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Volume 21, Issue 12

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Middle Creek Roofing

Quality Amish craftsmanship for the roof over your head *page 11*

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Reaction Exteriors Inc.

Handling all of your exterior needs *page 15*

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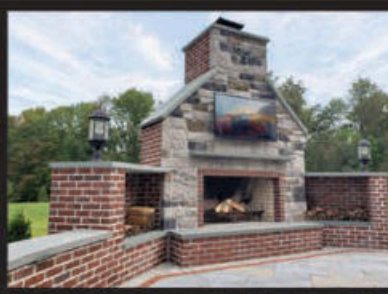
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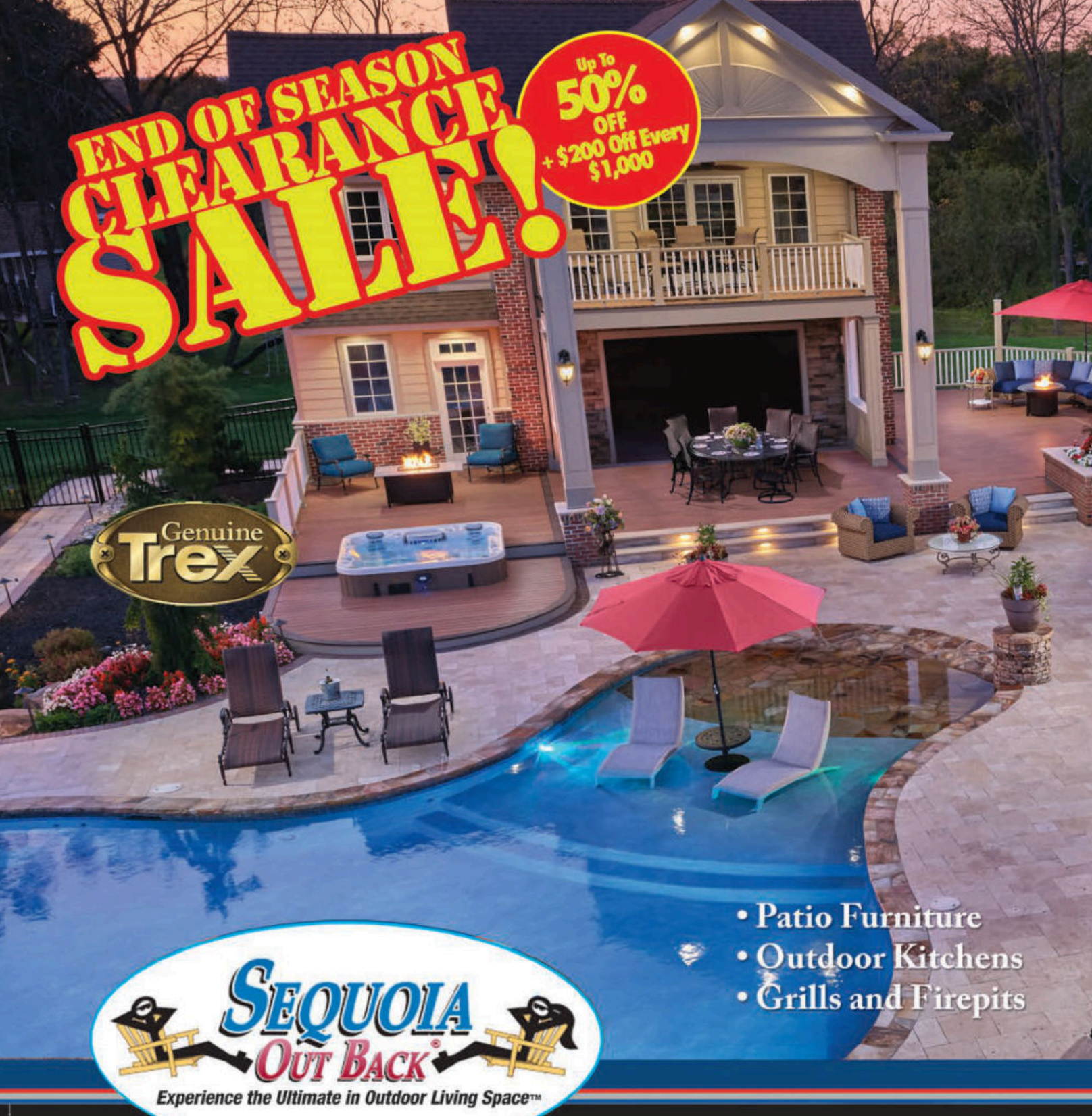
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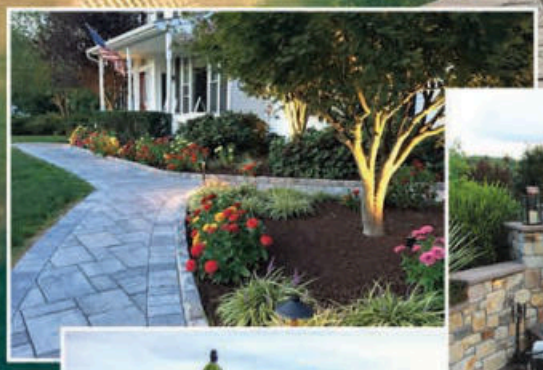
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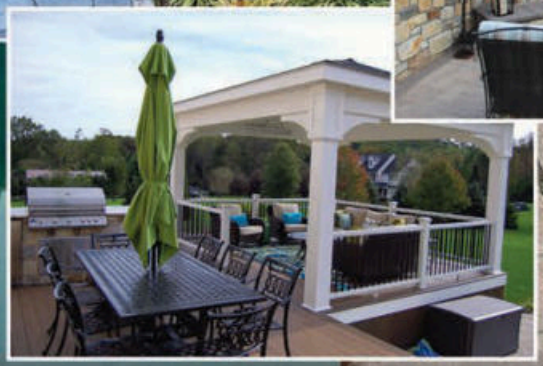
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contents

