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Volume 22, Issue 9

## AAA Hellenic Marble

Expert guidance to find the perfect stone products for your next project *page 11*

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## Imperial Marble & Granite

Providing dedicated customer service  
and exclusive products to more  
Pennsylvania homeowners *page 19*

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**AAA HELLENIC**  
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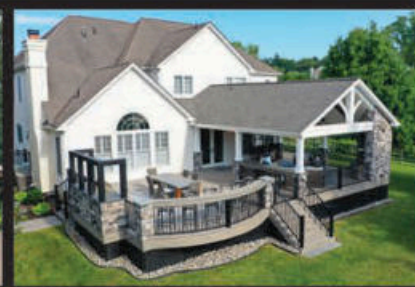
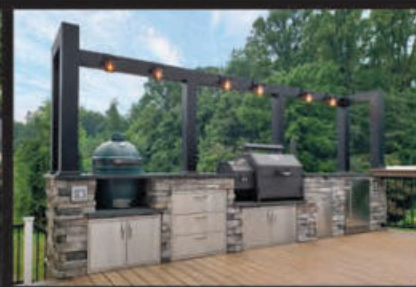


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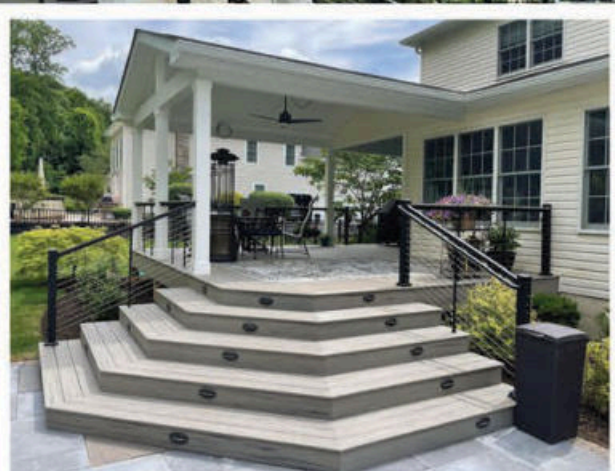
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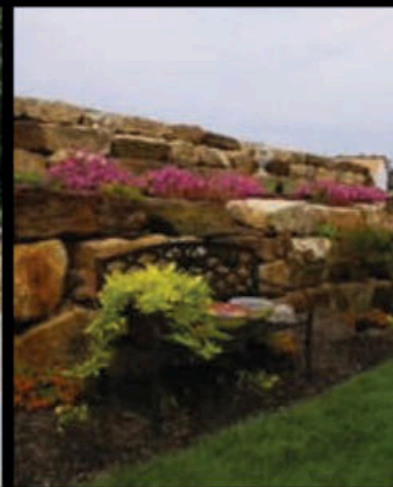
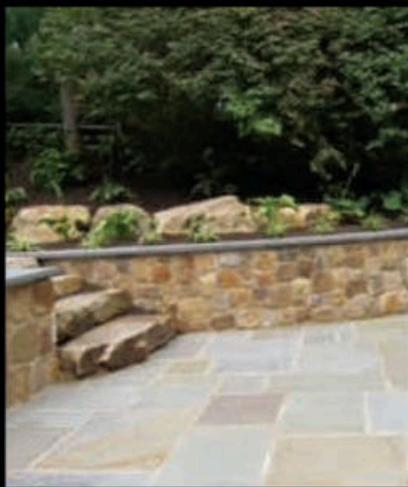
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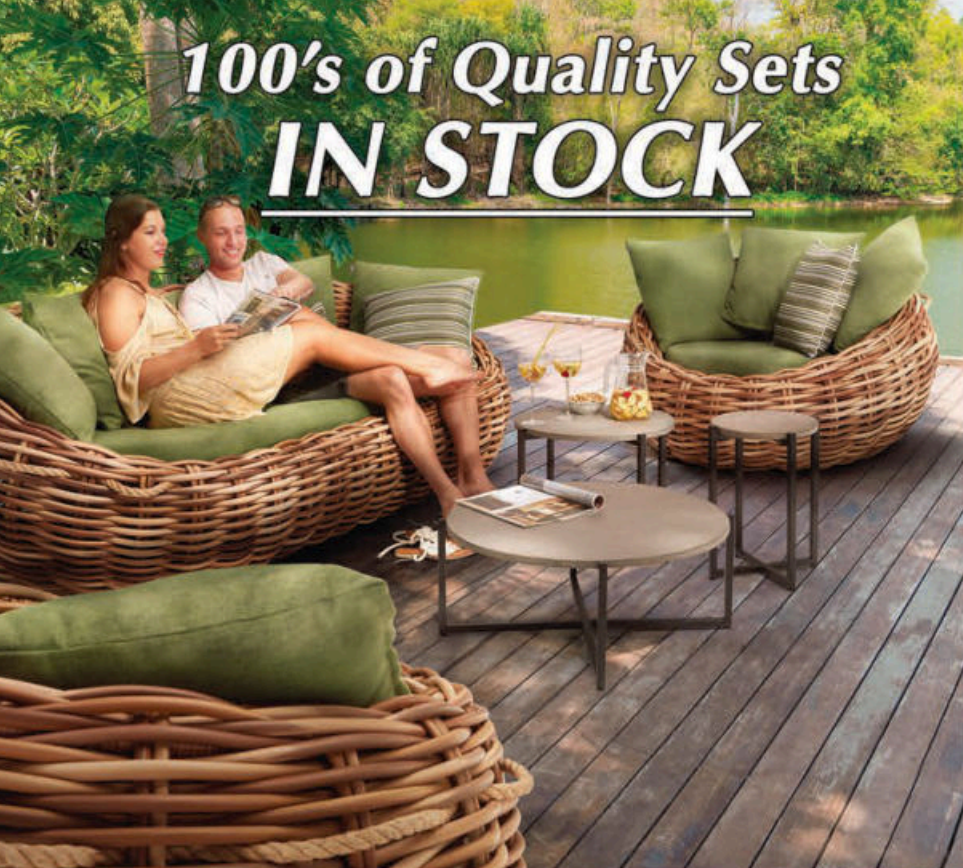
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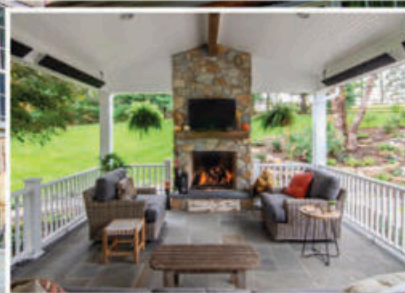
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**ask the expert**  
by Liz Hunter

