DelChester/Main Line West

HOUSE & HOME

Volume 24, Issue 3

Spring PLANNING GUIDE



Keystone Custom Decks

The future looks brighter than ever thanks to new offerings sure to benefit clients *page 9*

ASK THE EXPERT

Closet Factory

How organization can help you maximize your home's potential page 17

Taking Center Stage

Create a blissful outdoor living space just in time for spring

DelChester/Main Line West

HOUSE & HOME

Volume 24, Issue 3

Spring PLANNING GUIDE



Dilworth's Custom Design

Making design dreams come true page 31

ASK THE EXPERT

Closet Factory

How organization can help you maximize your home's potential page 17

Taking Center Stage

Create a blissful outdoor living space just in time for spring

DelChester/Main Line West

HOUSE & HOME

Volume 24, Issue 3

Spring PLANNING GUIDE



Imperial Marble & Granite

Providing dedicated customer service and exclusive products to more Pennsylvania homeowners *page 27*

ASK THE EXPERT

Closet Factory

How organization can help you maximize your home's potential page 17

Taking Center Stage

Create a blissful outdoor living space just in time for spring

DelChester/Main Line West

HOUSE & HOME

Volume 24, Issue 3

Spring PLANNING GUIDE



AAA Hellenic Marble

Expert guidance to find the perfect stone product for your next project page 29

ASK THE EXPERT

Closet Factory

How organization can help you maximize your home's potential page 17

Taking Center Stage

Create a blissful outdoor living space just in time for spring

DelChester/Main Line West

HOUSE & HOME

Spring PLANNING GUIDE

Volume 24, Issue 3

E&E General Contracting

As the company grows, it remains true to its roots of honesty, integrity and value *page 23*



ASK THE EXPERT

Closet Factory

How organization can help you maximize your home's potential page 17

Taking Center Stage

Create a blissful outdoor living space just in time for spring

DelChester/Main Line West

HOUSE & HOME

Spring PLANNING GUIDE

Volume 24, Issue 3



Ted's Pools

Making a splash with resort-style amenities

page 15

ASK THE EXPERT

Closet Factory

How organization can help you maximize your home's potential page 17

Taking Center Stage

Create a blissful outdoor living space just in time for spring

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10

contents

9 **Ready for What's Next**
After more than four decades, Keystone Custom Decks stays on the cutting edge

10 **Landscapes in Bloom**
Now is the time to start readying your outdoor living space for the spring season

15 **Making a Splash**
Ted's Pools creates beautiful backyard centerpieces that include resort-style amenities

17 **Ask the Expert: Closet Factory**

18 **Elevating Your Exterior**
Transforming your home into a stunning showcase can be done any number of ways

23 **Breaking New Ground**
E&E Contracting has expanded its services to better meet the needs of clients

25 **Peace in Your Own Backyard**
Ponds by George owner George Mihalchick shares what homeowners need to know about building a pond

27 **Imperial Marble & Granite**
Providing dedicated customer service and exclusive products to more Pennsylvania homeowners

29 **AAA Hellenic**
Guidance on picking the right stone materials for your project

31 **Making Design Dreams Come True**
Dilworth's Custom Design prides itself on exceeding expectations



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PUBLISHER
Edward P. McCartney

EDITOR
Peter Proko

ASSISTANT EDITORS
Matt Cosentino, Madeleine Maccar, Carly Murray

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS
Kristen Dowd, Kristen Jorgensen, Chelsea Valcourt

CREATIVE DIRECTOR
Hank Alspach

PRODUCTION MANAGER
Brian Mikulski

DESIGNERS
Alex Bianco, Jay Urbaniak, 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, Julian Rosado, Lori Vorgang, Amy B. Weiss

ACCOUNTING MANAGER
Max Haggerty

STAFF ACCOUNTANT
Karmal Pritchett

DIGITAL MEDIA DIRECTOR
Leigh Stuart

PUBLISHER EMERITUS
Bob Doran

EXECUTIVE PARTNERS
Gerry Haggerty, Edward P. McCartney

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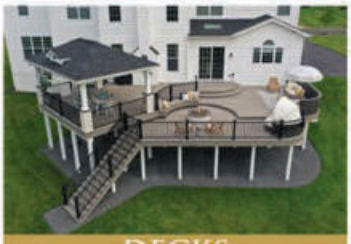




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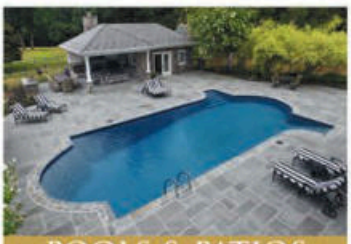
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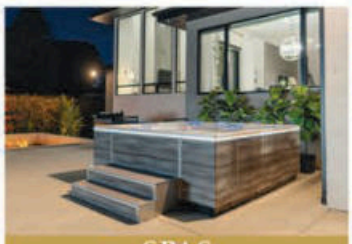
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Ready for What's Next

The team at Keystone Custom Decks didn't miss a beat while navigating personal and professional tragedies, and they're greeting the future with new offerings sure to benefit clients across its five-state service region. *by* **Madeleine Maccar**

If 2023 was a year for learning how to bounce back from heartbreaking adversity, this one is Keystone Custom Deck's year to celebrate all the ways the family-owned builder is coming back stronger than ever.

"2024 is going to be a great year!" promises Marcus Stoltzfus, who joined the Keystone team as its marketing manager last fall but has known the company's key players for quite some time.

Before Stoltzfus came on board, Keystone had suffered a series of tragic events. Founder and owner Amos Esh passed away in 2021; fortunately his sons successfully carried the company into its second generation of family ownership. One of the sons, Kevin, was killed in a plane crash days after his 30th birthday in September 2022, and just weeks before losing Kevin, the company's East Earl showroom and shop suffered significant damage from the results of a fire, causing the team to relocate for a large portion of 2023 while repairs were made.



With a service area spanning five states of loyal customers eager to complete their decks, patios, pools, outdoor kitchens, water features and other outdoor projects the in-demand team at Keystone Custom Decks is known for, the company knew it had to get back to business as usual and honor its commitment to its clients, no matter how hard it was to move forward.

The fruits of forging ahead include an updated, one-of-a-kind showroom in East Earl that the Keystone team proudly welcomes the community to discover, explore and be inspired by.

"It's where people can see something they haven't been able to before. Vision is something some people struggle with, especially with a custom project," Stoltzfus says. "Sometimes, they'll come to our showroom and see something for the first time and they go, 'Yep, that's it. That's exactly what I was thinking.'"

That "Aha!" moment of meeting the piece, configuration, color scheme, accent or flourish that a client has been waiting to come across is not an uncommon occurrence at Keystone's show-stopping showroom.

"There's clients who have come in and actually pieced together items from the showroom for their own design after seeing them in person," he continues. "There's multiple porch displays, outdoor kitchen displays everywhere, you name it. And then the adjoining café also has many outdoor setups as well, so you're able to see a lot of different options all in one place."

And while the Keystone showroom is temptingly close to the beloved Shady Maple Smorgasbord and Farm Market, its own café is gearing up for an expected March reopening—and already has the makings of becoming an in-demand destination in its own right.

"In the past, our café has served as a great space to host people," says Stoltzfus. "Whenever someone comes in for a visit to the showroom, they often will go over to the café for some coffee and to grab something to eat. The new space is going to be updated. …. The fire, while it was obviously terrible and took us through a rough patch, gave us a chance to reconfigure and reimagine the spaces on the property. We've added an extra floor of office space, and the café is now going to have a 30-seat indoor seating location. Like in the past, folks can rent out the café space, only this will be a year-round spot for them."

