family-focused company for more than 10 years.

House & Home spoke with Werner about how new products from Silestone and Dekton are giving people the high-end looks they've wanted at a more reasonable price.



Mike Werner, sales manager

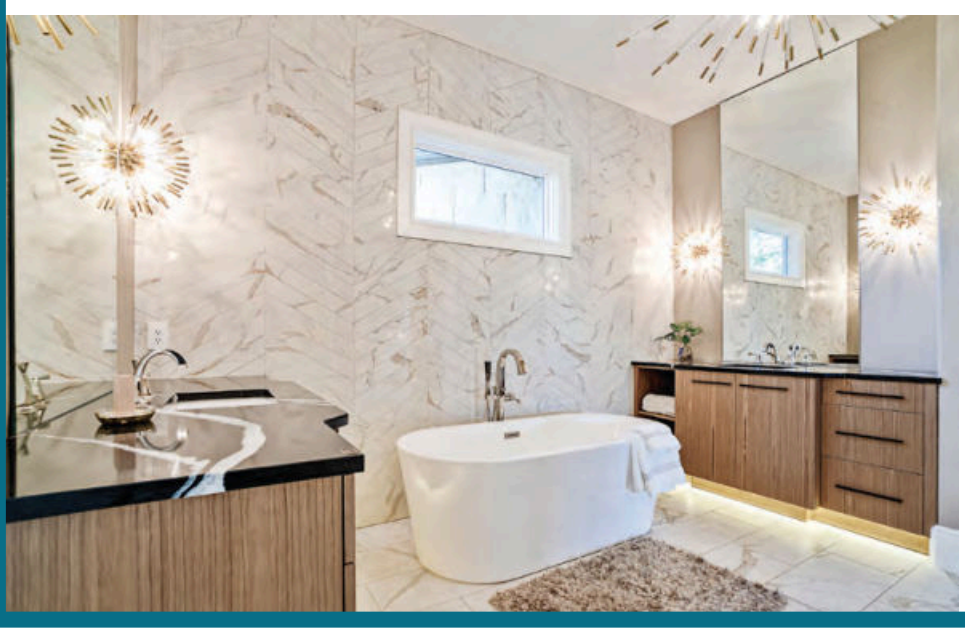
WHEN YOU MEET WITH CLIENTS, WHAT ARE SOME THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THEIR LIFESTYLE TO GUIDE THEIR SELECTION?

Most individuals typically have saved pictures they found online or in magazines to establish an idea of their design preferences. We also want to know about what's going on in the space where the stone will be used. Every household is different. Materials they might like or find attractive might not be the best choice for their home. Granite is very dense and durable. It is heat resistant and scratch resistant, with minimal maintenance. Marble is a classic choice with unrivaled beauty and gives you a timeless look. It may be a little softer than granite, but will still give you a very durable surface.

CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE EMERGING POPULARITY OF NATURAL STONE QUARTZITE AND YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF IT?

Engineered quartz has gained popularity over the past couple of years, but natural stone is still the most requested for its beauty and durability. Natural stone quartzite is an especially good choice for kitchens. Everyone likes the look of marble, but it's softer and more porous. Quartzite is a dense stone that can handle the impact and functionality in a kitchen, and it's not as porous.

We directly import this stone from the quarries to our facility, which enables us to pass discounted pricing on to clients for rare quartzites in a wide variety of colors. The materials are temperamental and require a high level of care and precision, which Hellenic excels and specializes in.



WHAT ARE THE NEWEST MATERIALS ON THE MARKET AND WHERE ARE THEY BEST USED IN THE HOME?

We're really excited about the design potential with products from Silestone and Dekton in shower wall and bathroom applications. People have been longing for a solid-slab, seamless look on their shower walls—nobody likes grout joints—but this comes with additional labor to get these large slabs into tight shower spaces. These new products are more durable and thinner, making them easier to transport and install. Silestone is engineered quartz and in particular has some nice combinations of natural stone-looking materials, as well as muted patterns for the monochromatic look people want. Dekton is a porcelain and glass hybrid with quartz that is more durable and still gives that desirable natural stone look. This is something that we are specializing in.