# 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.

**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.



Mike Werner,  
sales manager

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?**

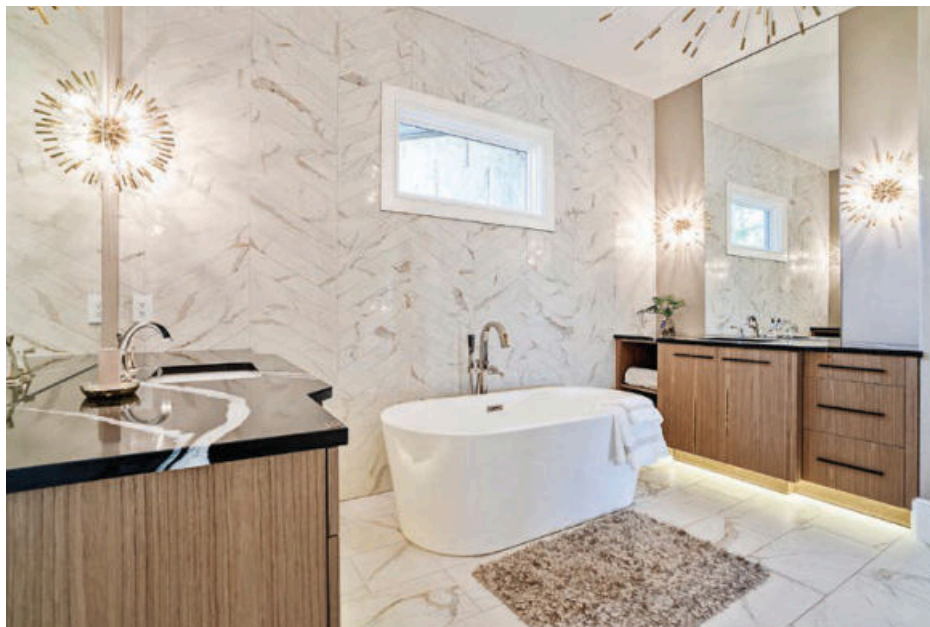
Our slab yard is open by appointment so we can control the amount of people in the building at a time, everything is spaced out and we also have outdoor inventory available weather permitting. We have implemented additional safety measures, including UV light systems and UV air purifiers to reduce airborne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

**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.

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# BACKYARD BLISS

BY MATT COSENTINO

## OUTDOOR KITCHENS

continue to evolve into fully functional spaces that rival what's inside.

**A**long with family vacations, trips to the beach and baseball games, the backyard barbecue is right near the top of the list when it comes to favorite summertime activities. This longstanding tradition has only been enhanced over the past decade with the emerging popularity of outdoor kitchens, which have provided a central loca-

tion for homeowners to mingle with their guests while flipping burgers and hot dogs.

Lately, however, outdoor kitchens have included much more than just a simple grilling station and have evolved into a functional space similar to what's in the home, featuring refrigerators, sinks, prep and storage space, and trash cans. Many times they

become even more elaborate and incorporate all the bells and whistles, from pizza ovens and griddles to rotisseries.

"COVID has definitely driven the demand for outdoor kitchens even further than what it was before," says Jordan Shenk of EWBK, which specializes in outdoor living projects. "People wanted outdoor kitchens

prior to COVID but now it's a little bit different. They want beyond just a standard grill station in the backyard. They basically want an extension of their home, so they want their outdoor kitchens filled with many appliances to make it feel like it's a room itself."