The growth of Keystone's new-and-improved offerings is proportional to how thoroughly the company has expanded its capabilities since Amos founded the company in 1983. While his ideals of approaching every job with high-quality materials, superior craftsmanship and custom designs remain the same, those projects have evolved to include all aspects of outdoor living projects.

"The inspiration to add divisions to our company was being able to fully support whatever someone needs in their backyard from start to finish," Stoltzfus explains, adding that Keystone also handles project requirements like permitting. "We're able to give you a porch, a patio, a pool, and masonry features like fireplaces or firepits. Typically, people got the service from us and then had to go somewhere else to get their pool installed. Now, we've really become a one-stop shop for your backyard."

No matter how far the company goes or how exponentially it grows, though, Stoltzfus says ensuring that every client is a happily dazzled one will always be Keystone's goal.

"The continuity factor is a big one, even when it comes to working with our team. From the time you first reach out to the very end, our team strives to have the same attitude and energy. People often comment about the uplifting spirit our team brings. Seeing the homeowner with a smile on their face knowing they made the right decision to choose us at Keystone, that goes a long way for us!" **H&H**

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LANDSCAPES IN BLOOM

BY CARLY MURRAY

Mother Nature takes center stage during spring, and the right **landscaping and hardscaping** can create a blissful outdoor living space that allows you to experience the season like never before.

As an extension of the home, an outdoor area can tap into boundaries previously unexplored. The space beyond four walls offers opportunities to finally create the entertainment, relaxation or gathering area that couldn't fit inside the home, all while benefiting from both the special addition of and amalgamation with nature. Natural elements can not only elevate the appearance of an outdoor addition, but also provide the ambiance necessary to uplift the spirits of homeowners and their guests alike.

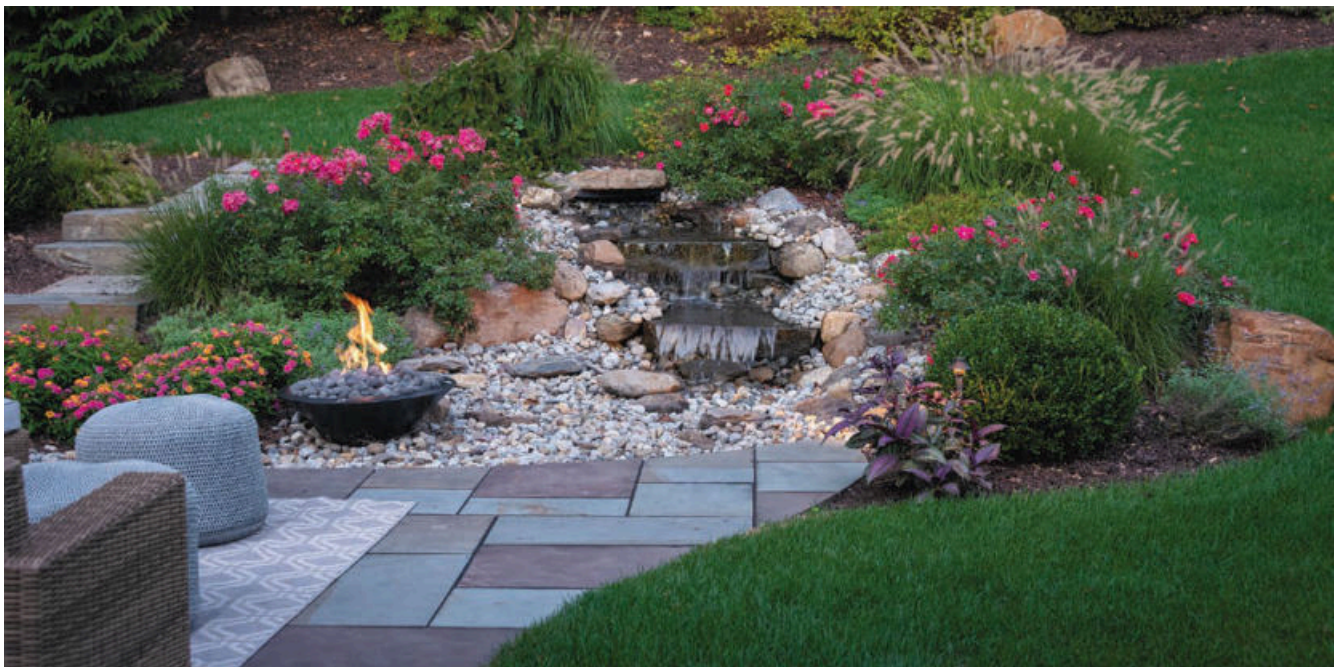
"I view the outdoor living space as an extension of the home and the client's personal style. The colors in the architectural details of the home are important when choosing materials and colors for the outside space; they don't have to be an exact match, but it will all flow together if the colors and tones complement each other," says Keith Frederick, owner of ELA Outdoor Living.

While the main attraction might be a water feature, outdoor television set or a high-tech lighting and sound system, what truly makes outdoor living spaces special are the plants complementing them. Implementations to reduce an ecological footprint are trending most right now, both inside and outside the home. With such considerations, a cosmetic rejuvenation can give back to the earth to help create a symbiotic relationship. While spring is a fantastic time to enjoy an outdoor living space, it is always best to be conscious of how plants will interact with local native species and the changing climate.



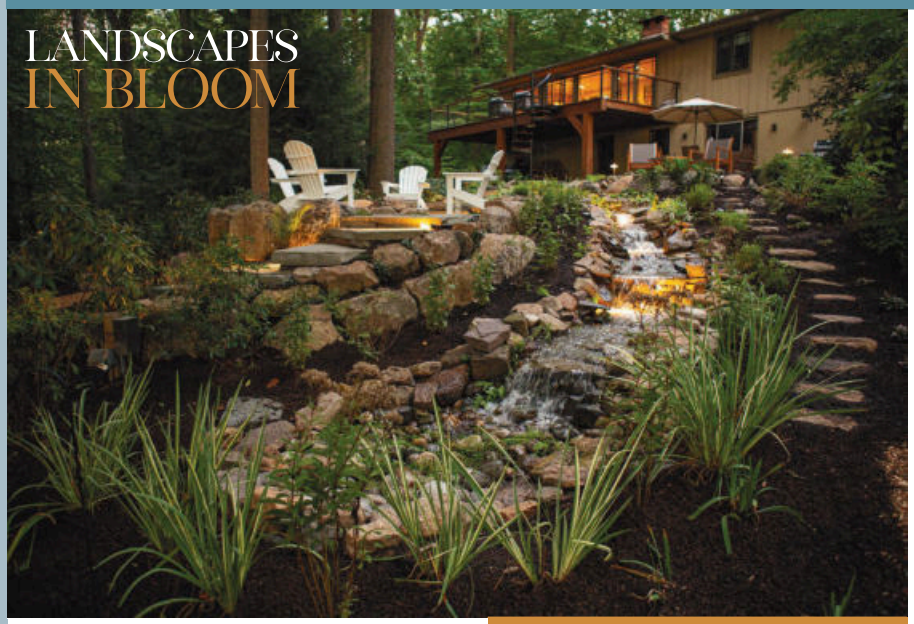
"Everyone and everything is being affected by climate change. Therefore, my focus is to incorporate as many plantings into a design that can handle extreme temperature swings throughout the year and satisfy the aesthetic needs of the client," says Ronni Hock, landscape designer and owner of Ronni Hock Garden & Landscape. "It's a balancing act that's essential from my perspective. … Beauty plus environmentally sensitive practicality seems to be the formula going forward."