11 Committed to Quality
In the tradition of Amish craftsmanship, Middle Creek Roofing ensures homeowners have a beautiful but durable roof over their heads

15 Reaction Exteriors
One company to manage your home's entire exterior

18 Unfinished Business
Summer may be over, but landscaping experts say there is still plenty of work to be done in your yard this fall in preparation for the spring

26 An Energy-Efficient Exterior
Is your home ready for the winter ahead?

30 Heating Up
The key to staying comfortable this winter is making sure your heating systems are running properly





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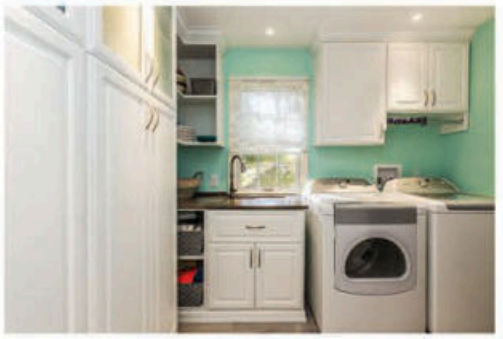
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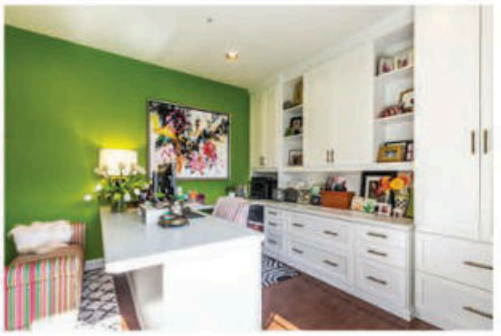
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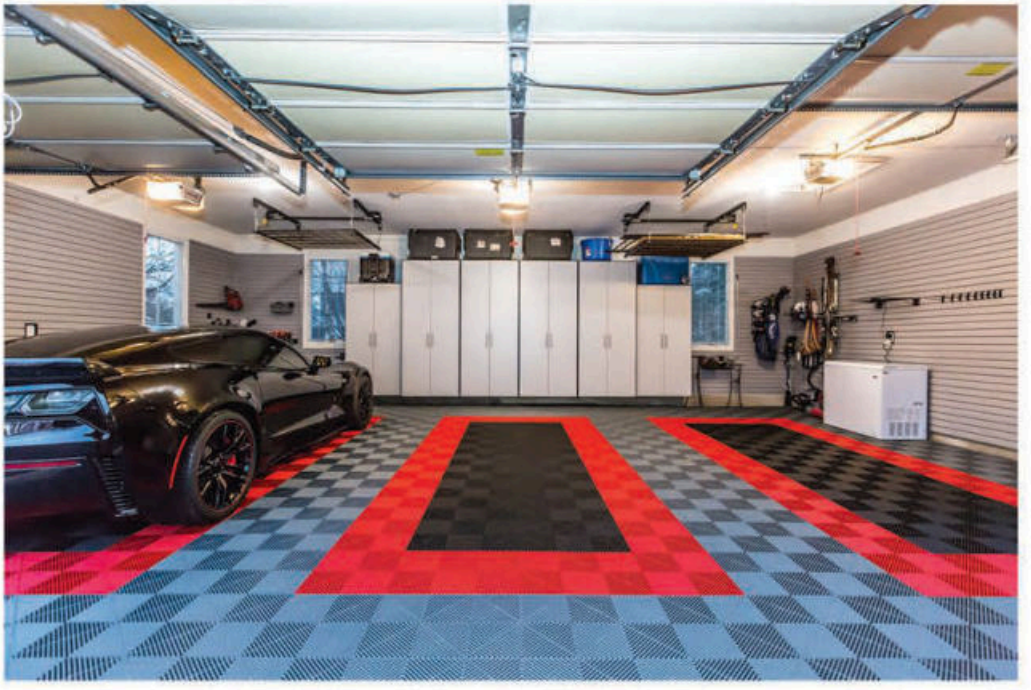
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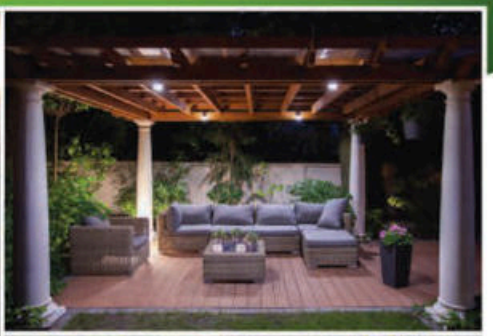
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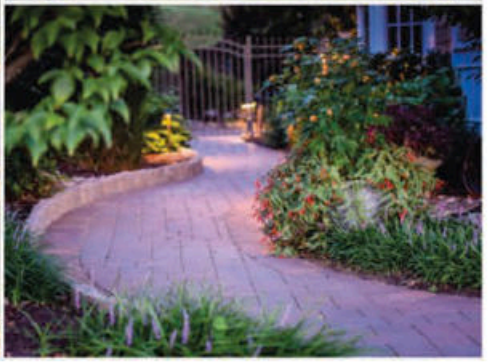
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In the tradition of Amish craftsmanship, **Middle Creek Roofing** ensures homeowners have a beautiful and durable roof over their heads.



by **Liz Hunter**

IN THIS PART OF THE COUNTRY, PEOPLE ARE WELL AWARE OF THE REPUTATION OF PRODUCTS AND SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE AMISH. Their attention to detail, knowledge and commitment to quality is second to none, so it comes as no surprise that homeowners seek out Amish-owned businesses to handle their valuable projects. Middle Creek Roofing is one of those companies.