Not only are homeowners going bigger with their outdoor kitchens, but there's been a significant uptick in the number of projects as well. Several local experts took time out of their busy schedules to share their insight into the trends they're seeing and how a professional can help design and build an outdoor kitchen that can become a showstopper.

### Imagine the possibilities

When homeowners decide to move forward with an outdoor kitchen project, the fun part is making a wish list of all the amenities they would like to include, of course with their budget in mind.

"I get excited when we start talking about outdoor kitchens because the possibilities are only as limited as your desire," says Bill Lecorchick Jr. of Legends Home Improvements. "When COVID hit, everybody started spending way more time at home and in their backyards, and now they're looking to cook all summer. It's not just burgers and dogs anymore—people want smokers and we can fit the Big Green Egg into their outdoor kitchen. We're also putting deep fryers in, pizza ovens, griddles, and you can even do hibachi outside.

"Other components include the trash can, the fridge, warming drawers and cooling drawers. Anything you want to put in there, we can do it."

Joe Oakes of First State Building & Design (FSBD) begins the process by finding out as much as possible about the customer's lifestyle so he can design an outdoor kitchen



that best suits their needs.

"We just ask them how they're going to use the space," he says. "What do you like to do: Do you do corn broils? Do you entertain and grill a lot? Do you need to be able to do food prep out here? We really try to understand how they're going to use the space and then direct them to the proper components. We start off by providing pricing for what it's going to cost to get water lines out there and drain lines out there. We have to make sure it's within what they want to invest in their outdoor kitchen."

Even with outdoor kitchens evolving, the grill remains the centerpiece, and Lecorchick likes to install built-in grills with 18-inch wings on either side and a natural gas line running

to it, eliminating the need for a propane tank. Shenk adds that customers are seeking top-of-the-line units that are powerfully built and able to cook large meals in a short amount of time.

"We use high-end products because that's what people are looking for," she says. "They're not looking for a cookie-cutter grill from a big chain store. Those are nice but they're not going to last like these stainless steel pieces. Even if [the space is] covered, your outdoor kitchen does face the elements, the colder temperatures. So you definitely want products that are going to hold up to that."

Beyond the grills, people are adding alternative cooking methods to take their menu—and party—to the next level.

"We may only do about five or six of them per year but pizza ovens are starting to become a little more popular on the outdoor kitchens," Oakes says. "You can do a lot of things with it. A majority of the time it's used for pizza but it can be very versatile.

"It's the same thing with griddles and power burners that you can put out there: They're not just geared toward one type of food—you can do corn broils, shrimp boils. We have smokers that are going into outdoor kitchens as well with the Big Green Eggs and the Kamado grills. We're building them into the countertop or dropping them down onto their own separate platform."

While the outdoor kitchens of the past were usually linear setups, several of the professionals who spoke to *House & Home* say that L-shaped designs are now used a majority



# BACKYARD BLISS

of the time. Incorporating a bar area near the kitchen and then a separate, outdoor “living room” with comfortable seating and a television completes the space.

“When we do a grilling area, we want to design the space so people can sit around and you can be with your guests and not off by yourself,” says Bill Wilson of Amazing Decks. “We want to integrate the space. If you have people over, you’re going to be grilling—that’s just the way it is. But we don’t want you to be separate from your guests.”

“When we do outdoor kitchens, I’m always looking for an area where they can make their drinks,” Lecorchick adds. “We’ll do a kitchen area that is L-shaped and wrap it around and have it raised to bar height, and on that side we’ll throw the refrigerator and wine cooler, along with shelves and drawers. You want to have it set up so you’re not carrying everything in and out of the house.”

## Not just for summer

As outdoor kitchens get bigger and bigger, naturally the price tag goes up as well. So it makes sense to add some features that will allow it to be a usable space beyond just June, July and August.

“They are almost always in demand with some type of roof structure, whether that’s a roof attached to the home or a custom pavilion, which is another popular choice,” Shenk says. “The roof structures are great with outdoor kitchens for more reasons than one. ... It draws your eye when you have a roof structure over it and it makes it more of its own

room. It also helps with those colder months and you can still use your outdoor kitchen if it’s raining.

“A lot of our customers are now requesting to have fireplaces with their outdoor kitchen, and sometimes that is a gas fireplace insert but other times it is a wood-burning fireplace with hearth included and beautiful custom mason pieces that make the fireplace a showstopper in itself. Being under a structure and including some kind of warmth from a fireplace, whether it’s gas or wood-burning, definitely helps extend the use of your outdoor kitchen to almost the whole year.”

FSBD specializes in custom stone and masonry features like fireplaces or fire pits and encourages clients to consider the benefits.

“Having that true fire feature is something you want to think about and incorporate, whether it be a natural wood-burning fireplace or fire pit, or one that has gas lines run to it and requires less maintenance with no smoke, no wood cleanup, and you don’t have to store firewood. It gives you that ambiance flame that puts out a little heat as well for when your guests come over,” Oakes says. He adds that it’s roughly 50-50 whether homeowners prefer a wood-burning or gas fire feature. “I would say it’s a happy medium. Some people like that wood-burning smell, that

atmosphere, but there are a lot of clients who like to flip a switch and have their fireplace come on.”