Describing one of her favorite projects as an example, Hock explains how an intri-



Images at left and right courtesy of CLC Landscape Design. Image above right courtesy of Ronni Hock Garden & Landscape

LANDSCAPES IN BLOOM



cate home was customized to her client's specifications. This complete renovation of a contemporary home in a wooded area for a young family emphasizes the realm of possibilities in landscape design when using the natural surroundings to spark creativity.

"One of the client's principal concerns was to create a series of gardens with native plantings that would complement the location of the home and be safe for the children and pets," she recalls. "My intention was to create an 'inspirational journey' for the girls that would lead from the main house, through a woodland maze and into their playground near the lake."

Placement can make or break a final product. That's why it is vital to balance looks and utility while also envisioning these attributes from all perspectives: changing weather, night and day, and the relationship with both natural and manmade features.

"What's your priority? If you're cooking, you need an area for cooking, but you also need your traffic patterns to go to a social area where you can just relax—say, by a fire pit or a water feature," says George Mihalchick, owner of Ponds By George. "A lot of people don't really think about this, but it's your angle, your exposure to the elements like the sun. Is your dining area going to be right in the sun rays in the evening hours as the sun is setting?"

With any project that has an everyday impact, a household's unique lifestyle should be a significant consideration in determining what works best. Families with pets likely want to enjoy the outdoor living space alongside them, but they'll also want to take into account what popular plants are toxic to dogs or cats. While working with natural elements, carefully planning around all the living things that may interact with it can yield the best and safest results, while also providing new inspiration.

> "I view the outdoor living space as an extension of the home and the client's personal style."
>
> —Keith Frederick
> Owner of ELA Outdoor Living

"At ELA, we have excellent horticultural knowledge and will always advise on which plants and shrubs are better for different soil types, areas of the garden, if they're deer-resistant and, of course, whether or not they are a good choice if the client has children or pets," says Frederick. "Some things which might look beautiful are not a practical choice in reality for the local climate and the ways in which it is intended to be used."

Practicality and safety are two guiding principles when it comes to selecting from the many different types of water features, especially if an area is intended for small children to run around and play. Conferring with an expert can help narrow down that plethora of choices to best accommodate one's ideal scenario.

"The most popular water feature we do is called a pondless water feature, meaning there's a stream and you've got all these nice little waterfalls, and it's beautiful. You get the sound of water, you get sunshine, you get birds, your dogs can go in and your kids can play in it. But, it disappears into a gravel bed; it doesn't go into a pond and therefore it's totally safe," says Rich Cording Sr., owner of CLC Landscape Design.

Fire features alongside water features are popular ways to add a wow factor with contrasting elements, from a fire pit to sit around after getting out of the pool, to actually combining them in a fire and water bowl where both flow simultaneously.

"We call it living the lifestyle—even when you're inside and you look outside, you always see a water feature. That's your focal point. That's where people are going to gather. That's where the conversations are going to happen if you have seats by it.

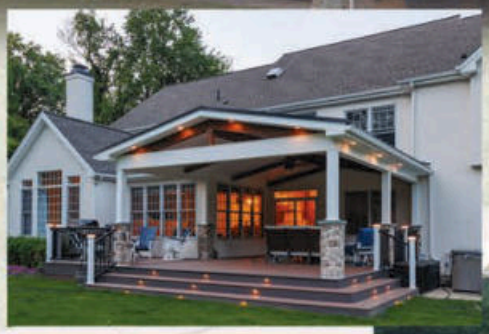


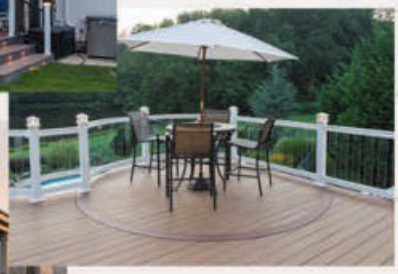
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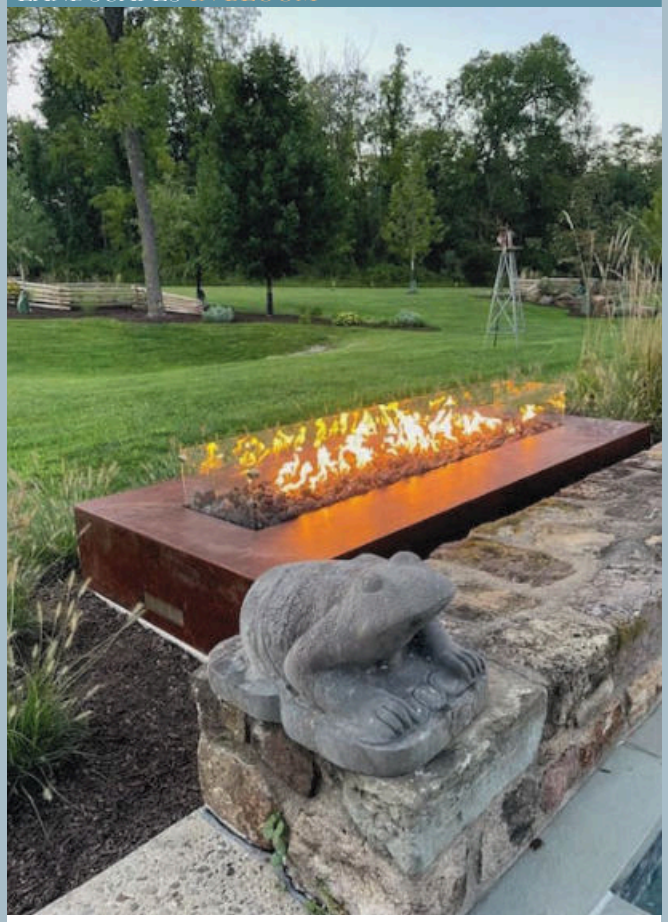


Image above courtesy of ELA Outdoor Living

And I can tell you that a fire pit will usually be by a water feature, because it's soothing, it's relaxing," says Mihalchick.

The best time to make the leap toward beautifying an outdoor living space is right now. With planning design, consultations and construction, there are permitting considerations to account for, as well. Knowing your town's standards and laws can minimize the potential for any hurdles moving forward.

"The sooner, the better," Cording affirms. "Everything in every town in North Jersey requires permits or what's called a zoning review. What normally used to take weeks is now taking months."

Any vision in home renovation these days can become a reality with adequate planning, expertise and time. Allowing the climate provided by spring to demonstrate the endless opportunities for an outdoor living space can guide you in making the choices necessary to create your family's new favorite hangout destination. H&H

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MAKING A SPLASH

Ted's Pools, a company that has served the region for four decades, offers homeowners beautiful backyard centerpieces that include resort-style amenities. *by* **Matt Cosentino**

When Ted's Pools was founded more than 40 years ago, the term "outdoor living space" had yet to enter the vernacular and backyard designs were still fairly simple. But as the industry has evolved, so too has the company, and nothing makes current owners Joe and Carol Perchetti prouder than delivering clients an elaborate oasis that meets all of their wants and needs.

The end result is often reminiscent of a five-star resort, and allows families to create memories that will last a lifetime.

