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Dutchies Stoneworks

An experienced team bringing customers' backyard dreams to life *page 11*

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Imperial Marble & Granite

Providing dedicated customer service and exclusive products to more Pennsylvania homeowners *page 33*

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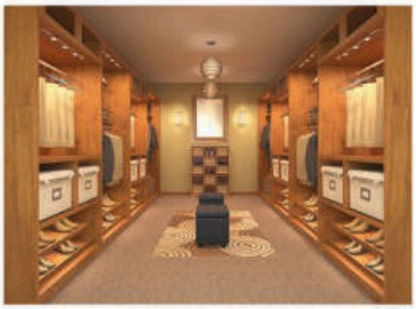
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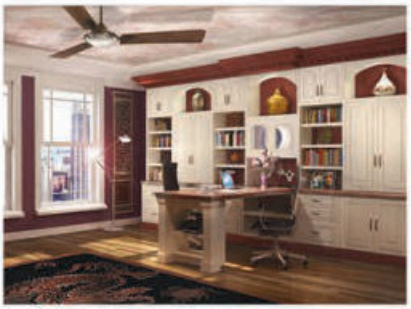
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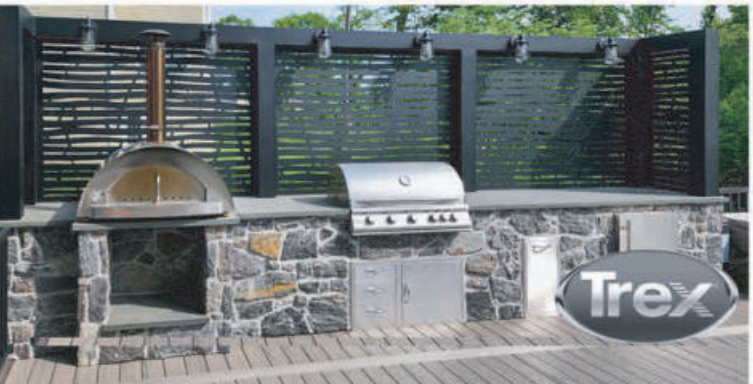
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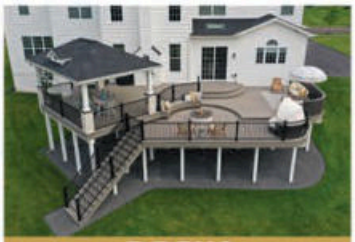
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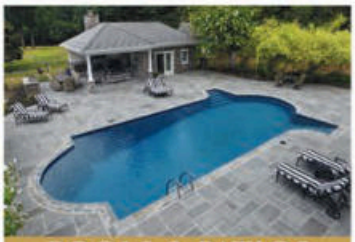
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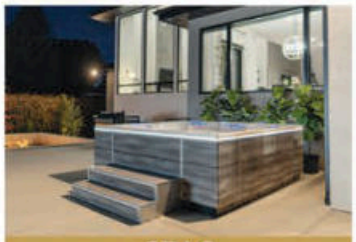





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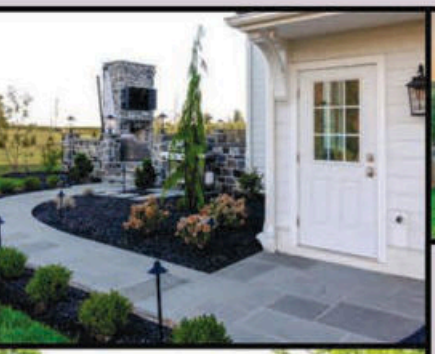
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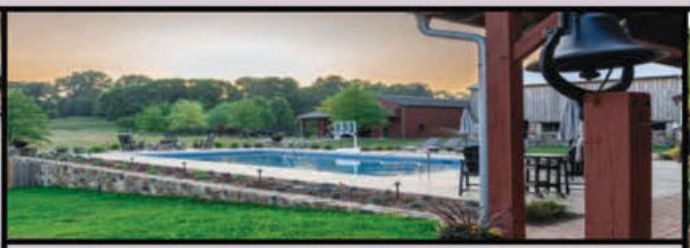


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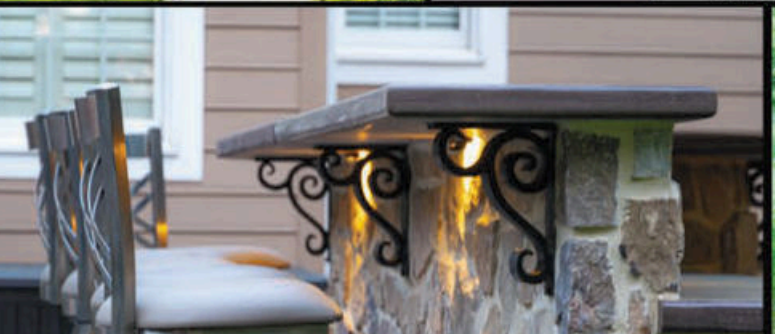
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A Passion for Outdoor Living

From its natural stone craftsmen to its experienced designers, the team at Dutchies Stoneworks is proud to bring customers' backyard dreams to life.

by **Matt Cosentino**

With a family history of masonry on both of his parents' sides, it's no surprise that Dave "Dutchie" Fisher embarked on a similar career. But his love for outdoor living is truly his own, and luckily he was in the right place at the right time when the industry started to take off, enabling him to pursue his passion on a full-time basis.

That was in 2004, and Dutchies Stoneworks is now celebrating 20 years of designing and constructing elaborate backyard oases for customers throughout Chester, Montgomery, Berks, Delaware and Bucks counties, along with Northern Delaware. It all began with Fisher's younger brother, who preceded him into the masonry trade and brought his sibling on board, first for a personal home project before it became a job.

"We started working as a subcontractor for a builder, doing stone facades," Fisher recalls. "When the houses were done, the homeowners would come back to us wanting patios built, so we worked directly with the homeowners to build their outdoor living spaces with outdoor kitchens, fireplaces, patios and walkways. That's how we got our start in the outdoor living space. Today, we have a team of about 30 and we have a full-time salesperson, and building outdoor living spaces is our main goal."

Although his brother left the business and moved to Montana, Fisher still gets as much joy from bringing clients' visions to life as he did in the company's early days. An accomplished outdoor chef himself—he has a grill, a Green Egg and a pizza oven in his backyard—he endeavors to give his customers the same ability to create lasting memories with loved ones.

"We just built our own outdoor space last year, and to spend time with family out there is just priceless," Fisher says. "You are going to spend some money, but it's not just about that—it's about making memories and being intentional about spending time together, whether you are having a cookout with your family or entertaining friends. It's a great place to be social and to interact with people, especially in today's world where we have even more of a challenge with so many distractions."

