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Volume 22, Issue 10



Imperial Marble & Granite

Providing dedicated customer service
and exclusive products to more
Pennsylvania homeowners *page 11*

HOT SPOTS

*Sheds and pavilions have become the latest
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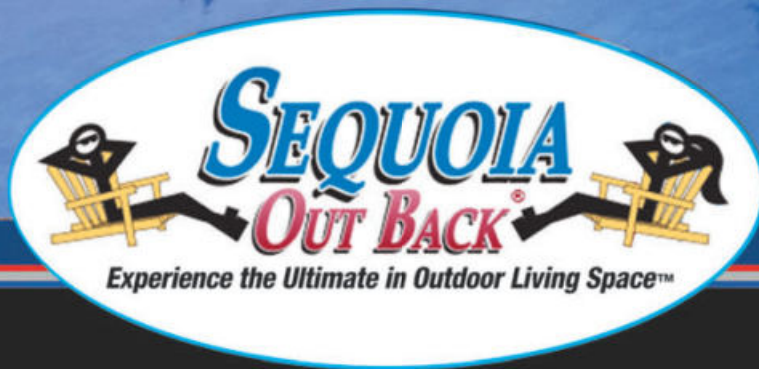


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24 contents

11 Just a Stone's Throw Away

With a new showroom recently opened, Imperial Marble & Granite brings its dedicated customer service and exclusive products to even more homeowners

12 Annual Resource Directory

House & Home's annual listing of the top home improvement companies in the region

24 Backyard Hot Spots

Sheds, pavilions, pergolas and other shade structures are becoming increasingly popular with homeowners

30 Making a Splash

With pool ownership on the rise, experts fill us in on the hottest trends

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12



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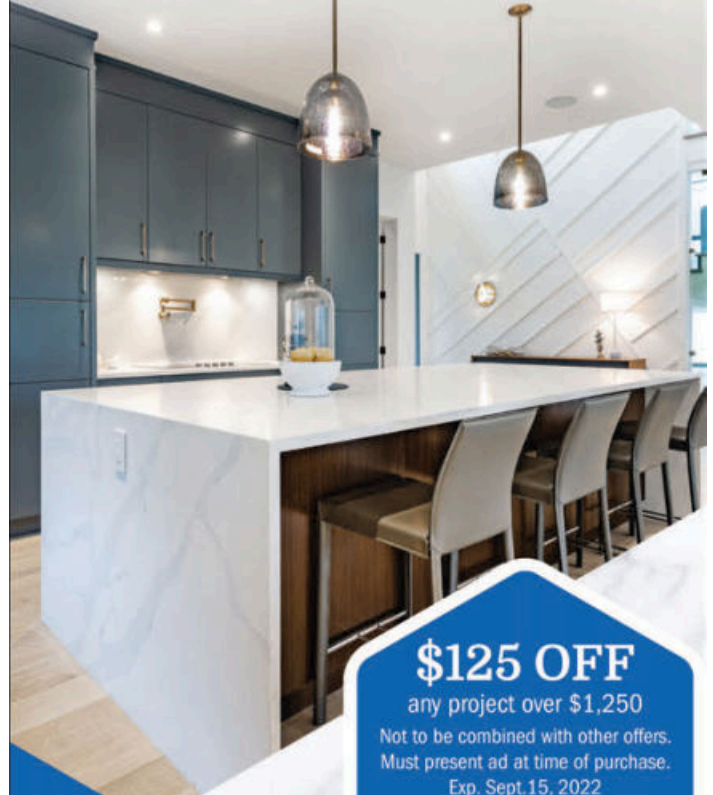


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Just a Stone's Throw Away

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**

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.

"All of our wholesalers, all of our dealers that we do a lot of business with, they just love it," Kzelian says. "Sixty percent of our clients who walk into the facility purchase from us, which is really good feedback."

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.

"They're buying direct from the manufacturer: It's not like going to Home Depot or Lowe's, who has to outsource to somebody else—we are the somebody else," says Kzelian. "They're going to save at least 15% with us versus any big-box store that sells countertops."