Lecorchick cautions that with a roof structure, it’s a must to install an outdoor fan over the grill to prevent soot buildup. He is also a big proponent of adding a heating element so the outdoor kitchen can be used throughout the fall.

“Fireplaces and fire pits are great, but fireplaces do take up a lot of space,” he says. “Infrared heaters are fantastic. They make it very comfortable and you won’t be feeling anything out there.”

## Choosing the right materials

When selecting the materials for an outdoor kitchen, aesthetics and durability both must enter into the equation. Michael Chadwick of Riverside Supply Company says his team works with contractors, masons and even homeowners themselves to come up with the best materials, from stone to veneer, brick and more.

“We have a lot of people who, instead of using the paver material for the outdoor kitchens or the outdoor fireplaces, are going with either the thin veneer stone—manufactured or natural—or they’re going with the thin brick if they want to add a brick motif to their outdoor area,” he says. “Sometimes using the thin brick or the thin veneer stone for the outdoor kitchen, the pizza oven or the fireplace helps it stand out a little more.”

Chadwick stresses that supply chain issues have hit the industry hard. Material availability has improved, but the high price to deliver materials from other parts of the country is adding significantly to the overall cost of projects.



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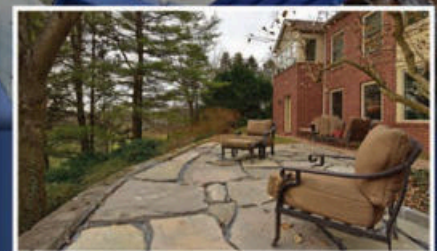


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"We try to tell people to plan ahead as much as possible, and we keep a lot of material in stock," he says. "That's one good thing—we have a pretty large area to keep a lot of stock material, especially the thin brick. The thin brick has really exploded over the last five or six years, so we stock a large amount of that."

As far as countertops for the outdoor kitchen or bar area, some of the same materials used inside are recommended, but others are not suitable for dealing with the elements.

"I like granite the best," Lecorchick says. "We've also done tops in limestone, bluestone and tile, but I like that the granite is a solid piece, it's a stone so it's porous, and it's easy to clean—you just wipe it down and away you go. With tile, we do bigger tiles and smaller grout lines so there's less of it, and that cleans up real easily too. With bluestone and limestone, if you put a wet glass on top of the stone you get a ring. It emulsifies and fades out, but it's just another thing you don't want to deal with."

"We have utilized custom flagstone for countertops and we are really getting into some cool designs using concrete countertops," Oakes adds. "You can get different colors and different edges for the concrete, from a modern finish to a rustic finish."

## Standing out from the crowd

When all is said and done with the outdoor kitchen, the goal is to create a space that not only fulfills the homeowners' needs but also reflects their personalities.

"When you add in those custom requests, that's when your piece becomes super personalized, because it's one of a kind," Shenk says. "It's your project that you're creating. ... That's what we aim to do, to make that personal touch. We

don't want our designs to look cookie-cutter. We want it to stand out and I think that's why our clients pick us, because they're part of the vision."

Shenk, a history buff, notes that "summer kitchens" were used in the late 1700s and early 1800s as a separate cooking space away from the main home, so that heat from the fire didn't overpower the living area. It is interesting to see outdoor kitchens become mainstays in modern times, and she doesn't see the trend stopping anytime soon.

"You almost see a return on investment between 100% and 200% with outdoor kitchens," she says. "They definitely increase the value of your home, and they increase the demand of people wanting it when you sell it. It's high on people's lists—not just the outdoor kitchen but the outdoor space. People want entertainment space outside." **H&H**



## RESOURCES

### Amazing Decks

Ambler, Pa.  
Flemington, N.J.  
(215) 654-1886  
AnotherAmazingDeck.com

### EWBN

New Holland, Pa.  
(717) 355-0741  
EWBN.net

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### Legends Home Improvements

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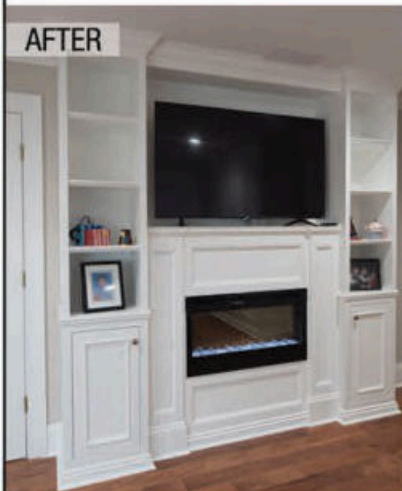


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# Just a Stone's Throw Away

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.