"It's so much fun to provide that for them," Joe Perchetti says. "From the initial consultation with the client, we'll come up with a design that includes everything we talked about, and then it's in their hands. I tell them, 'If there's something that touches a pool, we've done it before. So if you think it's a boring shape and want to dress it up, just let us know.' I call that the red-pen stage. They can mark up the design, take a picture and send it back, and I'll revise it so that it better fits what their dreams and vision are."

Ted's Pools specializes in gunite and vinyl liner in-ground pools, which both offer their own advantages to homeowners. While vinyl liner is more cost-effective, gunite can be customized to just about any shape, and the gunite shell comes with a lifetime warranty.

Joe and Carol have over 25 years of combined experience, and their project managers and crews have similarly extensive backgrounds in the industry. Their knowledge allows them to design and construct pools that not only serve as stunning centerpieces of the backyard, but are functionally efficient as well.

Popular amenities include water features like mini jets or raised walls with cascading waterfalls; boulders with a grotto that people can swim inside; sun shelves for lounging in the pool; fire features around the pool; swim-up bars; and even bridges overtop of the pool.

"With the added features obviously comes expense, so we have to prepare it according to their budget," Joe says. "Whatever their vision is, we're working through it and communicating with the client to make sure they're satisfied and that their end vision is met. Frankly, I want to exceed every client's expectation at every phase and detail of our project."

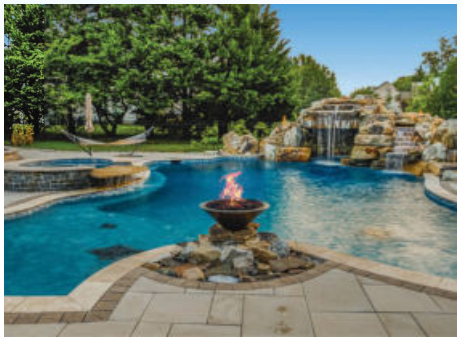
He adds that his team works in concert with partners who provide the decking, landscaping and fencing. "We take every job very, very personally. We're not just in and out—it's a couple months of work in the client's backyard, and we realize that we're working for them. I consider every project we do to be magazine cover-worthy."

Unlike many pool companies, the relationship doesn't stop there, either. Ted's Pools has a service division to provide maintenance and a renovation division for either small cosmetic changes or a complete facelift of the pool.

"We try to be a full turn-key operation," Joe says. "The biggest compliment we can ever receive is, 'You did a phenomenal job with the construction, so why don't you take care of the pool?' We love to become a lifelong service provider for each client and for their exceptional backyard setting." H&H

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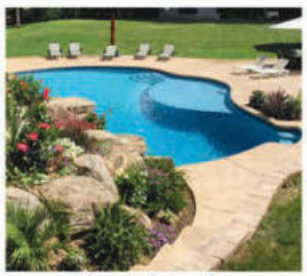
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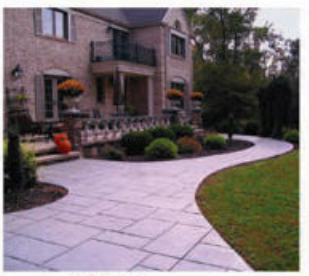
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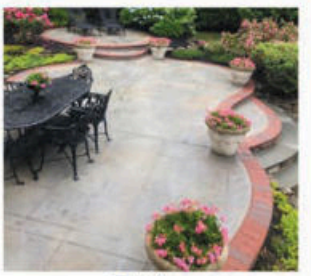
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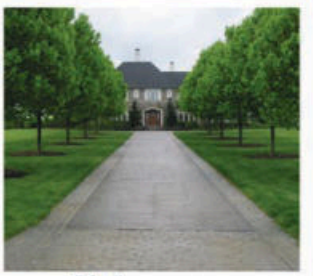
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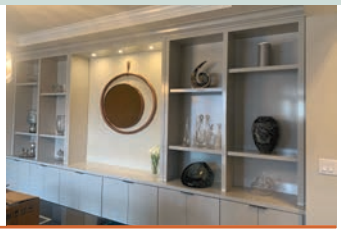
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ask the expert by Chelsea Valcourt

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WHETHER YOU'RE LOOKING TO DISPLAY YOUR SHOE OR EXOTIC HANDBAG COLLECTION, ELEVATE YOUR WINE CELLAR OR SIMPLY WANT TO GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR HOME, ORGANIZATIONAL DESIGN IS KEY. Thoughtful planning can ensure the maximization of your space, allow you to achieve your dream aesthetic and boost the value of your home.

House & Home spoke with Closet Factory's senior designer Brittany Palko-Harris and general manager Charles Palko about the benefits and growing trend of organizational design.

WHAT SEPARATES CLOSET FACTORY FROM OTHER BUSINESSES IN THIS INDUSTRY?

Customers that are upgrading their closets are making a major investment in their home. They want quality and the peace of mind that a well-organized space will bring them. We've been in the premium architectural woodwork business for over 40 years and bring those quality and constructability standards into the most basic reach-in closet. Our commitment to quality and a calming aesthetic separates Closet Factory from other home organizational businesses.

CLOSET FACTORY DOES MUCH MORE THAN CLOSETS. CAN YOU TELL ME A LITTLE BIT MORE ABOUT THE OTHER SERVICES YOU OFFER?

By virtue of the fact that our name is Closet Factory, the majority of our business focuses on simple to spectacular closets, although we offer whole-home organization solutions for pantries, home offices, garages, mudrooms, entertainment centers, wine rooms and all areas of home organization except kitchen and baths. While we provide a great deal of low-voltage lighting, we depend on electrical and plumbing professionals to deal with those areas of responsibility.

WHAT DOES ORGANIZATIONAL DESIGN BRING TO A HOME?

Our designs are meant to focus on two areas—organization and aesthetics. While many in our industry overlook vertical planning, a 10-foot simple reach-in closet could almost double the storage capacity of this small space. With vertical planning, we not only maximize the space but we can make it as aesthetically pleasing as the customer desires. The mission of each one of our designers is to maximize storage capacity while bringing a level of calm or excitement to the environment. The homeowner is a collaborative partner during the design process, and they play an essential role in us designing and installing a home organizational solution that meets with their ultimate expectations.

WHAT ARE SOME TRENDS YOU'VE NOTICED IN TERMS OF DESIGN AND PROJECT TYPES?

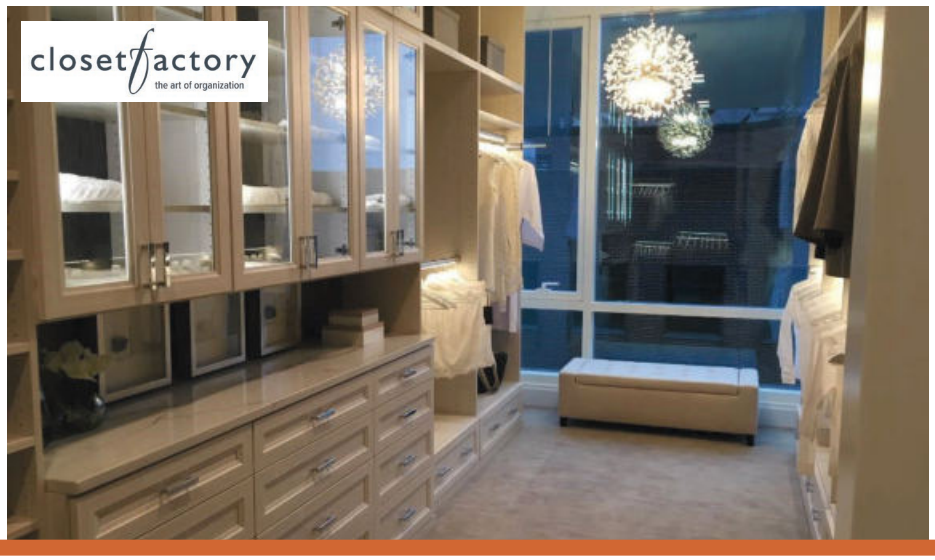
Since everything we design and produce is custom based on the organizational requirements and aesthetic appearance of our customers' individual tastes, we've seen the trend leaning toward systems that are more upscale that match the interior influence of the home. Our customers have certainly gravitated to organizational projects—simple or spectacular—that give them peace of mind and a sense of calm. In the past, our customers and home builders have focused on the importance of kitchens and bathrooms but now home organization and a well-planned closet or pantry have become a significant focus for the most discriminating buyers. As professional organizer and author Christina Scalise says, "Organization isn't about perfection, it's about efficiency, reducing stress, saving time and money, and improving your overall quality of life."