While some customers know exactly what they want from the get-go, many others rely on Dutchies Stoneworks to offer its expertise and suggestions. Depending on the budget, the team may recommend a pergola, pavilion or screened-in porch for protection from the elements. Outdoor kitchens and fire features are high on most clients' wish lists, while retaining or segmental walls can add usable space if the back of the house drops off sharply.

Finishing touches, also provided by Dutchies, include lighting, plantings and mulching.

"There are times when you really have to guide customers through the design because they really can't visualize anything, and that's why we have 3D renderings," Fisher says. "It's definitely fun to walk through with the customer during that process."

The foundation of most projects is a custom stone patio built by Dutchies' expert craftsmen, who all have years of experience. Although the company also uses manufactured pavers from EP Henry, Fisher urges customers to consider natural stone first.

"I would recommend natural stone, because it's more durable and has better longevity," he says. "The concrete products have come a long way and you'll get some life out of them as well, but natural stone holds up and doesn't fade as much. You're going to pay a little bit more for it and you're a little more limited in your options as far as colors and styles with natural stone, but overall it doesn't fade nearly as fast as the concrete products do, especially the darker colors."

Fisher notes that the Pennsylvania flagstones quarried in the Northeast are locally in demand for their versatility and availability, compared to more expensive imported stones.

"The modern styles are definitely in and have been for the last few years," he adds. "Squares and rectangles are very hot. We still see some of the old fieldstone in the irregular shapes, but not like the square and rectangle patterns."

No matter the scale or type of project, homeowners will enjoy a smooth process with a family business that now includes Fisher's sons: Mike serves as an operations manager and Jason is a foreman on the outdoor living crew.

"I think our attention to detail stands out, because we grew up in the masonry world so we come at it from that angle and our specialty still lies within natural stone craftsmanship," Fisher says. "But we also strive for service and we strive for transparency, and that supersedes the sale. Sometimes people will come to us without expectations of the cost, and we'll work with them and see if they are a fit with us. If it's within their budget, then we try to do what we say, when we say it. That's one of our core values here. We really focus on service and doing a great job." H&H

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Owner Dan Dilworth ensures that throughout the entire project, he and his team will provide personalized care to ensure a stress-free process. *House & Home* spoke with Dilworth to learn more about their signature process and the ins and outs of home renovations.

HOW IS YOUR COMPANY DIFFERENT FROM OTHER KITCHEN/BATH DESIGN COMPANIES?

We start the project with an in-home visit to listen to the client in order to get their goals and wish list for their new kitchen or bathroom. We will then invite the client to visit our 3,000-square-foot showroom where we can showcase their project on the screen using 3D imaging and walk through the showroom to help show what their new space will look like.

Once selections are made, our cabinetmakers get to work while the rest of the materials needed are gathered in our warehouse. Then the in-home construction begins and we introduce the client to their team of craftsmen who will remodel their home. When you entrust Dilworth's with your home renovation, there is only one call to make to communicate the details of the project from start to finish.

WHAT TYPE OF EXPERIENCE DOES A HOMEOWNER RECEIVE WHEN DEALING WITH YOU FROM THE INITIAL POINT OF ESTIMATE/DESIGN TO THE PROJECT'S COMPLETION?

Many express their concerns about extensive home renovation projects. We have had many clients tell us we helped make it such an enjoyable, stress-free environment from the planning in the showroom through the selection process and all the way through the construction phase.

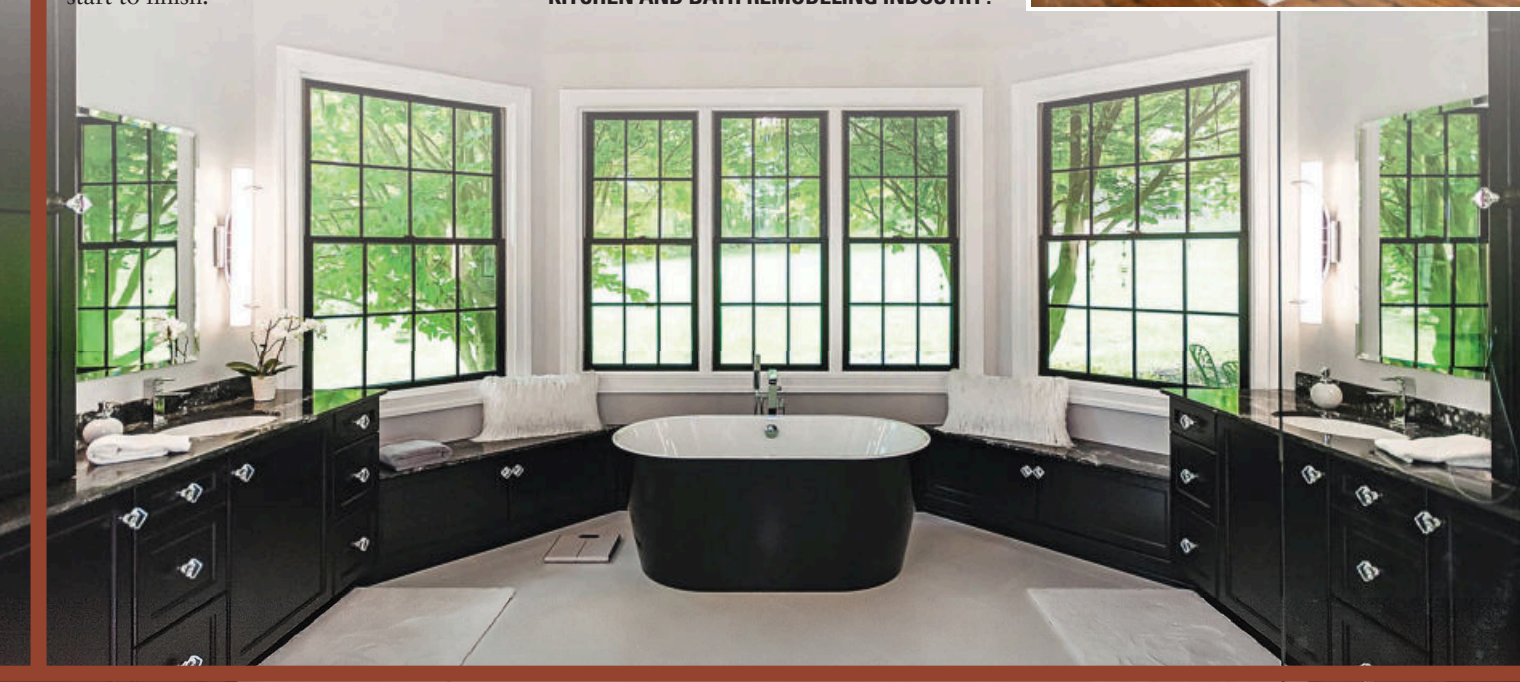
A kitchen project can last anywhere from 4-8 weeks and a bathroom project can be from 2-6 weeks depending on the renovations. Our goal is to get the project done as efficiently as possible, maintaining a high level of quality while doing our best to accommodate the homeowner's needs.