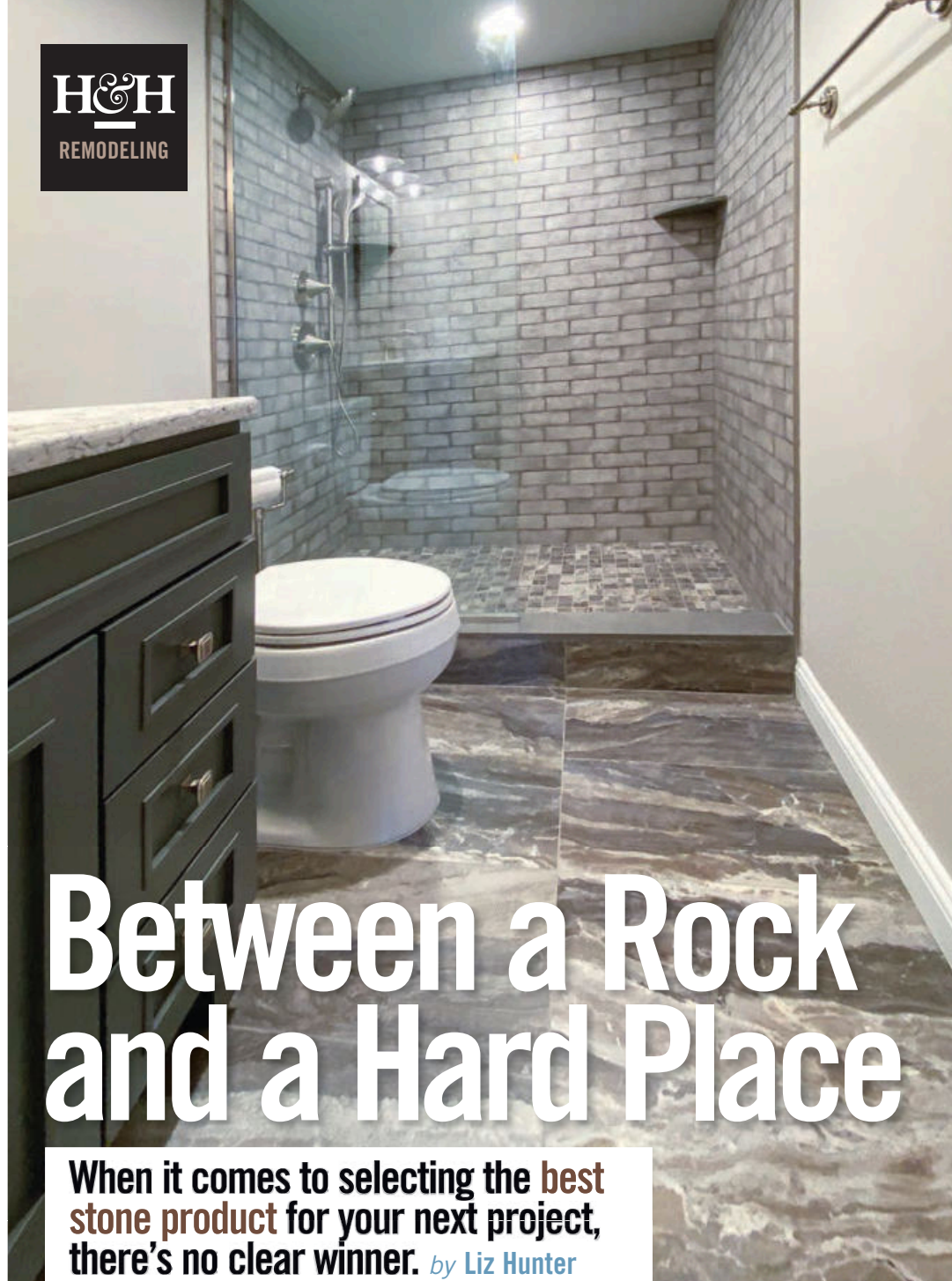
"Customer service is No. 1, No. 2 is craftsmanship and No. 3—which is the most important thing—is turnaround," he says. "From template to install, it's a 10-day turnaround. We have the technology and machinery to back us up. Everything is done by digital measurements and laser measurements, so that helps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



Nina Lea Photography



# Between a Rock and a Hard Place

**When it comes to selecting the best stone product for your next project, there's no clear winner.** *by Liz Hunter*

**F**OR THE LONGEST TIME, granite seemed to have a complete stranglehold on the stone market. The first request from homeowners remodeling their kitchen was more often than not “granite countertops.” Things have changed though, and while granite still has its place, there are other contenders tossing their name in the ring.

## NATURAL STONE VS. QUARTZ

One of the first things to address

is the difference between granite and quartz. Granite is a natural stone, mined in quarries, many of which are right here in the U.S. The fact that this product—and others such as marble, limestone and quartzite—comes from nature means that its colors and patterns are completely random. No two slabs are identical. Natural stone has been favored in kitchen design for its durability and resistance to the temperature extremes a countertop might undergo.

Quartz is stone mixed with resins, classifying it as a man-made product. Some people prefer it because of its uniformity. It's also low maintenance and non-porous—all features that appeal to the average person.

But when speaking with home improvement design professionals, their opinions vary.

“Keep away from granite,” advises Vasos Posidonas, owner of VT Home Improvements. “We’re replacing it in nearly every kitchen we do. Quartz is the way

to go. It's more durable and not affected by temperatures.”

“Regular aggregate granite is out; people want quartz,” says Keith Bernhardt Jr., owner of TriCity Kitchens. “What's popular now is the look of a veined marble pattern. You wouldn't want to have a porous marble counter, so the quartz gives you the opportunity to have that look without the maintenance.”