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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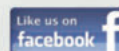
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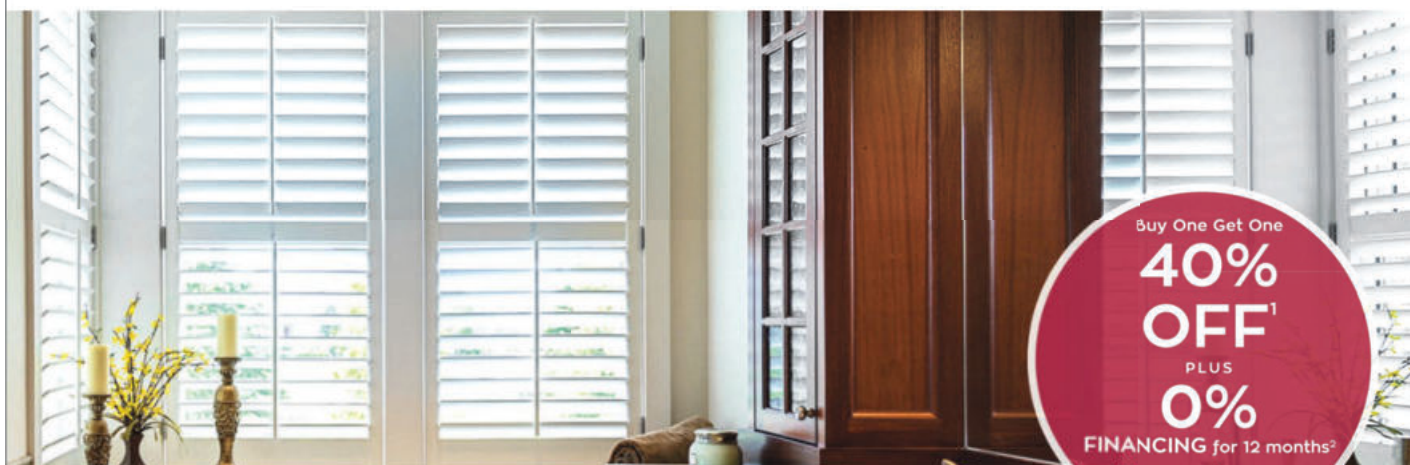
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SHEDS AND PAVILIONS have become the latest must-haves for your outdoor space.



Backyard Hot Spots

by **Liz Hunter**

If the recent heat wave was any indication, trying to sit in your backyard with only an umbrella for coverage isn't going to cut it. To truly enjoy your outdoor space even in summer's harshest days requires larger shade structures to provide relief. From pavilions to pergolas and even multi-use sheds, homeowners have several options to consider, so *House & Home* spoke with a few local companies to find out how these structures have evolved to become must-haves in any yard.

Party Pavilions Prevail

Those within this part of the home-improvement industry witnessed unprecedented demand during the pandemic, and it continues still. While wait times for materials have improved, plenty of homeowners are putting in orders for backyard structures.

"People value outdoor time much more, and they want to permanently improve their outdoor space," says Pete King, director of sales at Country Lane Gazebos. "They don't want something from Costco that won't last, they want a structure that will be like a destination in their own yard."

King says most customers will come into the showroom with a general idea of what they want, but many are surprised at the sheer size

of the structures. "We'll spend time with them, asking their needs and what kind of space they have available, and of course do site visits for measurements," he says.

It's not uncommon for people to change their mind once they see the options. "They might come in thinking they want a gazebo, but then they realize how much more use they'll get out of a pavilion. Or they think a pergola is a good option for shade, until we show them it's not full shade, unless you add a canopy," King explains.

Dan Stoltzfus, manager of Country Tyme Sheds, says pavilions are by far the popular structure right now. "Gazebos are not as useful—they are more aesthetic. With a pavilion, you can set it on a patio or next to your pool and put everything underneath it and fit all of your party guests," he says. "It's the hot spot for hosting."

He would also place pergolas in the aesthetic class of outdoor structures. "You can put fabric on it for shade, but how long will it last? Not as long as a real roof," Stoltzfus says. "That's why it's important to find out every customer's needs."

Customers also have to determine the materials for their structure, whether wood or vinyl. King says it depends on where they live, but many people end up going with vinyl. "Some want the natural wood-look if it complements their house, but once we start talking



about maintenance, they consider vinyl because it can withstand so much.”

Although companies do offer standard pavilion designs and models, further customization can be done with the shingle colors, roofline and accessories. King says they wire many of their pavilions for customers to hook up TVs, ceiling fans, lighting and more. “We love seeing their ‘after’ photos. It’s amazing how they transform them,” King says.

Supercharged Sheds

This humble backyard structure has gone from the place to keep rakes and snow shovels to a man cave, she shed, home office and even backyard bar. Professionals say these structures are built with as much detail as a house.

Starting with the materials, Stoltzfus says, there are wood options, but LP Smart Siding has been their No. 1 seller. “It holds up really well and doesn’t absorb moisture as much as a plywood product,” he says. “It also comes in as many options, colors and planks that you’d have for a regular house, so you could have it match your home. It will last just as long, too.”

Kristi Reading, managing partner of The Buxton Complex, adds

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If using the shed year-round, it needs to be insulated. Next would be finishing the interior walls and floor. Reading recommends sheet rock. "You can install pegboards for hanging items, or paneling. There is even horizontal paneling to get that popular shiplap look," she says.