Since COVID, more people are working from home. This trend has created new requirements for many of our customers who have decided to transform a spare bedroom or unused space into a productive working environment while still maintaining sleeping options with the installation of a home office and wall bed.

With the hectic athletic lives of most families, garage organization has become paramount to organize tools, athletic equipment and garden accessories while maintaining space for the family car.

WHAT IS THE PROCESS FOR STARTING A NEW PROJECT?

An initial phone call to schedule a no obligation design consultation. From there our designers will meet, review inventory requirements, consult on aesthetic and budget expectations, and then start the design process with the use of a computer-aided design (CAD) program. Within an hour or two, and in collaboration with the homeowner, the organizational expectations and storage requirements will come to life in a 3D image. If all is in order, the project will be placed on the production and installation calendar and our expert installers will transform the original space into a space of beauty and calm. H&H





Elevating Your Exterior

by Kristen Jorgensen

TRANSFORMING YOUR HOME INTO A STUNNING SHOWCASE IS EASY WITH THE HELP OF A PROFESSIONAL.

Your home's exterior is the first impression you give to guests and passersby, making it essential to ensure it reflects your style and personality. From the roof to the landscaping, every detail contributes to the overall aesthetic and curb appeal. Read on to explore the latest options in roofing, siding, paint, lighting and other ways to liven up the look of your exterior with advice from some of the region's leading professionals.

Unveiling the Beauty of Stone and Brick Veneer

In the realm of home design, few elements evoke a sense of timeless beauty and sophistication quite like stone and brick veneer. These versatile materials have long been cherished for their ability to enhance the aesthetic appeal of any structure, whether it's a cozy cottage nestled in the countryside or a sleek modern residence in the heart of the city.

"You can transform your home with the timeless elegance of stone and brick veneer. Thin stone and thin brick veneer can add that earthy, yet elegant allure that full-thickness stone and brick provide at a cost savings," shares Michael Chadwick from Riverside Supply Company.

Crafted to mimic the natural beauty of authentic stone and brick, these veneers offer a stunning facade that enhances any architectural style.

"Thin stone and brick are made from extremely light and durable materials that do not add significant weight to your home while still offering the look of refined sophistication," Chadwick continues. "The versatility of the products allows for the material being used on the outside of the house to be introduced on some focal points in the interior of the home as well."

Once stone and brick veneers are installed, there is little to no maintenance. So whether you're looking to add rustic charm or contemporary flair, stone and brick veneers provide durability and versatility, creating a lasting impression for your home.

Roofing: The Crowning Glory

The roof is not only a functional component of your home but also a significant architectural feature. Advances in roofing materials offer homeowners myriad options to enhance curb appeal while providing durability and energy efficiency. Traditional asphalt shingles remain a popular choice, but metal roofing, with its sleek appearance and longevity, is gaining tremendous traction.

"A roof is one of the most integral parts of a home, as it is one of the most critical lines of defense against protecting it from the elements," says Isaac Huyard, owner of Silverline Exteriors. "Metal roofing not only looks impressive from a design aspect, but is also very eco-friendly and incredibly durable."

Though metal roofing costs more than other materials, it offers better roof insulation, providing energy savings and a return on your investment, and can last for several decades.

"Metal roofing can last up to 75 years when installing a standing seam metal roof. It's worth the initial investment if a

homeowner has the budget for it," says Huyard.

Global Home Improvement has also had great success over the years with the installation of metal roofs and recommends that option of its durability and 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."

Siding: Style and Substance

Siding also plays a crucial role in protecting your home from the elements while also defining its exterior style. Engineered wood siding is an option Huyard highly recommends, specifically LP siding—or LP SmartSide—a type of engineered wood siding that mimics the look of natural wood but is more durable and resistant to weather, rot and pests. It's made by Louisiana-Pacific Corporation and consists of wood strands or fibers bonded with resin and zinc borate.

"The core material is wood. However, it has undergone an extensive treatment process to enhance strength and resistance to some fungal elements and moisture," explains Huyard.

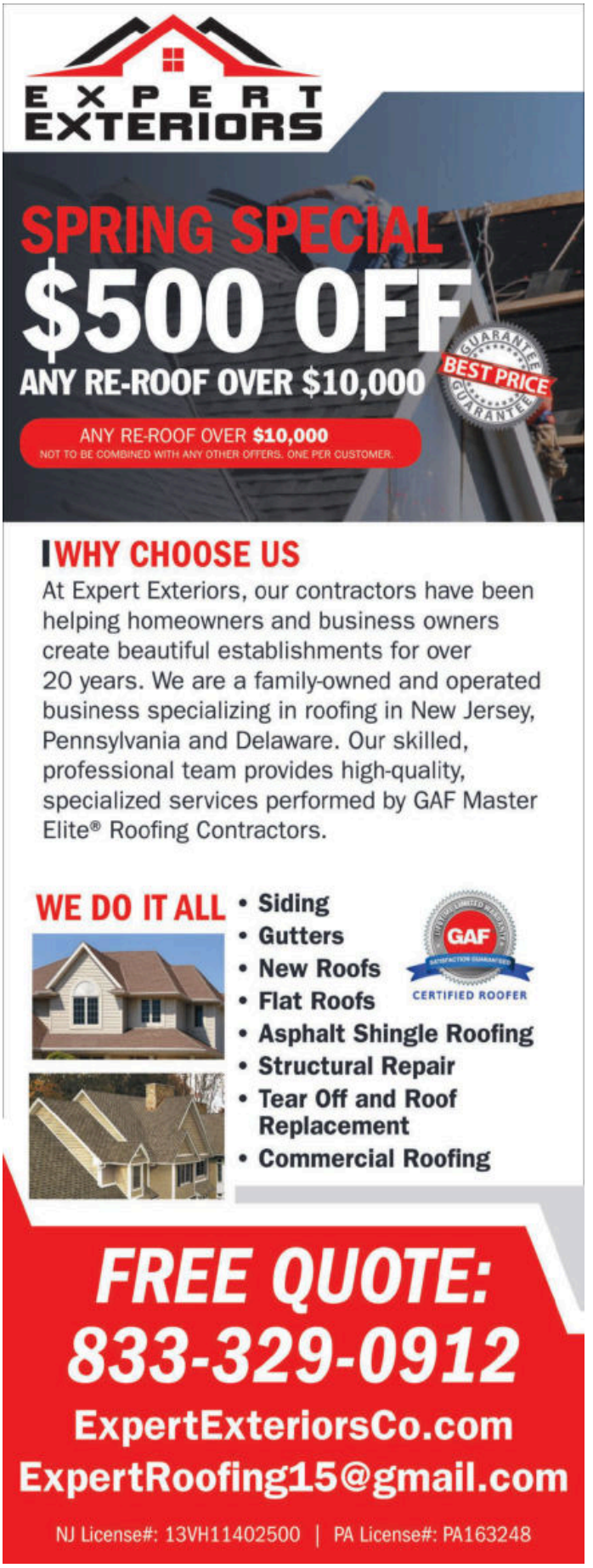
Another emerging trend is the use of board and batten style, which combines the natural beauty of a more traditional farmhouse look with the low maintenance of engineered materials, providing a timeless style with modern convenience.