HOW CAN CUSTOMERS ARRANGE TO VISIT YOUR SLAB YARD TO SEE THEIR OPTIONS?

Our slab yard is open by appointment so we can control the amount of people in the building at a time, everything is spaced out and we also have outdoor inventory available weather permitting. We have implemented additional safety measures, including UV light systems and UV air purifiers to reduce airborne contaminants and provide more peace of mind for customers. We also offer virtual appointments.

Our inventory of marble, granite, soapstone and quartzite is very strong right now, we've added a lot of new products for people. We have about 200 different colors on display, and our stones are directly imported from places like Italy, Brazil and Africa. It's always beneficial to walk through and see the stone in different lighting, and more often than not, people find something they never expected. H&H

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Grow with E&E

This local, family-owned general contracting company has expanded its services to help clients' wildest dreams become reality.

by **Katie Francis**

E&E GENERAL CONTRACTING HAS DEVELOPED GREATLY OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS and substantially since the family business, originally focused on home siding, began in 1993.

"We have expanded into all sorts of exterior renovations," says Matt Esh, half of the brotherly duo who took over E&E from their father a few years ago.

Today, clients can opt for multiple essential and cosmetic services to enhance their home's livability and exterior aesthetics. E&E's services include decks, porches, patios, roofing and the always-popular stucco remediation.

As the company grows and improves, so do its clients' homes—literally. The team has spent the past few years incorporating home additions and those accompanying skills into its expansive wheelhouse of specialties. The service has come to be one of E&E's most sought-after services.

"Now we're at the point where we can offer a full-skill, exterior renovation or addition," Esh says. "We work with qualified subcontractors like electricians, plumbers and drywallers on the interiors of those projects, and our own guys do parts like the flooring and trim work."

Quite possibly the most important aspect of E&E's services is the fact that each and every job is managed by the same in-house project manager from start to finish. Esh says this not only sets the contracting company apart from many others, but also gives his clients a great sense of relief and comfort.

"All of our project managers were, at one time, a foreman or a craftsman in our system, so they've been through each part of the process. And when they step up to a project-manager level, they take on client communication from the beginning of the project to the end of the project," Esh explains. This includes daily stops on-site to ensure each project is going smoothly and enabling communication between the team and the clients, especially if they want to make any changes to the original plan.

Going on 30 years this fall, E&E has heard countless stories from clients who have dealt with companies that utilize multiple subcontractors for one job.

"None of them have had communication with each other. … They're just kind of showing up and stuttering their way through it. That's a lot of the feedback we heard from different people, so we've implemented a process that alleviates the pain of that part of the process.

"It's quicker, better quality because it's managed better, and customer experience and satisfaction dramatically increase," Esh says.

High standards create high-quality results, meaning E&E's services are often more expensive than competitors'.

"We take the extra time to focus on customer satisfaction and to listen to the customers," Esh says. "We try and set ourselves apart by not just trying to compete for the lowest dollar but adding more value too."

E&E is welcoming an addition of its own in the form of a 24,000-square-foot space. The massive project, which broke ground in June of last year, will host the contracting company's new office, shop and showroom.

No matter how much E&E grows or what it adds to its expansive list of services, Esh says the company remains dedicated to the values that have granted the family business nearly three decades of overwhelming success. "Our mission statement is all about providing an excellent customer experience. That's what our reputation is built on." **H&H**

> **They showed nothing but respect for us and our property.** *They consulted with us on issues along the way, resolving them to our satisfaction. They have an awesome work ethic, safely removing the old material, and installed the new windows, siding and trim perfectly. They worked long days, cleaning up at the end of every day. We both could see the whole crew took pride in their work, and we had the most pleasant experience with the entire process. Matt the project manager also ensured the material deliveries kept the work moving, and the subcontractors were ready once the E&E crew completed their work. He checked in with us numerous times to ensure we were happy with the work."*
>
> —**Mark Bilinski,** E&E General Contracting client

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