“I don't think granite has run its course,” says Albert Kzelian, owner of Imperial Marble & Granite. “You don't have to worry about scratching or staining, and people like the beauty of a natural product.”

Kyle Eisele, head of business development at Coast Tile & Marble Supply, believes natural stone gets a bad rap. “People get turned off by natural stone when they hear they need to maintain it,” he says. “Yes, it's a porous material and over time the sealer fades. But what it takes to reseal it is very easy, and should not be the one reason not to use it. It's a beautiful material and the bit of maintenance it does require is worth it for its beauty.”

Kzelian puts it into further perspective. As with most things, there is a generational gap in taste preferences. “We've seen a lot of the younger generation, they like that modern look—that's customers anywhere between the ages of 25 to 40. They love the quartz. But the clients 40 and older, they still like marble and granite. They like the natural colors.”

## CONSIDERING THE INDIVIDUAL

Although these professionals have their own opinions, it's the customers' style, preference and budget that ultimately determines the stone. And there are plenty of stones in the sea—so to speak.

“You need to understand what a client's needs are or what they're looking for. For instance, if a client likes to cook at their home a lot, we don't really recommend quartz. If you're doing

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## Between a Rock and a Hard Place



a lot of cooking and you're going to be putting a lot of hot pots on your counters, the quartz is not durable enough because it has resin. [Wear and tear] kind of stains the resin itself," Kzelian explains. "For them, I'd suggest marble or granite. If a homeowner doesn't want to do marble or granite, then we'd go into what is called quartzite, and quartzite is actually a natural product, which is very strong and very durable—but just, unfortunately, very expensive."



In Coast Tile's case, its location near the Shore means they see two types of customers on the opposite ends of the spectrum. "We get customers who want something subtle in their primary home because they look at it every day, but we also work on projects in second homes, something they'll use on weekends and in the summer. They don't want maintenance or stains, and they want fun colors and textures," Eisele says.

This gives the designers at Coast Tile a chance to play with materials and textures. "Porcelain is becoming more popular in countertops. They are arguably the most durable," he continues. "When you think about a Shore outdoor kitchen and the elements, porcelain holds up, and it's not going to stain. Cement is also an option if the customer wants something truly unique. You can add your own colors, almost like epoxy, and practically create your own artwork. It's not for everybody, but it's exciting and can create a conversation piece wherever you use it in the home."

The finish of a stone can also change the look. Dave Cerami, CKBR, president of HomeTech Renovations, says he was one of the first in the industry to take the shine off of natural stone, instead brushing it with a wire brush to create texture. "It adds a beautiful look, rather than the shiny,

reflecting surface, and is just a little more special," he says.

In Kzelian's experience, the shiny look still goes into the majority of projects. "About 10 to 15% like to do a matte finish or leather finish," he says. "Polished is still what everybody's asking for."

### TILE AND TRENDS

Tile is another product that has evolved with some high-end options that are applicable throughout a home. Cerami says tile could be ceramic, porcelain, stone; and where it's going: foyer, family room, kitchen or bath, determines what to use.

"There are logical deductions on where to use tile. If you're remodeling over a cement slab foundation or floor, tile would be a great choice because you can bind it to the cement sub-base. This is preferable vs. installing a floating wood floor over the concrete," he says. "But I would also recommend a radiant heating system underneath the tile to warm the floor."

He says this would be perfect for a primary bathroom located over a garage or a sun porch that is being converted into a year-round room.

Most of our experts agree: the bigger the tile, the better. "The larger the tile, the more modern the look, compared to the smaller tiles with the traditional bullnose finish. There's not much of those being requested now. It makes the finished project look dated," says Posidonas.

"People want bigger pieces," Eisele states. "In porcelain, it's either 24 by 48 inches or 12 by 24 inches. The bigger piece allows the movement in the stone to really come out. If you chop it into tiny pieces, it looks busier and clashes."

Porcelain tile can also have a wood-look, which is extremely popular now. "The industry has come pretty far in how authentic the wood grains and patterns look on the porcelain tile. It's like having hardwood without the maintenance," Cerami adds. "Even in that area, there are var-

ious aesthetics, such as farmhouse or contemporary and everything in between. It takes an expert to know the difference in the styles."

One element that is immediately associated with tile is grout. The large-format tiles allow for fewer grout lines.

Bernhardt goes back to quartz. "It can be used in bathrooms, even on shower walls, as opposed to tile and offers no grout, no cleaning and it does better with moisture," he says. "Any time you have grout, over time it can discolor or if it comes out, water can get behind it, which you don't want to happen."

Cerami says there are some new performance-based grouts that have less propensity for staining. "Grout is part of having tile, so it's important to use a design-build professional who knows about the performance-based grouts without sand that will repel the typical stains people associate with grout," he advises. **H&H**



## RESOURCES

### Coast Tile & Marble Supply

Egg Harbor Township, N.J.  
(609) 646-9346  
CoastTile.net

### HomeTech Renovations

Lower Gwynedd, Pa.  
(215) 646-7477  
HTRenovations.com

### Imperial Marble & Granite

West Chester, Pa.  
(610) 738-5277  
IMGStone.net

### TriCity Kitchens

Vineland, N.J.  
(856) 825-9002  
TriCityKitchen.com

### VT Home Improvement

Lyndhurst, N.J.  
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by Peter Proko

New flooring, storage solutions and other enhancements are opening up the garage to new possibilities.