WHAT NEW TRENDS ARE HAPPENING IN THE KITCHEN AND BATH REMODELING INDUSTRY?

Styles change, sometimes as fast as the seasons. For kitchens, painted white cabinets with hardwood floors have been the trend for several years. For some, Hale Navy or Sweet Basil provides a bold pop of color, yet others choose subtle hues of Alabaster or Agreeable Grey to provide the warmth and calm that is desired.

Many are choosing to paint most of the cabinets and then add dark walnut or natural quarter-sawn white oak accents to make it their own. For bathrooms, bigger is better. Folks are leaning toward larger-sized wall and floor tiles with a curb-less walk-in shower. If there is enough space, a free-standing tub with high arch filler helps create a relaxing oasis far from the rat race that is our lives. H&H





Elevated Exteriors

Exploring the plethora of effective decking options takes an outdoor living space—and the entire home—to new heights.

BY CARLY MURRAY



A stylish and functional deck can be the centerpiece of a memorable summer, and the modern, multifaceted approach to decking allows for an expansion of the home. Traditionally a place of outdoor observation, gathering and relaxation, decks in 2024 often include the additional features of outdoor kitchens, pergolas, gazebos, screens, fireplaces and more. The consistently growing trend of creative customization is no longer limited to interior design or landscaping, enhancing both a space and residents' quality of life.



Deck Aesthetics

Home renovation projects have the best results when they are coordinated with each element of the home, culminating in a harmonious structure with every detail taken into account. When it comes to decking, one should be mindful of the adjacent interior space, the outdoor living space surrounding it and the exterior elements of a home. A property can be like a blank canvas, completely restructured for optimal personalization, but it can also act as a starting point to inspire a deck's look and utility

"Two factors dictate what your new deck should look like—it must be in proportion with the house and property, and it must be built large enough to accommodate the people using the deck," says Jerry Jerminski of Get Decked.

Colonial-style houses are characteristic of the Delaware Valley region, and that built-in historical charm allows for a guideline to help match a deck to the exterior. This is not to say that the preferred aesthetics are exclusively vintage, but rather timeless. When renovating or remodeling a deck, experts and homeowners strive to fuse contemporary and classic elements.

"A few years back, a lot of what we saw were modern looks. It seems that it has changed a little bit more to traditional, classic looks with a modern touch. [For] example, sleek rails, black railings—but still the classic wood look on the deck. So, it seems like the style is slowly moving toward a modern-classical look," says Ephraim Stoltzfus, designer at Deck Craft Plus.

Bold and bright colors aren't very common, so the general process is to opt for a complementary neutral color for the base and to style it with finishes or other parts of the accompanying outdoor living space. With all of the options available, one can pick the exact shade variation with undertones that are congruent with the rest of the space.

"They've developed a few colors that can fit in with the older architectural stone, and then the beige will come out. A gray will come out if you want to hit that modern farmhouse with a gray. They have colors that will satisfy both at the same time—pretty ingenious," explains Bill Wilson, co-owner of Amazing Decks.

Gray seems to be the top choice, according to decking experts in the region. It is the perfect amalgamation of sleek and futuristic tones with an evergreen and adaptable quality. Warmer and cooler colored accessory pieces further influence the look of the deck as a whole.

"I think gray decking is very popular right now. AZEK has about three or four different gray colors, and it seems like we sell a ton of those. Powder-coated aluminum railing mimicking the old, wrought-iron railing style is [also] super popular right now," adds Ray Ebersol, marketing manager of Decks R Us.

Similar to a primary gray color, black adornments are versatile enough to work well with a multitude of colors and styles. The neutral color also gives more freedom to play around with designs without appearing over the top.

"Our most popular railing color now is the bold, black-on-black design—black cross rails and black Deckorators balusters," affirms Jerminski



Elevated Exteriors


DECKS R US

As every piece is essential to the fully finished project, the base of the deck may influence railing and step options, and steps and railing can impact the inclusion of lighting. Aesthetics can encompass visual and tactile appeal with materials, patterns and colors, but to take it up a notch, consider creating movement. Illuminate chosen visuals by intertwining lighting and guiding the eye to a designated focal point.

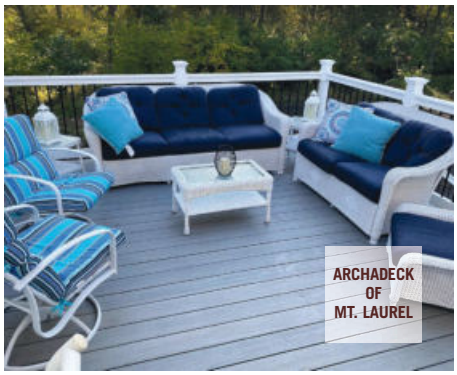
Deck Lighting

Lighting beautifies decking to a new level, and can range from practical to whimsical. Robert Lascelle, owner of My Deck, explains that colored lighting is called RGB lights, and they are increasingly gaining popularity with newer projects. However, practical lighting can still create an ethereal effect with the variety of options and cognizance of placement.

"Our viewpoint on lighting for a high-quality job…Your eyes should not focus on light fixtures, you're looking at the light the fixtures put out and that's what makes quality light jobs," says Lascelle. "Recessed under-rail lights [and] recessed under-stair riser lights are two examples "

Of course, any type of lighting will always require some sort of electrical accommodation. As with any home improvement project, careful planning is not just encouraged—it's a prerequisite. Jarrod Coburn, co-owner and production manager of Archadeck Outdoor Living of Mount Laurel, explains that the most common deck lighting—stair riser lights and rail post cap lights—does not require an electrician to install, but rather utilizes landscape wiring and a transformer with a solar sensor.

"When doing a new deck project or a complete demo and new deck replacement, it's best to decide on your lighting and under deck/skirting options before you start," Coburn says. "Running low voltage wiring to your stair risers and/or rail caps is much easier and cleaner if done before the decking is installed."


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The decision to make a deck an extension of the home demands cohesiveness, but that forethought in the design process is well worth the effort. Expanding the space also expands the realm of lifestyle possibilities. Personalizing a deck for each unique household's lifestyle guarantees that it will be where cherished memories are made.