"Wood siding that consists of narrow vertical strips or battens installed over a flat base or board is known, logically enough, as board and batten, or batten board. It has been popular for centuries on the exterior of houses, and has since become a trendy way to add visual interest to the exterior of the home," says Vic Fiore of Magnolia Home Remodeling Group.



Paint: Adding Personality

A fresh coat of paint can instantly transform the appearance of your home, breathing new life into tired exteriors. When selecting exterior paint colors, consider the architectural style of your home and the surrounding landscape. Neutral tones like beige, gray and taupe are timeless choices that complement a variety of architectural styles, while bold hues like navy blue or forest green



H&H EXTERIORS

can make a striking statement.

"The industry is still seeing clients opt for lighter color homes—whites, creams and neutral tones—whether when painting or selecting siding materials," Fiore says.

Fiore also points out how certain details can add further visual interest to your home's façade. "You can also add stone veneer to the trim areas of the home for an extra pop of character. It really adds an upscale look to the home."

Lighting: Illuminating Your Home's Beauty

Outdoor lighting not only enhances the safety and security of your home, but also adds both ambiance and drama to your exterior space. From sleek wall sconces to dramatic uplighting, the options for outdoor lighting are virtually endless. Consider installing pathway lighting to guide guests to your front door or highlighting architectural features with strategically placed spotlights. For a touch of elegance, add string lights or lanterns to your porch or patio, creating a warm and inviting atmosphere for outdoor gatherings.



"We will never lose the trend of homeowners wanting to spend more time outdoors when the weather gets warmer, hence the continued popularity of decks, porches, patios and pergolas," says Fiore. "Adding ambient lighting to those areas creates a more inviting feel and allows the homeowner to enjoy the space after dusk."

Landscaping: Adding the Finishing Touches

No exterior transformation is complete without attention to landscaping. Thoughtfully designed landscaping can enhance the overall curb appeal of your home, framing it like a work of art. Start by assessing your yard's layout and consider incorporating a mix of trees, shrubs





and flowers to add color and texture. Define your outdoor spaces with hardscaping elements like pavers or stone walls, creating visual interest and adding functionality to your landscape. Don't forget to maintain your landscaping regularly to keep it looking its best year-round.

Your home's exterior is a reflection of your style and taste, making it essential to invest in upgrades that enhance its curb appeal and overall aesthetic. From roofing and siding to paint, lighting and landscaping, there are countless ways to elevate the look of your home's exterior and create a stunning showcase that you'll be proud to call your own. By incorporating these latest options and trends, you can transform your home into a welcoming retreat that leaves a lasting impression. H&H

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Breaking New Ground

As **E&E General Contracting** continues to expand the ways it can beautify customers' homes, the company is excited to soon open a beautiful showroom where clients can visualize their projects.

To say that E&E General Contracting has experienced tremendous growth in recent years and built upon its already-stellar reputation in the home improvement industry would be an understatement. Founded as a siding company more than three decades ago by John Esh, E&E has reached another level under the direction of his sons, Michael and Matt, by expanding its offerings to a full range of exterior and interior services and including some of the most in-demand products on the market.

The evolution is only continuing with the creation of a new company headquarters in Gap, which the team moved into this past October. The 24,000-square-foot space will soon include a beautiful showroom that will enhance the client experience for homeowners looking to transform their residences with a spectacular indoor or outdoor project from E&E.

"We used to work out of the upstairs of an old dairy barn, so this is much different," says Elsie Beiler, hospitality manager at E&E. "Our new facility has 20 offices along with a shop space for our truck and tool storage, so it's a very large building. We're hoping to open our showroom in April so people can come in and see all the featured products that we have and the services we can offer."

Those services include the company's original specialty—siding—using top-notch brands like LP Smartside or James Hardie. E&E can also add to a house's functional use or curb appeal with roofing solutions, stone veneer, energy-efficient windows, shutters, gutters and downspouts.

What really has changed since the early days of the company, however, is that E&E now has the ability to provide full-scale renovations, such as additions, kitchen and bathroom remodels, finished basements and outdoor living areas with all of the amenities. Utilizing the experienced and skilled craftsmen on its own staff along with qualified subcontractors like electricians and plumbers, it can deliver life-changing spaces.

"It really has grown from a siding business into a large company that can offer just about anything that you're looking for," Beiler says. "Much of the company's growth came as a result of homeowners asking us to consider





future or additional projects for them after having a great experience with us on a past project. It grew organically and led to us taking on a variety of services."

The new showroom will assist in starting those projects on the right foot by allowing homeowners to both draw inspiration from it and get educated on what might work best for their house. They can simply drop by or call to schedule an appointment.

"That's the big thing: People have ideas of what they want, but they don't actually know what it's going to look like," Beiler says. "The advantage of having a showroom where they can come in and look at all the featured products that we have and the things we can do with their home is that it helps them visualize the ideas they have. At the same time, it helps us to better understand what they're envisioning or looking for before a project begins."

Good communication is stressed throughout the process, with E&E making sure to heed all the wishes of each customer, being clear on all scheduling and timelines, and handling tasks like applying for permits.

"One thing we offer that's pretty unique is that we have a project manager assigned to every project that we start," Beiler explains. "There is one person assigned to oversee your project, to communicate with you and to hear your thoughts and questions throughout the project. Your project manager will be there from start to finish. If you as a homeowner are communicating with someone different every week, it is difficult to have that excellent project experience we are seeking to deliver."

Beiler, who has two brothers working at E&E on the window and siding crews, adds that the Esh family also genuinely cares about their employees and shows them the same first-class treatment they give to customers. John Esh is still in the office every day overseeing operations and helping his sons push the business forward with exciting ideas.