Led by Ben Lapp, president and owner, the team of highly skilled craftsmen and managers at Middle Creek Roofing provides expert roof replacement services for a variety of roofing materials, including asphalt shingles, metal roofing, cedar shakes, slate roofing, and flat and low-slope roofing. A native of Lebanon County, Lapp has over 20 years of experience in the industry and founded Middle Creek Roofing on the Amish principles of honesty, integrity and a concern for excellence.

For Lapp, the "Amish" label goes deeper than face value. "I am proud of my heritage that has been passed down in my family and community," he says. "I don't take lightly that my work represents the reputation we have built over generations."

Middle Creek Roofing has established itself in the roofing industry and has achieved the esteemed recognition as a Certified CertainTeed Shingle Master and Owens Corning Preferred Contractor. These designations come with a litany of inspections and requirements that must meet the manufacturers' stamp of approval. Not only does Middle Creek Roofing provide its own labor warranty, but the backing of two nationally recognized manufacturers' warranties is another benefit for customers.

Lapp says homeowners should always question the warranties a roofing contractor is offering. "Customers approaching this project are making a big investment and should trust that the person doing the work has years of experience and has the blessing of the manufacturer. Because our work is reinforced by a manufacturer, you know it's something we're doing on a regular basis," he says.



At Middle Creek Roofing, installing roofs isn't just a science, but an art as well. The company has become particularly experienced in cedar shake and metal roofing, two products that take particular skills to install.

"Metal roofing has become a significant new trend, as homeowners seek to use it as an accent over a front porch or windows, on additions or their garage, but it's not new to the Amish community," Lapp says. "I have been installing these specialized roofing systems for many years, and there is a craft to it, different from a traditional shingle roof."

Metal roofing adds a unique texture to a home and can increase its value. Although the initial cost is higher than a shingle roof, metal roofing lasts two-three times longer and holds up better in severe weather.

Currently, homeowners can take advantage of an Energy Star metal roof tax credit that has been extended to December 2021, which can help defer some of the cost.

Determining which roof system is right for you is a personal decision, but Middle Creek Roofing takes no shortcuts in educating customers about their options. Complimentary estimates are done on site, not via email using a satellite image. With social distancing measures in place, Middle Creek Roofing's staff will climb up on the roof for a full inspection and walk the perimeter of the house. Homeowners can view an array of color palettes and shingle samples to make the most informed decision.

It has been important to maintain this personal touch even during the pandemic. "We make sure to follow the guidelines to keep our employees and customers safe and healthy and we want to make sure the customers get the service and support that has been part of our legacy," Lapp says.

When it comes time to install the roof, nothing but excellence is required from the production team. Middle Creek Roofing's installers are managed by Amish leadership, carrying through on its promise throughout the process.

"For higher end roofing systems, you really want to hire a true craftsman and professional. We have been a fixture in the community for years, with a permanent office and a team of real people answering the phone," Lapp continues. "We are proud to live and work in this community. Our customers are our neighbors and we treat them as if they were part of our family." H&H

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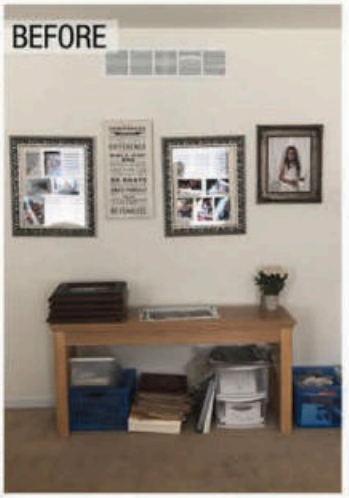