"Imagine a perfect place for prom or wedding pictures. The multi-level decks cascade around the house towards their backyard with a gorgeous lake view," says Coburn, as he describes one of his most memorable projects.

Whether it is designing a platform ideal for family photographs above a stunning backyard oasis or considering architectural durability for a household with small children, the lifestyle needs of a home's residents are at the forefront. Many of these decisions equate to the idea of accessibility: making sure getting into the house via the deck does not require excessive effort with steep hills or unaligned entrances and adding features that are functional.

Exterior kitchens have made major traction in recent years, as they are highly customizable and add efficiency to the cooking process. When entertaining, a deck can give guests a maximized place to hang out without getting in the way of the food's preparation, and it can also allow for multitasking if cooking multiple dishes.

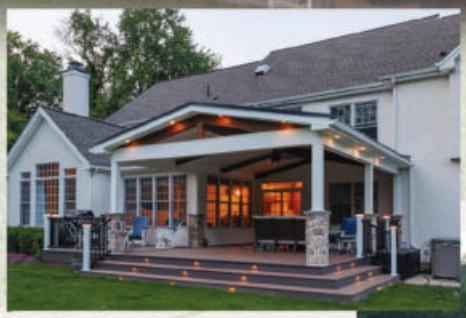
"You could have 150 people at your house, but they'll all hang out in the kitchen area. We call it the heart of the house. … It's very important that we make our deck an extension of that heart of the house," says Wilson.

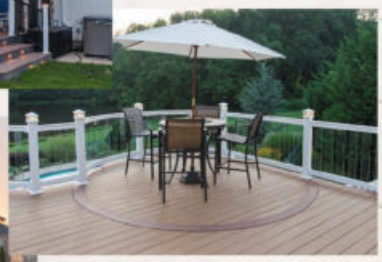
Full outdoor kitchens contain almost everything one would expect in an indoor kitchen: sinks, pull-out garbage, refrigerators, drawers and cabinets. Lascelle explains that the main focus is usually a standard grill, but he has witnessed the emergence of outdoor pizza ovens and hibachi-style grills.

"We're doing a ton of exterior kitchens, they're a really big feature that we put on a lot of decks now that people really enjoy," he says. "You can have a full kitchen outside

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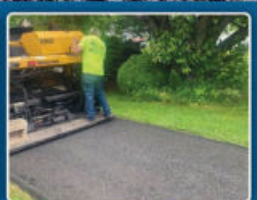
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Taking in nature and fresh air is paradisiacal—with the exception of a few factors. Gazebos, pergolas and screens are other common deck embellishments that provide a picturesque quality as well as factors to ensure an optimal outdoor experience. This includes staying shaded, warm or cool in varied weather, and protection from bugs.

"Gazebos are a great way to screen in an area, to spend more time outdoors. Obviously, if it's bug free, this will enhance the experience ... [and] makes it more pleasant on hot days to sit inside of the gazebo rather than out in the open, in the sun," says Ebersol.

Regardless of any potential qualms about an outdoor living space, there is typically an inventive solution that can be built into a deck. For example, gazebos can have outlets, fans and tinted windows installed. Additionally, working with the railing and underside of a deck can best maximize the area. Stoltzfus exemplifies this problem-solving approach while discussing a unique project that he worked on last summer: a second-story deck with a fully custom outdoor kitchen and bar underneath.

"We put a dry space underneath, outfitted with lights of course and some ceiling fans. We put stone columns from the ground to railing height, and we put screens in around the bottom of that deck. ... The face screens were all electrical screens, and we put a double-sided fireplace under the deck as well," he recounts.

A desired vision is a major first step toward the deck of one's dreams, and previously inconceivable attributes are more accessible than ever. Consulting an expert can traverse imaginative ideals and conceptualize them into reality, guaranteeing a deck you and your family will love. H&H

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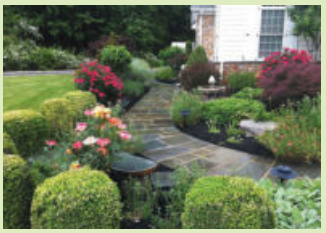
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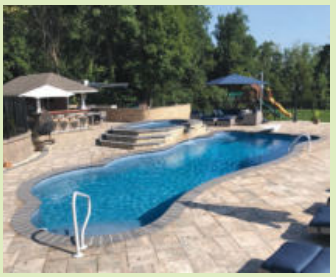
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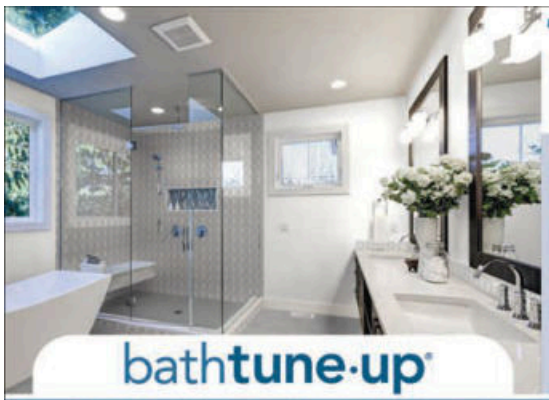
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Set Up Your Space for Summer

At **Sequoia Out Back**, customers can find endless inspiration for their outdoor dreams.



It's safe to say that the pandemic has taught us to appreciate the outdoors even more. While backyard outdoor living areas have been soaring in popularity for years now, for many, the stay-at-home orders and the experience of being stuck indoors for so long have made homeowners absolutely crave these spaces more than ever. They are truly a must-have—a fact that's been increasingly evident at Sequoia Out Back, where owner John Keller says that he's seeing even more people come into the showroom than ever before.

From the moment that homeowners walk through Sequoia Out Back's front doors, the experience is really unlike any other. The 30,000-square-foot showroom has everything you could want for your personal oasis on display so that you can envision it in your own backyard.

When you walk through a typical patio store or a big-box store, items aren't usually set up or paired together the way they would be in your backyard so it can be difficult to visualize your finished space. At Sequoia, you can see an entire outdoor living space the way that you might set it up on your own patio. It inspires so many ideas.

The goal of the showroom has always been to make homeowners feel like they're stepping into a real-life outdoor space. This helps homeowners to make the best choices when it comes to furniture and decking supplies that will work for their own projects.

Pair these gorgeous displays with the knowledgeable and helpful team members who are ready to assist—and homeowners can really appreciate the showroom visit



At Sequoia, you can see an entire outdoor living space the way that you might set it up on your own patio. It inspires so many ideas.

experience. Customers always leave Sequoia with a lot of great ideas and information.