Backyard Hot Spots

Then come windows and a sliding door, or a regular door, whichever you choose, Buxton continues. Stoltzfus says there is HVAC to consider and even a bathroom depending on your township's zoning and sewer limitations. "Basically, you could live in these things," he says. "If

you get the permit for it, we can build it."

For inspiration, we asked these experts about some of their recent projects. Stoltzfus says seaside bars are in demand, even if you're not near the ocean. "It's more like a pool house area where there's a pavilion connected to the shed, and you can make a little bar area under the pavilion with a fridge and TV," he says.

Reading recounts a project that was half barn, half pavilion, as well as a shed/sunroom with three glass walls and dark brown siding.

No request is too extravagant. "We offer everything from floor to ceiling," Reading says. "If you want it and it's not necessarily listed in our catalog, we can often go to the manufacturer directly. We're working with a customer who wants an insulated glass garage door. It's not in our catalog but we were able to order from the manufacturer."

Stoltzfus says, like most projects, be sure to check with your township before getting too excited. "You have to know the limits and obtain permits. Start there and find a nice way to ask about your options," he advises.

"Contact a local supplier before designing the whole project," King says. "You want to make sure it's going to work with your property layout, and your local companies take pride in their experience and knowledge." **H&H**



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Now that your pavilion or shed is installed, keeping the ground around it looking neat may be a challenge. Artificial turf is something to consider, says Luke Ribeiro, manager of New Jersey operations for Artificial Grass Turf Warehouse.

"After all your effort of installing this structure, you want the grass around it to be nice and flush with the surface. That's difficult to do with real grass, not to mention you constantly need to maintain it with cutting and trimming," he says.

Real grass also creates dirt and wears down with foot traffic. Whether it's kids running in and out of the pool from the pavilion or your family dog jumping on your outdoor furniture, grass clippings, dirt and mud can get tracked onto the floor of the pavilion, creating more cleanup for the homeowner. Using artificial grass eliminates that stress.

And there's no need to be concerned about how it looks. This is not the same artificial grass from a decade ago, Ribeiro says. "It doesn't even look artificial anymore. The styles we carry are so realistic and soft, so it won't scratch your skin. It's highly durable and toxic- and chemical-free, so it's safe for kids and pets."

Ribeiro recommends pairing the turf with a complementary hardscape border to help define the transition from natural grass to turf to finish the look.



RESOURCES

Artificial Grass Turf Warehouse

North Bergen, N.J.
(844) 768-8873
ArtificialGrassTurfWarehouse.com

The Buxton Complex

Ewing Township, N.J.
(609) 771-6840
TheBuxtonComplex.com

Country Lane Gazebos

New Holland, Pa.
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Making a Splash

In many ways,

COVID-19 forced countless folks to fall in love with their house all over again. The increased amount of time spent indoors during the early stages of the pandemic caused a major spike in home renovation projects as homeowners looked to adapt their living quarters for work purposes or perhaps simply felt it was time for an upgrade.

And while kitchens, bathrooms, basements and other remodeling projects were in high demand, the installation of new pools also saw a meteoric rise. As families decided to trade in their vacations for staycations, they began to envision their outdoor living space in a new light. Even those who may not have otherwise considered adding a pool to their backyard prior to the pandemic began to gravitate toward the idea of creating their own oasis at home.

Along with his brothers Thomas and David, Stephen Fahs co-owns Country Club Pools, a company established by their late father in 1965. As part of a second generation of pool builders, Fahs has seen a lot during his time spent working in

the industry and acknowledges modern-day pool owners are thinking bigger than just a prototypical rectangular pool where they can cool off during the dog days of summer.

Instead, installers are being tasked with using added design elements to create truly one-of-a-kind and distinctive pools that seamlessly blend aesthetics with functionality. Popular choices of late include the additions of a sun shelf, a long ledge that allows owners to place chairs, and in some cases even umbrellas, directly in the pool so they can lounge comfortably in the water. Stone perimeters around the pool have also become more commonplace and the inclusion of various water features can give an otherwise ordinary pool the look and feel of one you may find at a 5-star resort.

As homeowners get more creative with their wish lists, installers are in turn finding themselves working on some unique projects.

"We are under construction of a 20-by-40-foot mountain pond-shaped pool that has a hidden swim-out area under a grotto waterfall," Fahs says of one of his current jobs.

Derek Blasker, owner of Pool

Designs Inc., has also noticed folks wanting show-stopping bells and whistles for their pools, citing an increased interest in rock waterfalls and the popularity of LED deck jets with laminars, which can provide added tranquility and ambiance.

"We just did a project where it was a pool/spa combination and they put a giant rock waterfall on the one side, with like 5,000 pounds of rock. Then we added a full paver job going around it with a beautiful border; it was really quite the project," Blasker says.