Homeowners who want to work with a company whose care and values are strong and established should reach out and begin a process that will not leave them disappointed. Give E&E a call today so they can discuss your dreams and accomplish them according to your desired timeline. **H&H**

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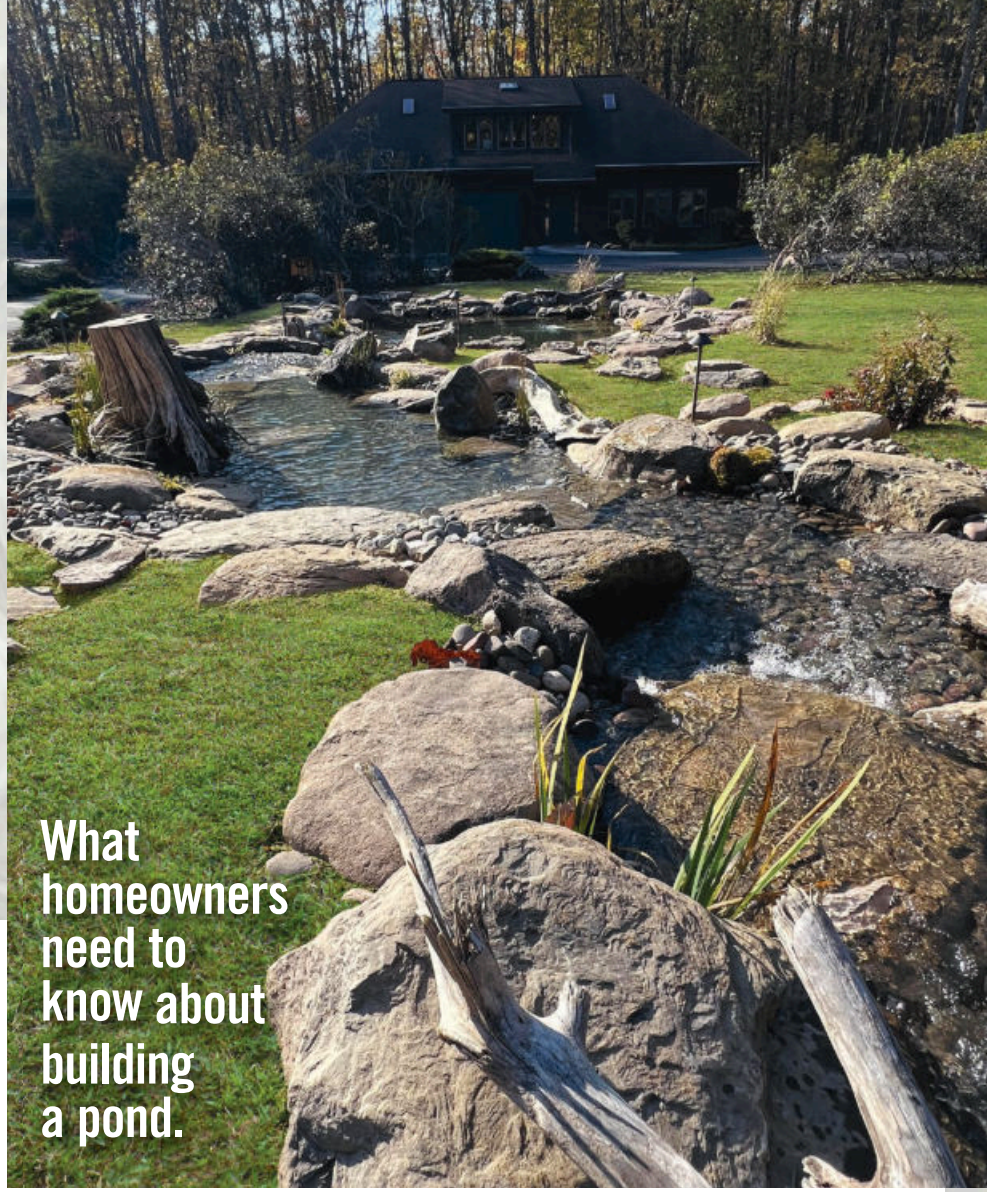
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Peace in Your Own Backyard

For nearly three decades, George Mihalchick has been helping people connect with nature through water features. From fish and koi ponds and bubbling fountains to disappearing waterfalls and all the accessories in between, Ponds by George can bring a wealth of creativity to any space.

As spring approaches, it's a great time to consider bringing these features to your own yard. If you're contemplating a pond project, Mihalchick says the following topics are some of the most important to consider.



What homeowners need to know about building a pond.

Location

SHOULD IT BE CLOSE TO THE HOUSE, PATIO, PORCH, ETC.? You definitely want to see and hear it from a comfortable location. Don't put a pond in the lowest area of the property as outside water can enter the pond and harm the fish, and/or put pressure under the pond liner and possibly lift the liner and rocks inside the pond. Sun or shade have some impact; water plants will perform better in the sun allowing more root growth, which in turn filters the water better. Shade means more leaves and debris can fall into the pond causing more maintenance.



How Big?

BIGGER IS BETTER! The bigger a pond is, the easier the maintenance. A bigger pond allows for more water movement and more filtration which results in less algae. A depth of 24-to-30 inches is plenty. Most townships require a fence around the pond over a 24-inch depth.

Dirt

A LOT OF DIRT COMES OUT OF THE HOLE DUG FOR A POND. Most of the dirt will be used around the waterfall, some will be used in the landscaping around the pond as well. Sometimes you will need to find places to put any excess dirt.

Water Line

A DIRECT WATERLINE IS NOT NEEDED TO HAVE A POND. Once you fill the pond, however, you will need to top it off due to evaporation. You will need to use a garden hose to add to the water level if there is no rain for a while. If this becomes troublesome, then an autofill can always be added.

Filtration

THIS IS THE MOST IMPORTANT STEP. The bog or wetland filtration is the best type. This is created with gravel and plants and no filter pads. This is completely natural allowing the water to move up through the gravel into the roots of aquatic plants growing in the gravel. The fish waste is absorbed into the roots and turned into usable nutrients for the pond, keeping the water crystal clear. Cleaning can be as little as once every one to two years depending on fish load.

Cost

THIS IS RELATIVE TO SIZE AND TYPE OF FILTRATION. Extras such as lighting, landscaping, driftwood and fish caves will add costs but have an amazing impact on the final project. 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**

Imperial Marble & Granite

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

Nina Lea Photography



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ask the expert by Liz Hunter

AAA Hellenic

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

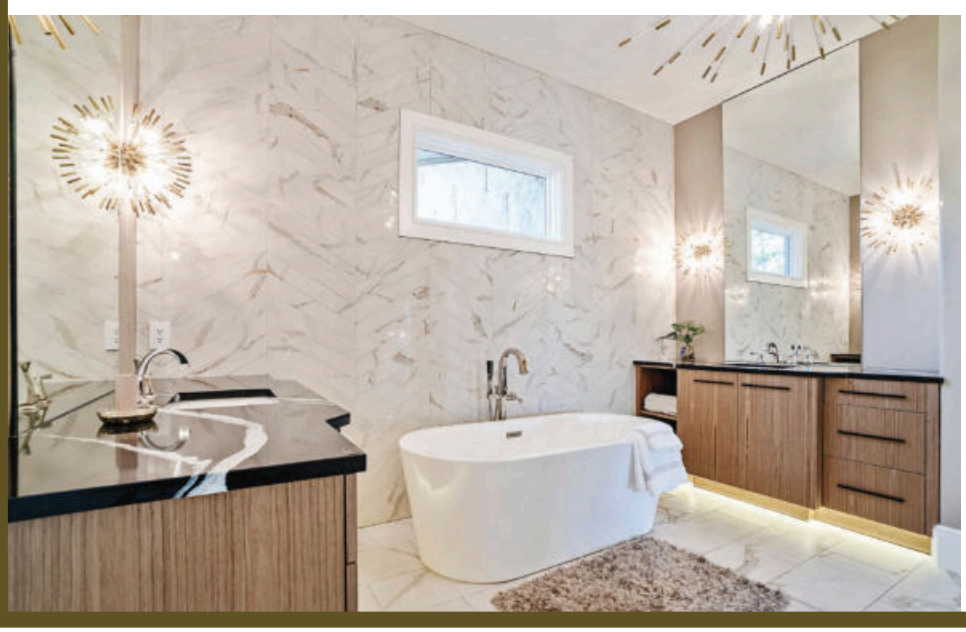
WHEN YOU MEET WITH CLIENTS, WHAT ARE SOME THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THEIR LIFESTYLE TO GUIDE THEIR SELECTION?