Of course, in general, inventory has been a major issue since the start of the pandemic. Homeowners who have tried to purchase furniture and decking may have noticed limited stock. But Sequoia Out Back has been fortunate to be able to keep a lot of inventory in stock thanks to its relationship with manufacturers and its purchasing power, as well as having a large quantity from the start. Even so, with so many people coming through the doors, now is the time to start planning for the spring while inventory is still available.

After all, before you know it, the weather will be consistently warm, and we'll all be spending even more time outdoors. Homeowners want to make sure their space is ready now!

"The sooner you can start planning, the better," urges Keller. "The number of visitors coming to the store right now is higher than ever for this time of year. It's definitely not too early to start thinking about setting up your outdoor space."

As you start planning, Sequoia Out Back has all of the amenities that you might want to consider. This includes fire pits, patio furniture and all of the material supplies including decking and railing and hardscaping. Sequoia works with all of the leading manufacturers including TimberTech, Wolf, Trex, Zuri and Fiberon—all of whom continue to offer innovative products.

Whether you're a do-it-yourselfer or someone who was sent by their contractor to look for materials, Sequoia's showroom can accommodate everyone.

It's all about making the experience as easy and as enjoyable as possible for homeowners. As the true outdoor living experts, Sequoia and its team are ready to help make homeowners' backyard dreams come true.

"Outdoor living has been a trend for a long time but it's hotter than ever," Keller sums up. "I think we're all ready to start spending more time outside." **H&H**

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Where the Grass is Greener

by Madeleine Maccar

EcoGreen Lawn Care has been diligently tending to Southeastern Pennsylvania's front- and backyards since 2011, and its organic, eco-friendly products are in such high demand that the company recently introduced franchising opportunities.

With more than 30 years in the lawn-care industry, Dave Walsh has learned a lot about what does and doesn't work.

And for about 14 of those years, homeowners and lawns throughout Montgomery, Chester, Delaware and Bucks counties have benefited from Walsh pouring his tried-and-true experiences into the family-owned EcoGreen Lawn Care.

"It's not just about fertilizing the grass: It's about creating a healthy soil," affirms Walsh, the company's owner and founder. "Synthetically, a lot of times, you're just fertilizing the lawn. With our products, they're not just fertilizer, but they're also soil conditioners, they're biologically active to create a healthy soil, and we'll also do free soil pH tests to determine any other needs based on that."

That holistic approach to caring for the entire lawn extends to cultivating an ecosystem free of harmful chemicals, an asset to not only its plant life but also any pets or children playing on that grassy expanse. After all, among the many points of pride that differentiate EcoGreen from others in the field is that it's one of the few companies in the region offering 100% organic, environmentally conscious products.

"Our focus is on safer lawn care—that's our tagline in our logo, 'Safer by Nature,'" Walsh begins. "We're focused on organic. I've done a lot of research on it and we've ended up with our own proprietary line of organic products."

In addition to exclusive all-natural lawn treatments, EcoGreen also boasts a suite of services and options, like traditional lawn care, tree and shrub care, and tick and mosquito treatments. That varied selection ensures that every lawn gets exactly what it needs, according to the team's professional assessment—which includes an initial consultation and follow-up service calls—and the client's overall goals.

"When people sign up for a lawn service, it's an ongoing service—typically, they're signing up for a program where, at different points of the year, they're getting fertilizer and weed control as the basics of a continual process," Walsh explains. "We offer different programs, it's not only organic: We offer traditional, fully organic and a hybrid, which is kind of a combination of them. The products that are used in each program are designed for this geographical area. For example, in this part of Pennsylvania, most lawns typically have acidic soil, so we're going to need to balance that pH level—that's why we do those tests."

But he notes that a number of clients remain "all-in with organic," though it might not always be the first line of defense for lawns requiring a little more TLC than most.

"People hear the word 'organic' and they're ready to go with it," says Walsh. "But we also want to make recommendations that best suit their needs. Let's say your lawn is a mess: It might make more sense to start out with a traditional or hybrid program to get that lawn in better shape, and then transition to organic. That's why we believe in offering choices and recommendations to our customers, to find what's best for them."

While Walsh notes that the spotted lanternfly infestation of recent years has significantly migrated from Pennsylvania to become more of a problem for surrounding states, EcoGreen did identify ways to help homeowners combat damage from the modern-day invasive species without causing further ruin to properties that had never dealt with the pest before.

"We do follow the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture recommendations on how to control a new pest like that," he says. "It also comes from field experience and dealing with things hands-on, and tweaking things based on what we see and observe."

No matter why a client calls in the professionals at EcoGreen, Walsh promises not only a highly personalized lawn-care regimen but also a team that extends its family feeling to each and every customer—and the kind of attention that earns a company wildly positive reviews from deeply loyal customers.

EcoGreen has garnered itself such an enthusiastic client base that Walsh "literally just launched franchising a couple weeks ago" to increase its reach.

"We're targeting states adjacent to Pennsylvania to start out, like New Jersey, Delaware, New York, Massachusetts and Maryland," Walsh notes. "It's really about how unique we are in terms of our approach to organic lawn care and then also having our own proprietary products. We really feel that we're set up and ahead of the curve in regards to organic lawn care."

And Walsh is eager to welcome more households to the EcoGreen family, where they can enjoy not only a safely thriving lawn but also the benefits of working with a team of experts who are as warm as they are knowledgeable.

"Company culture is a huge thing with us: We have very intensive training with our technicians and have a very friendly, family type of atmosphere," he says. "Our reviews are excellent—we have a 4.9 on Google—but I really love seeing the reviews where people are saying how great and friendly our technicians are." H&H

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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