But because owners would rather be enjoying their pool than constantly tending to it, the thing that nearly every customer wants is to make ownership as maintenance-free as possible. Robotic vacuums and automated technology systems have certainly made that much more obtainable as has the growing presence of salt chlorination systems. "Everyone is looking for salt," Blasker affirms.

A saltwater system works to only produce chlorine as it's needed, resulting in much less upkeep than traditional chlorinated swimming pools, not to mention eliminating the need

Pool ownership has skyrocketed in recent years and there's no shortage of ways for homeowners to construct something unique and pleasing to the eye.

BY PETER PROKO

to keep and store lots of chemicals to help balance your water. And the salt systems produce water that is gentler on your eyes and skin. As a result, Fahs agrees with Blasker that salt is the preferred method for most customers.

"A salt system is the best way to sanitize a pool, period," Fahs says. "It makes the water soft, it has no negative effects on vinyl [liners] and saves a lot of money due to the fact that chlorine prices have increased substantially due to the pandemic—if you can even find it."

For those who may be allergic to a salt system, Blasker says they are likely also to have a reaction with a chlorine system as well, and so they may want to consider UV or mineral systems instead.

And though the pools in this area don't get the year-round use they do in other parts of the country, having the ability to heat the pool is also a desired amenity. Natural gas heaters are the most popular, followed by heat pumps and then propane heaters. But choosing which one is right boils down to how each person likes to use their pool.

"I ask the person what kind

of individual they are. If you need instant gratification, you'll want a gas heater. If you are more patient and thrifty, then the heat pump is the way to go. It takes longer to heat up, but once it raises the temperature, it will keep it there," Blasker says, adding that you also have to factor in how early you open or how late you close your pool, as the temperature outside will play an obvious role in any heater's effectiveness.

D. Panetta Contracting is a landscape design and construction firm that specializes in helping pool owners bring the area surrounding their pool to life. The company's Tammy Panetta says current clients are upgrading their backyard because they know the money is being well spent and that they will undoubtedly enjoy it more while getting a lot of return on that investment. "They feel it's a safe haven for their family," she says.

And it's not just new pool owners looking to transform their backyards. Many existing pool owners are eagerly giving their pool decks and gathering areas outside of the water a facelift.

"The bells and whistles are not only in the pool, but around the pool. A lot of people like to add features like an outdoor kitchen area, TVs to watch the ballgames or outdoor lighting, which can be used year round," says Panetta. "But what's most popular is a fire pit; there's nothing better than family and friends sitting around a fire and enjoying life."

While things like better filtration systems and heaters will allow you to keep your pool up and running longer, there will come a time when you will have to close it down for the season. In recent years, there's been a lot of discussion on whether a mesh or a solid safety cover is best in keeping your water in prime shape during the off-season. The pool experts we spoke with say there are benefits to both, but they prefer the mesh option in the long run.

"Some companies offer a tightly-woven mesh that allows for water to get through, but not light. It's the light and debris that cause problems [to the water]," Blasker notes. "With a solid cover, you need a pump on top of it [to filter off the excess water]. And if it snows and everything gets frozen, the pump is submerged in ice and will need to thaw out before anything can be done. The mesh cover will allow the snow melt to seep through and you don't have to worry about the pump getting frozen and locked."

"I prefer the ultra-mesh," echoes Fahs. "It keeps the pool relatively clean and is easy come springtime to remove and store. A solid cover needs to be monitored closely over the winter season due to the snow or ice build-up and it's very heavy."

Regardless of what options one considers for their pool, it's become quite clear that what was once considered a luxury has now become a necessity for many homeowners. And with seemingly no limits to how one can customize their pool to their liking, the trend of new pools being installed in backyards across the region doesn't appear that it will be slowing down anytime soon. **H&H**



RESOURCES

Country Club Pools Inc.
Feasterville, Pa.
(215) 675-7550
CountryClubPools.com

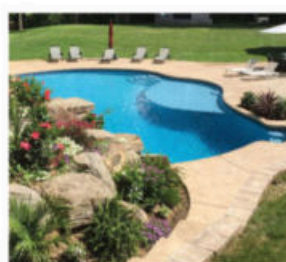
D. Panetta Contracting, LLC
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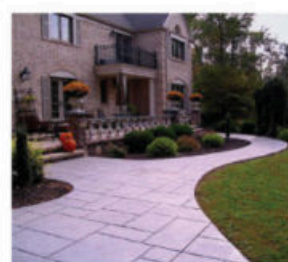
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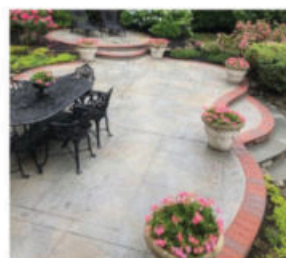
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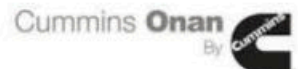
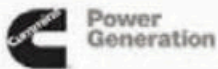
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