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

YOUR PROJECTS BEGIN HERE.

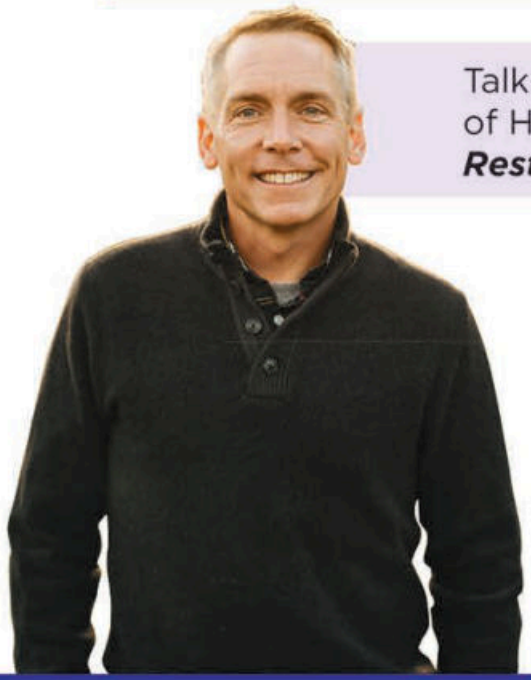
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by Kristen Dowd



Making Design Dreams Come True

Family-run **Dilworth's Custom Design** prides itself on catering to customers to create a perfect bathroom, kitchen or other new space in the home.

After living in their home for more than two decades, Dan and Lara Dilworth decided it was time to create the master bathroom of their dreams.

They weren't exactly sure what they wanted, but they knew they weren't looking for a run-of-the-mill bathroom. The Dilworths wanted a unique, custom design, from the tiles to the flooring, the cabinetry to the hardware.

And they knew exactly where to get it.

As owner and CEO of the family-owned and operated Dilworth's Custom Design, deciding to overhaul his own bathroom gave Dan the opportunity to see how things ran at his business from the perspective of a customer.

For more than 30 years, the multi-generational company has been designing, handcrafting and installing custom bathrooms, kitchens and more across Chester County. With dedicated designers, expert craftsmen and professional installers, Dilworth's prides itself on turning design dreams into design realities.

STARTING WITH DESIGN

Dilworth's designers are skilled at working with all customers, whether they have a general idea of what they want or have no idea where to start. With his expert background, Dan was, of course, the former.

"After a couple months of sketching, measuring and even laying down tape to represent our new ideas," he explains, "I finally went to my design team at work and asked for drawings to help us visualize."

Dan knew he wanted a walk-in shower. Lara also desired a standalone tub and faucet. They both wanted similar counter space as before, but with better use of the cabinets. Heated floors were a must.

From the two presented plans, Dan and Lara agreed on the same design. Then they headed to Dilworth's beautiful Phoenixville showroom.

NEXT UP: THE SHOWROOM

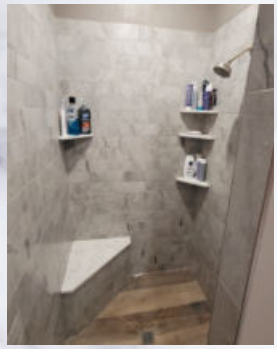
With fully built bathrooms and kitchens, the showroom gives customers the chance to decide on styles, finishes and every last design detail. To start, Lara was tasked with choosing a color and a texture to get the ball rolling. This turned out to be a marbleized white and gray porcelain tile.

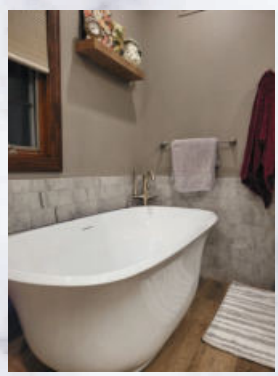
The duo walked the showroom a few times discussing options. It was a struggle, Dan admits.

Fortunately, Dilworth's Custom Design employs talented coordinators and decorators experienced in bringing together projects.

"That was crucial because it gave us someone with experience that we quickly trusted. My wife and I were no longer at odds trying to select everything," Dan says. "Having someone with a great eye for design, color and detail is an amazing gift."

The plans included options for floors, cabinetry, countertops and hardware. The pair gravitated toward the same palette, choosing wood-look porcelain tile flooring to warm up the cool gray tile, dark blue-gray cabinetry with additional dark glaze for a unique look, and brushed nickel Moen faucets. They chose Cambria quartz countertops, and the zero-entry shower featured a handheld showerhead on a slide bar, a main showerhead, and built-in seats and shelves. And the standalone tub was also a key fixture that played prominently in the design.





TIME FOR INSTALLATION

A "weekend warrior," Dan tackled the installation himself when he wasn't working. The process took about three months since Dan didn't want to tie up any of the Dilworth's installers with the job.

On average, a job like Dan and Lara's would take a two-man team from the company four-to-six weeks to finish. There are seven teams in the field each day.

"When you look up the word craftsman, my guys' pictures are there," Dan says. "They're great at what they do."

Like what happens with many customers, some decisions made during the initial planning changed during installation. The company's coordinating team was able to quickly pivot to get the alternate product.

"That's normal for our jobs," Dan says. "If we find a glitch or a customer finds something they want to change, we've got to jump. The goal is to keep working."

Things stalled again at paint colors, with Lara thinking yellow but changing her mind after trying several shades. Fortunately, Dilworth's works with a number of reputable, dependable subcontractors, including painters. Dan called in some help, and they ended up with a perfect Sherwin-Williams taupe to tie everything together.

A JOB WELL DONE

Dan and Lara love their new bathroom—not to mention the smooth process in getting to the finish line. Of course, while pleased, Dan wasn't surprised to find how well things went from beginning to end in working with Dilworth's Custom Design.

He knows he employs the best of the best.

From the office team to the coordinators and designers, to the shop team building custom cabinetry to installers in the field—everyone works well together, cementing Dilworth's as a premier custom home improvement and renovation business.

"It's a well-oiled machine," Dan said. "Everybody is pulling the rope in the same direction." H&H

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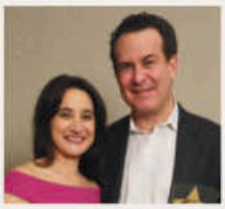
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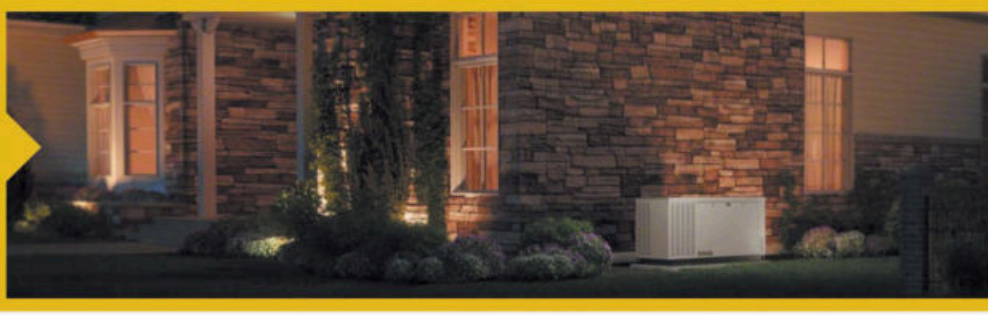
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