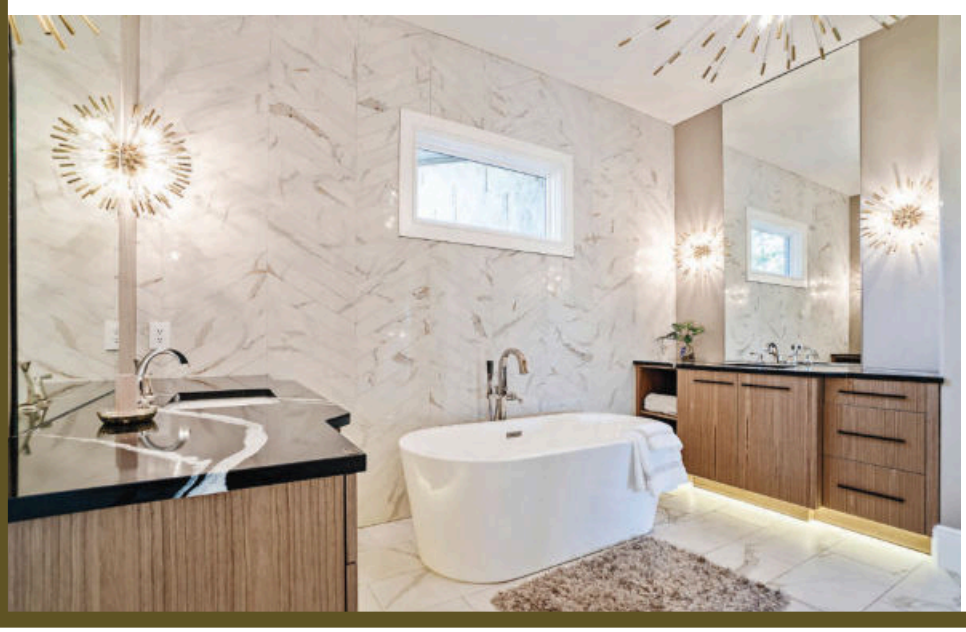
WHEN YOU MEET WITH CLIENTS, WHAT ARE SOME THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THEIR LIFESTYLE TO GUIDE THEIR SELECTION?

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

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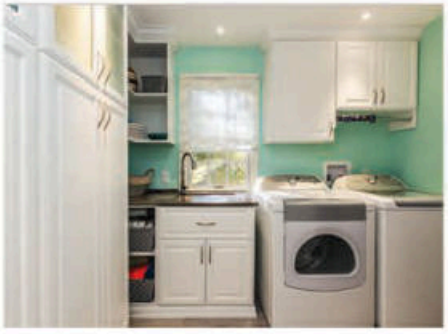


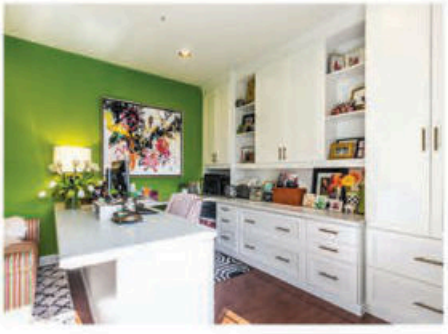
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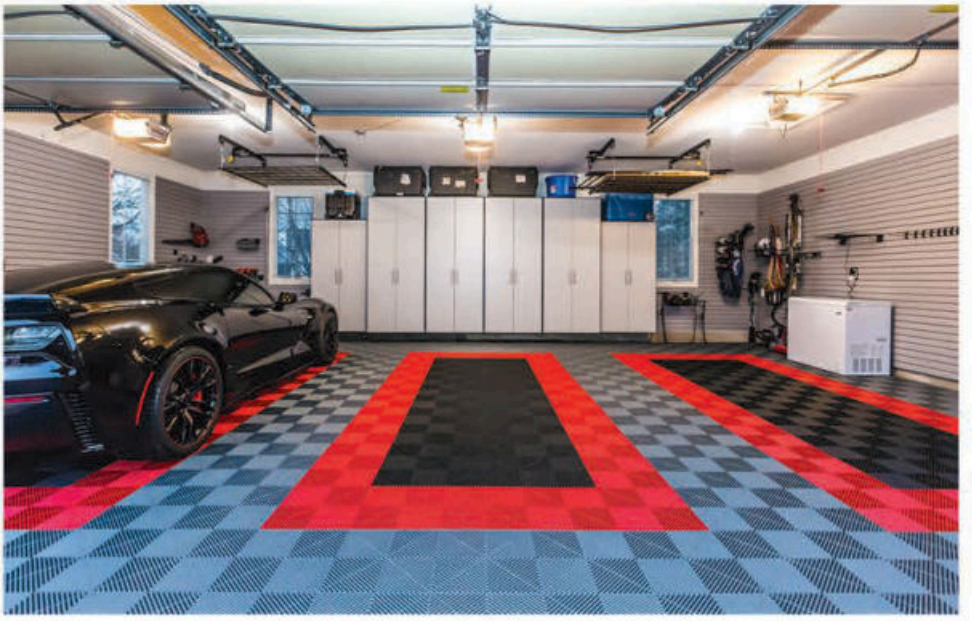
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Just a Stone's Throw Away

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**

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



DIVE RIGHT IN

From the lifetime of memories it can provide to increasing property value and more, the benefits of installing and maintaining a pool are innumerable.

by **Chelsea Valcourt**

In recent years, the backyard has become the focal point of many homes. With quarantine limiting travel, folks were left in the confines of their homes—leaving many with plenty of time and reasons to finally conquer their long-desired home improvement projects. For many homeowners, desperate to regain some semblance of normalcy and life outside their four walls, these projects focused on making their backyards places of happiness, beauty and relaxation. People wanted a way to vacation without leaving the house, a way to exercise without going to the gym and eventually, a place to host guests once the pandemic sub-





sided. The solution? Pools.

From installing new and improving existing pools to building up the space around their pools with hardscaping and landscaping, homeowners have taken a renewed interest in elevating their space. After all, who wouldn't want to watch the sunset by the pool after a long, hot day?

With new customization options and rising design trends, it's easier than ever to achieve the pool space of your dreams. Working with experienced pool professionals can even help to combine both design and cost-saving measures—making those dreams a reality while keeping costs to a minimum.

House & Home spoke with some of the area's leading pool companies to solicit their advice on the best way to start the process, to maintain your pool and to turn your simple pool into a hosting space everyone will love.

When is the best time to get started on a pool project for it to be summer-ready?

"The best time to get started on a pool project is in the fall or winter, since the permit process could take four to six months with engineering and zoning. If the customer is installing something other than a fiberglass pool, which can be installed in one day, the customer can plan for a two-to-six-month installation, which would eliminate the entire swimming season. If a customer began the process now, and purchased a fiberglass pool, it is still possible to have the pool in toward the middle of the summer."

— Derek Blasker, president, Pool Designs

"It's best to start as soon as possible. Like any home improvement project it takes time to plan, design and build. Coming up with a design plan and then finding the best contractor to make that vision happen is a process. You have to give yourself ample time to research, interview prospective contractors and allow for a realistic time frame to accomplish the work."

— H.P. Wertman, director of operations, Premier Pool Renovations

When is the best time to open a pool?

"If a pool owner has a gas heater for their pool, they can open the pool as early as they are ready, but the size of the gas bill may prohibit such early openings. The pool owner should generally plan for at least two to four weeks to get the pool in swimmable shape, but a good closing and cover can cut down on this time frame. If the pool owner has a solid or tightly woven mesh safety cover, it is likely that little to no debris will be in the pool and the water quality will be substantially better than a standard mesh safety cover or tarp cover."