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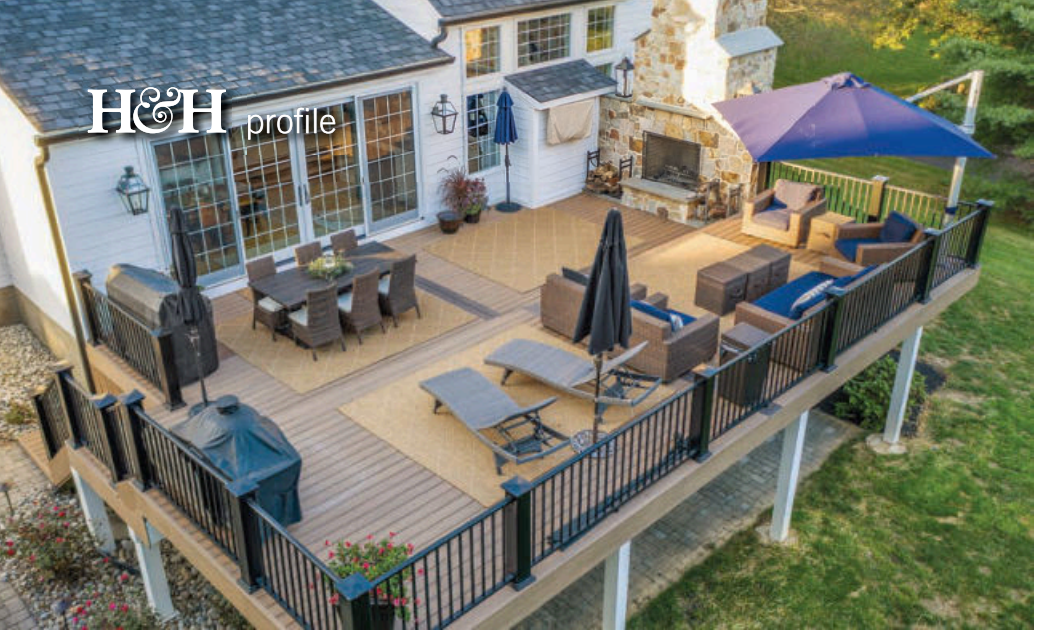
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Reaction Exteriors is based on superior skill and knowledge of exterior construction. It starts with Steve Bonatsos, the owner. Steve first gained business insight running and eventually selling his father's business before starting Reaction Exteriors. Steve combined his knowledge of the ever-changing trends of exterior construction to excel in building, remodeling and the direction of stucco remediation. Steve quickly gained insight into the epidemic of failing stucco that hit Pennsylvania especially hard and spent several years focusing on and perfecting the remediation process and worked with several licensed inspectors. Reaction Exteriors frequently works with both home buyers and sellers through the sale process made more complicated by stucco exterior issues, with a focus on delivering a beautiful and high-quality finished product within the time constraints of the sales transaction.



As Reaction Exteriors developed a strong reputation and received more and more recommendations, Steve began to expand. First, by partnering with Marcos Jara, a well-known and extremely knowledgeable construction tradesman. This partnership continues to grow stronger with the addition of family members and other quality workers who have made Reaction Exteriors their home. From the owners, to office staff, to the sales team, to each member of each specialized crew; all of the Reaction Exteriors personnel work hard to communicate with and accomplish the goals of every client. The resulting products speak for themselves.

Reaction Exteriors stays current with the products in the construction marketplace, meeting with manufacturers and distributors to make sure it is providing exactly what the market demands regarding materials, communication to the homeowner and quality installation. And, as a local business in West Chester borough, it is committed to the community.

As Reaction Exteriors continues to grow, their focus remains on delivering a superior product, constructed with care by talented craftsmen at competitive pricing in an ever-changing market. Reaction Exteriors is ready for your home's exterior needs! For more information on remediation, visit www.remediationdoneright.com or see some before and after photos at www.reactionexteriors.com. H&H