# Reimagining the Garage

## During the course of the pandemic,

as countless folks found themselves enjoying their living quarters more than ever before, the interest in home improvement projects skyrocketed. Fresh coats of paint were added to the walls to breathe new life into drab and discarded rooms. Basements were finished and outfitted with desired amenities. And of course, the most popular home renovation projects—kitchen and bathroom remodels—took center stage as homeowners looked at updating with the latest styles and trends. Even outdoor living spaces were reimagined with the addition of outdoor kitchens, decks, new hardscaping and landscaping,

pools and much more.

In the midst of this flurry of activity, one room that was once considered an afterthought is garnering plenty of attention these days: the garage. Often cluttered, disorganized and neglected, the garage space has become the final frontier for those looking to truly transform their home and they are doing so by adding cabinetry for better organization, new flooring, enhanced lighting and other features. As a result, the garage has become much more than just a place to store lawn equipment, dump your kid's sports stuff or simply park the car.

Paul Greskovich, owner of Garage Craft Interiors, says he's definitely seen a large uptick of

folks wanting to better organize and use their garage space of late. "People were realizing that they have this beautiful home on the inside, but they have to walk through a debris field to get there," he says. "And people always want to declutter; they suddenly realize when they look at things that they have stuff in the garage that they haven't touched for eight or 10 years and it make sense to do something."

And it's no wonder why these projects are gaining in popularity. With more than half of homeowners using the garage as their main entryway into the house, it's the first thing homeowners see when they arrive home and the last thing they see before they

leave. What's more, a study by the United States Department of Energy showed that 25% of people with two-car garages don't park in them at all, largely due to clutter.

Joe Paul acknowledges there's been a noticeable spike in homeowners interested in garage makeovers since the pandemic. His company, Apex Concrete Coating Solutions, installs garage flooring systems, specializing in polyurea and polyaspartic coatings.

"People want to open their garage after coming home from a day of work and see organization, they want it to be clean. It's the room they come in and out of the most and they track a lot of dirt inside the house from the



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# Reimagining the Garage



garage. In my case, they want a floor that's easier to keep clean," says Paul.

There are lots of color combinations that customers can choose from, but many look to have it blend with the rest of the home. "Most people gravitate toward colors in the house. If they have a lot of gray, for instance, they gravitate toward those base colors," Paul says.

Yasu Yamauchi, owner of Yasu's Flooring, has similarly found a lot of his clients have decided to install epoxy flooring out of practicality for the increased time they spend in their garages.

"Most people that choose this route do so because they are working in the garage a lot and they want something that is very easy to clean and functional. These floors don't absorb a lot of humidity and they're waterproof and chemical resistant," he says.

Floorguard's Reid Murray further illustrates epoxy flooring's effectiveness by touting its durability and industrial strength. "Ground water naturally evaporates through the soil and concrete slabs, so the epoxy coating is like a membrane on the floor and reduces the humidity you may experience in the garage."

Transylvania Concrete Coatings also offers a range of flooring

coating options, including epoxy, metallic, chip and polyurea. While they all have their appeal, their Chip Evolution floor has become the most popular.

"The one that we recommend 99% of the time is the Chip Evolution floor because of its anti-skid, chip-resistant and chemical-resistant properties," says Bogdan Pop, principal.

In addition to the flooring, Floorguard's Murray also specializes in garage organization and has seen a lot of customers adding new lighting and painting the walls to create a new spot for the family and friends to gather.

"[The garage] can be a hangout space. We did a project for people that wanted to host football games during the pandemic," says Murray.

Pop has also noticed that folks are looking for new ways to utilize their garage space. "Homeowners want to increase the square footage of their home, whether it's adding a gym, creating a man cave, etc. We have seen a huge growth in this area."

Lenny Kelman, owner of Dream Garage Remodeling Co., says around 80% of his customers are all asking about new flooring, but once that's installed the other biggest trend he's seen has been homeowners' desire to better organize.

"People are trying to enclose everything and put it behind cabinet doors so everything looks clean," says Kelman.

While a clean, streamlined look certainly is easy on the eyes, Kelman stresses the importance of not only creating a garage that is aesthetically pleasing, but also functional for their specific needs.

"Whenever I go out to people's homes, based on what they need, I design something that is for them specifically. Everyone is different and there is no one-size-fits-all approach," says Kelman.

Greskovich knows that firsthand, as he's done everything from install pull-down staircases in the ceiling, add flatscreen TVs and refrigerators, or change out the previous lighting for surface-mount LEDs.

"Your quality of life improves dramatically after you make over your garage," says Greskovich. "I take it from disorganized chaos and I make it a beautiful room. And people become much more reluctant to mess it up once they get it nice. They become more selective on what they decide to keep."