— Derek Blasker, Pool Designs

How can design elements come together to make your pool feel like part of the yard?

"This all starts with the design process. The placement of the swimming pool, terrace and the different features of the project are imagined by our architects and designers to create an amazing and functional outdoor space."

— Sam Waddell, president, SLS Landscaping

"Swimming pools used to be a separate item in your yard, completely disconnected in most cases from the design elements of the house. Now, many people want a pool and surrounding area that is used for entertaining and is completely integrated with the home itself. Continuity is easily maintained by choosing materials and elements that flow from the pool to the outdoor entertaining areas and even to the home itself. This is best achieved by utilizing similar surfaces, color palette, design elements, lighting and finishes throughout which will make the pool area seem very connected to the home. If your goal is to have your outdoor entertaining spaces and pool area feel very warm and inviting, then they need to be an extension of your particular design taste."

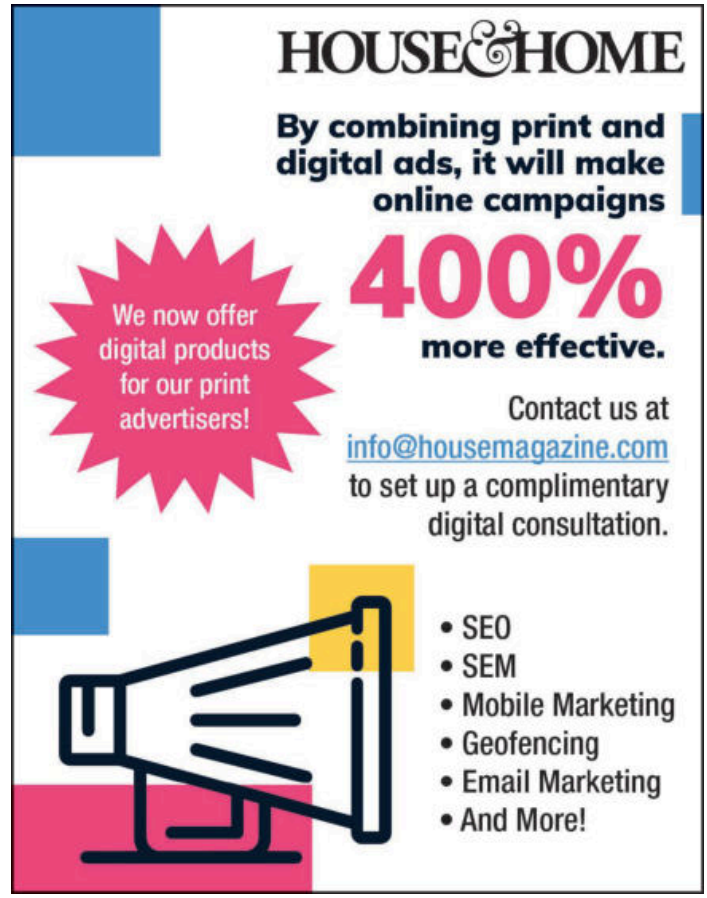
— H.P. Wertman, Premier Pool Renovations

What are some of the more unique pool elements folks could incorporate to take their pool space to the next level?

"We have created many unique and amazing swimming pools and environments over the years—

Image top left courtesy of Premier Pool Renovations. Image far left courtesy of Pool Designs. Image at left courtesy of SLS Landscaping







Images courtesy of Stardust Pools

including elements such as fire bowls, waterfalls and sheer descents, grottos and spas, and swim-up bars, to name a few.

— Sam Waddell, SLS Landscaping

"A lot of people are going with sun shelves where it's 18 inches deep and you can put chairs in there. LED lighting allows people to change colors for ambiance and has become very popular. In addition, a lot of people are going over to salt generators for sanitation. Installing a salt generator means your chlorine is always the same and you never have to buy pool shock or anything ever again, so it's a money saver."

— Walter Beyer, owner, Stardust Pools

What are the best ways to take care of your pool?

"The best way to take care of your pool always starts with maintaining your water chemistry. If your pH is off balance or your sanitizer is low, the water will turn quickly and you will spend your free time testing, balancing, retesting, rebalancing, and testing again. Similarly, alkalinity and calcium hardness need to be balanced to not only maintain water quality, but the quality of your pool surface. In addition to balancing your water, pool owners need to be diligent with cleaning the pool floor and walls. If you leave debris on the floor for prolonged periods of time it can lead to stains that may not come out easily or may be permanent. If the pool owner has the financial capability to afford a robotic cleaner for their pool, it will greatly reduce the amount of work required to keep the pool surface clean and the filter on the robot will also aid in cleaning the water."

— Derek Blasker, Pool Designs

How can pool owners transform their space to accommodate for hosting?

"A pool and surrounding area is a great place to lounge or relax with guests but it needs to be so much more. This is achieved by having seating areas that have plenty of shade and protection from the ele-





ments; large market umbrellas, pergolas and pavilions are great at accomplishing that. Having fire pits, fire tables and fireplaces is key in having inviting areas that can be used at night and even when the pool season is over.

Outdoor kitchens, grill areas and pizza ovens are a big trend in outdoor entertaining. Much like the kitchen is the main congregation point in the home, this can be the same outside.

Gaming areas are also now a huge element in the outdoor entertaining space. Having designated areas for games such as cornhole, horseshoes and ring toss is a great way to get adults and children alike participating in fun activities. Music is a huge part of any entertaining space and now with ever-improving technology there are more choices than ever to make this happen anywhere in your yard. Wireless speakers, or even waterproof underwater speakers in the pool are all great ways to get the music anywhere you are active."

— H.P. Wertman, Premier Pool Renovations

What are some things pool owners should be mindful of?

"When somebody's going to shop for a pool, they should see how long the company has been in business, if they're registered with the National Pool and Spa Institute and check with the Better Business Bureau. They need to do their homework these days because times are different. There's a lot of companies opening up and working out of their garages with no insurance. You want somebody that's been around a long time, has plenty of references and is abiding by all of the National Pool and Spa Institute rules that are out there."