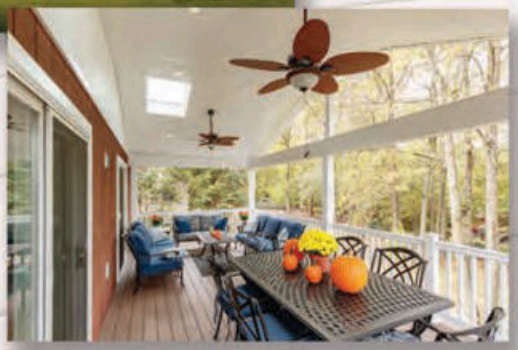
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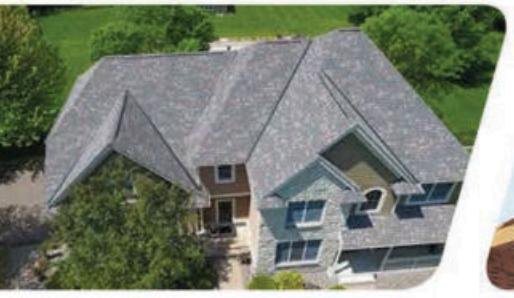
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SUMMER MAY BE OVER, BUT LANDSCAPING EXPERTS SAY THERE IS STILL PLENTY

By Matt Cosentino

EVERY NEIGHBORHOOD HAS THOSE RESIDENTS WITH A GREEN THUMB WHO TRULY ENJOY THE PROCESS OF WORKING ON THEIR PROPERTIES AND CREATING A PICTURE-PERFECT LANDSCAPE, AND THEIR YARDS DESERVEDLY RECEIVE COMPLIMENTS THROUGHOUT THE YEAR.

Others see it as a chore they must tackle every weekend, but nevertheless recognize that a little effort will go a long way toward boosting curb appeal.

No matter which camp you belong to, know this: The arrival of Labor Day does not mean it is time to lock away your lawn mower and gardening tools for the year just yet. Spring may be the season that the average homeowner most associates with landscaping, but fall is actually a crucial period when it comes to lawn renovations, plantings and maintenance.

"Fall is the time of the year where a property should be evaluated to see what stresses negatively impacted turf and plantings throughout the spring and more likely the summer," says Michael Pasquarello, degreed landscape architect and vice president of Elite Landscaping. "Proper actions taken now will allow your plants and lawn to have a comfortable winter slumber, ready to explode in spring once the weather breaks."

House & Home spoke to several area experts to learn more about the important steps to take now to lead to a lush landscape next spring and summer.

Prime time for planting

There are a number of factors why fall is an ideal time for new plantings of all varieties, most notably the weather.

"Most people don't realize it but September and October are much better months than April or May, and studies at Rutgers and Cornell have both shown that," says Richard Cording Sr., registered landscape architect and owner of CLC Landscape Design. "The reason is that soil gets cooler, the roots grow deeper and because of the presence of dew virtually every morning and then sunny days and cooler nights, it's perfect growing weather for lawns, trees and shrubs to set their roots. Also, for new trees and shrubs, it's less stress going into the winter than it is going into a hot summer because they go dormant. If you plant a tree in May and then in June we get five 90-degree days in a row, the stress on that plant is way worse than sub-zero temperatures when the tree itself is dormant."

Chris DeMato, owner of Rock Bottom Landscaping & Fencing, adds that the cooler temperatures make transplanting plant material much easier than in the middle of July.

"You can plant at any time, however the biggest concern is transporting plant material from a garden center on a hot summer day," he says. "It burns the foliage in the travel. In the fall season, it's a bit cooler so you don't have to worry too much about that. Also, it's less work on the homeowner's part to water the plant material. So I think generally it's a great time to plant all plants.