And for those looking to possibly cash-in on the red-hot real estate market, a refinished garage can boost curb appeal and help you fetch top dollar.

"If there are two homes for sale and one has a garage all made up—the floor is done, there's cabinets, shelving—and in the other home nothing has been done; most likely the home with the finished garage will sell first," offers Kelman.

Greskovich agrees: "If you go to sell your home and everything on the inside is nice, the person looking at your house has already looked at several other homes that are nice on the inside. But the one they'll remember is the one with the finished garage. It separates you from the crowd." **H&H**



## RESOURCES

### Apex Concrete Coating Solutions

Wilmington, Del.  
(302) 993-6716  
ApexConcreteCoating  
Solutions.com

### Dream Garage Remodeling

Serving Pennsylvania  
(215) 354-6502  
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### Garage Craft Interiors

Warminster, Pa.  
(215) 443-0458  
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### Transylvania Concrete Coatings

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# Quality, Integrity, Creativity

Your home improvement project is in the best hands with **M. Jay Builders.** *by Liz Hunter*

**A**s soon as Mervin Jay Beiler was old enough to swing a hammer, he started building things. He recalls cutting down saplings and building a log cabin by hand as a kid along with his twin brother. “I never questioned that I would do anything else as a career. It’s in my blood,” Beiler says.

Born and raised in Lancaster County, Beiler continued working with his hands and growing his skill set in his father’s company. It was not just the fundamentals of quality construction that he learned, but also a responsible work ethic and appreciation for customer loyalty. This is the foundation on which M. Jay Builders was built in 2007 when Beiler was 23.

“I took all of my passion for this craftsmanship and funneled it into my business. From early on I valued giving customers the right product—not just the fastest product—with research behind it to provide something that would be better in the end,” he says.

This philosophy is shared by the company’s general manager, Donald Owens II, who also spent time as a child in Lancaster County building playhouses and other projects, and hasn’t stopped since. He had firsthand experience with his father and brother who were both independent contractors, and he spent many years specializing in custom trim and cabinetry which require an unrivaled eye for detail.

M. Jay Builders prides itself on the values of integrity, quality and creativity—the guiding principles of every project no matter the size. With the homeowner’s vision at the forefront, M. Jay Builders brings it to life with trusted, high-end products that will make a home stand out as well as keep it protected.

Services offered run the gamut from roofing,

siding and stucco remediation to specialty projects inspired by customers. And while a lot of companies can say they provide these services, M. Jay Builders aims to make the homeowner’s experience far from average. And it appears to be hitting the target, as word of mouth is its main method of gaining new business as well as repeat customers.

“We’re an experienced company; we’ve done the research on the materials and proper installation,” says Owens. “Some contractors might be OK with just seeing a satellite image of your roof, but I prefer to walk on it, count the layers and check the decking. This gives us the most accurate information we need to move forward with the project.”

Roofing and siding products have undergone incredible innovations in recent years. Homes in need of replacement in these areas will find new options that surpass their expectations in aesthetics and longevity.

Among the favorites for roofing at M. Jay Builders are cedar shingles. “We use only premium, 100% edge-grain shingles with the longest warranty on cedar. The premium grade comes with a 50-year warranty,” say Owens. “The cost isn’t for everybody, but cedar is ideal for a historic home or in a neighborhood where you just want that extra pop.”

Synthetic options are available as well, simulating cedar and slate. M. Jay Builders works with brands such as DaVinci Roofscapes to provide homeowners with the look they want with a product that will outlast Cedar.

In the world of siding, the name James Hardie comes to mind, and it is one of the top two preferred brands installed by M. Jay Builders. Owens says James Hardie fiber cement siding

comes with a 30-year warranty on the substrate (the underlying layer) and a 15-year warranty on the finish, and can be made in virtually any color. While this is one of the most popular and most requested types of siding, Owens says LP SmartSide is another great choice for homeowners to consider. Although it doesn’t have the name recognition of James Hardie, LP SmartSide comes with a 50-year warranty on the substrate and a 15-year warranty on the finish, and costs about the same.

Siding options may come into consideration for homeowners looking to remediate or replace their stucco facades and M. Jay Builders has extensive experience. In this region, stucco remediation is common due to improper flashing and application during initial installation. Owens says over the years as homeowners remodeled, they discovered their plywood and insulation were rotting behind the stucco.

“It’s hard to sell a home with stucco these days, but our new stucco installations have been vigorously tested and approved and can last as long as anything else you put on your home,” he says. “But we do have a lot of homeowners choosing to replace stucco with siding and stone veneer.”

Not only does M. Jay Builders stand by its products, but its people as well. Beiler values his employees and has high standards for them. Crews are well-trained so homeowners don’t have to worry about how well a project will be done or who is showing up. When more help is needed, he only uses select subcontractors he would be willing to have as employees, and they are held to the same standards.

“We value hard work. It’s part of our culture and the way God created us to work, serve others and provide for our families. I am very thankful to be able to work with such fine craftsmen and provide genuine quality services to homeowners,” Beiler says. **H&H**

## M. Jay Builders, Inc.

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