— Walter Beyer, Stardust Pools H&H

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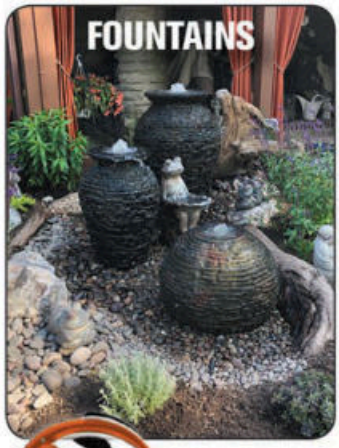
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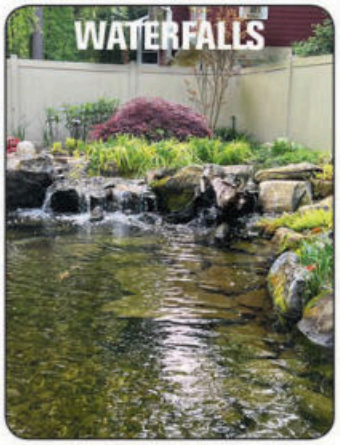


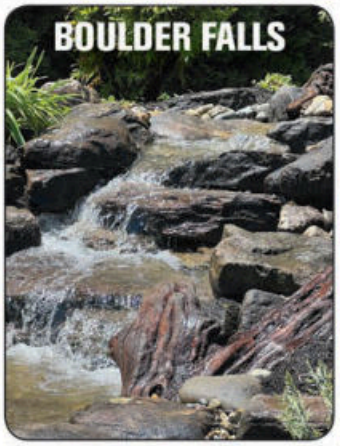


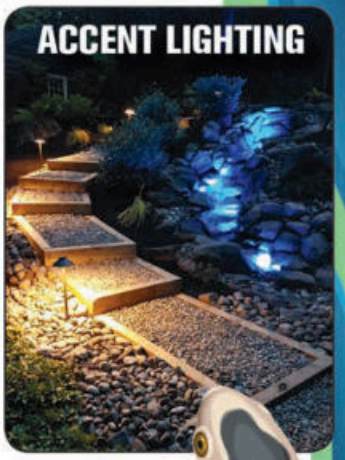
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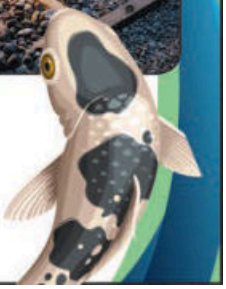




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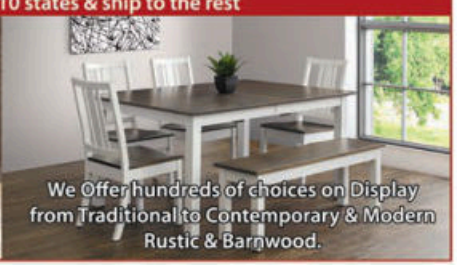


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House & Home spoke with Closet Factory's senior designer Brittany Palko-Harris and general manager Charles Palko about the benefits and growing trend of organizational design.

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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?

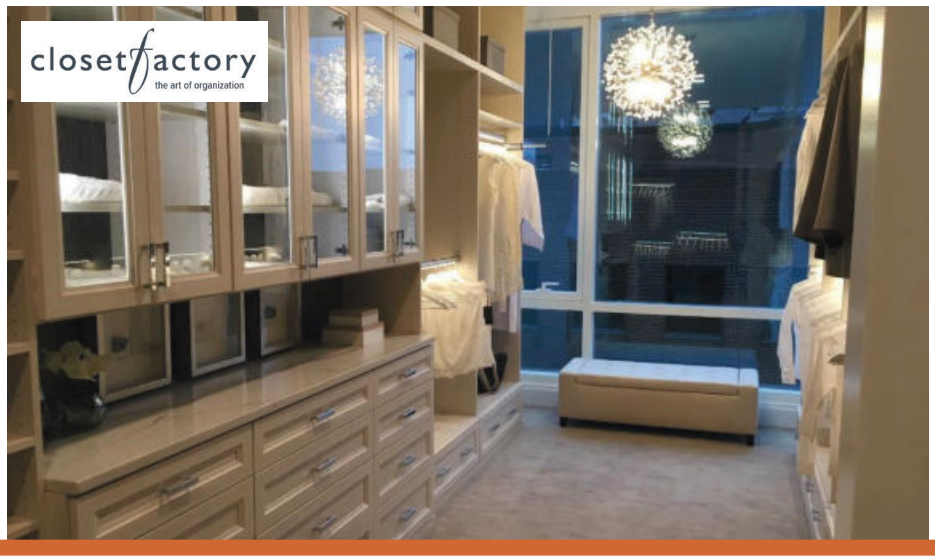
Since everything we design and produce is custom based on the organizational requirements and aesthetic appearance of our customers' individual tastes, we've seen the trend leaning toward systems that are more upscale that match the interior influence of the home. Our customers have certainly gravitated 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



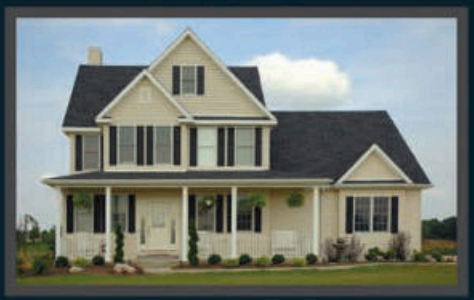


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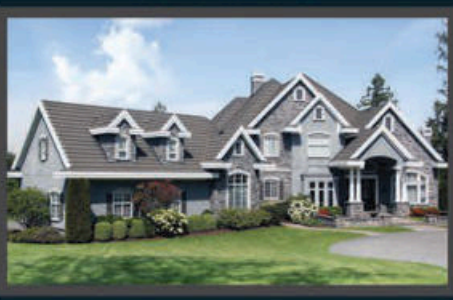
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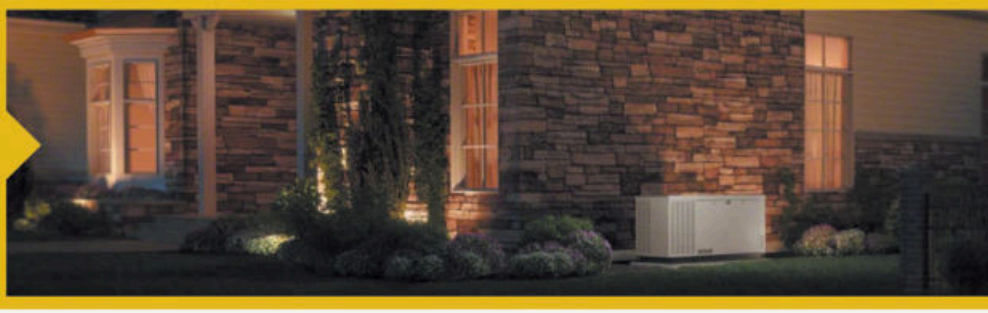
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