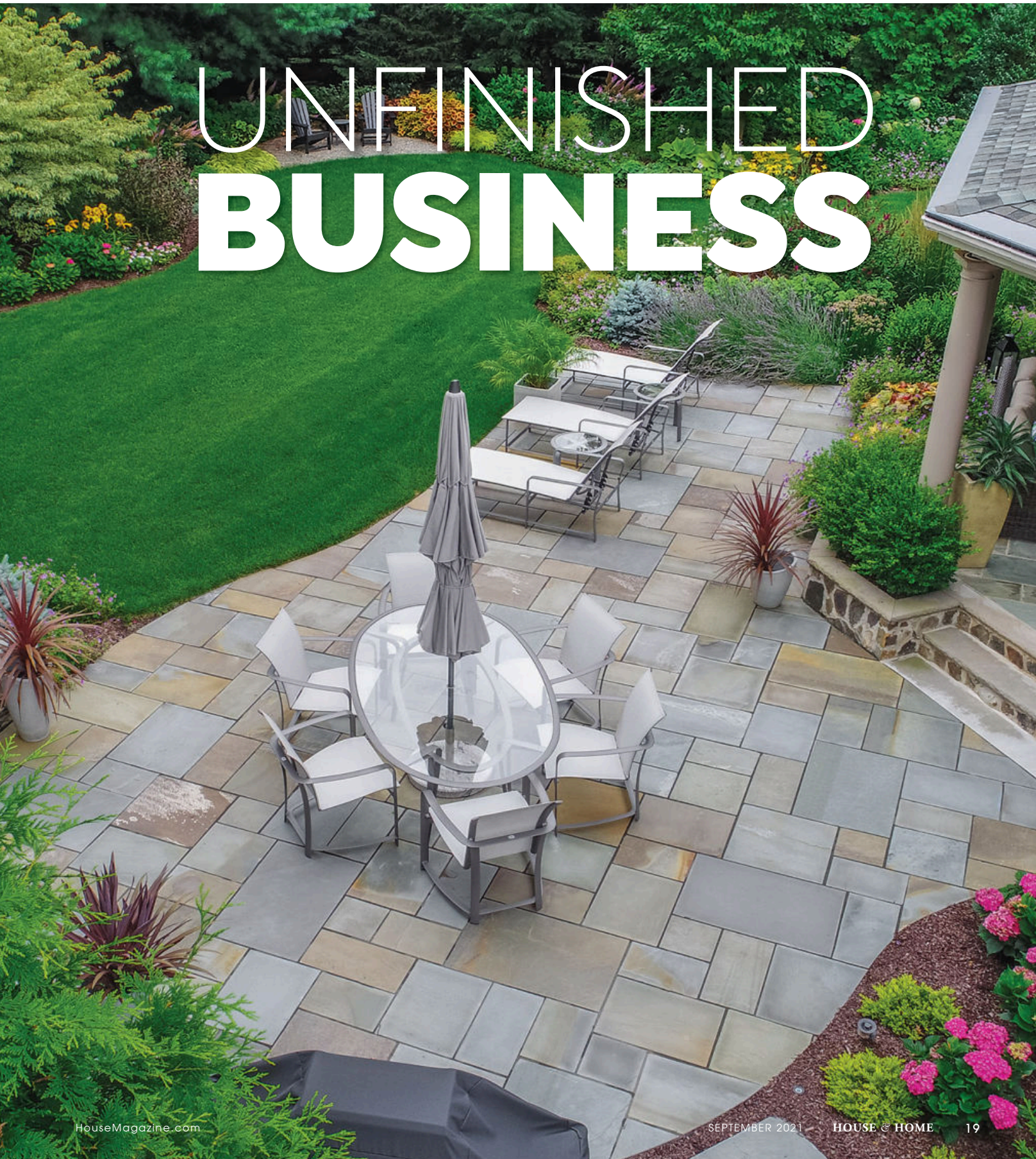




Image at right courtesy of CLC Landscape Design

OF WORK TO BE DONE TO YOUR YARD THIS FALL IN PREPARATION FOR THE SPRING.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS



Garden centers and nurseries are usually re-stocking in the late summer for another burst of business in the early fall, so you get some nice new plant material as well."

For those looking to add bulbs like tulips and daffodils to their flower beds, now is the time to do so, says Cording, so they can get into the ground before it freezes and have the winter to develop strong roots and begin the flowering process for spring. Sam Waddell, owner of SLS Landscaping, agrees and offers other helpful hints for a beautiful garden. "The avid gardener will also start planting chrysanthemum and aster that will offer that splash of color for the fall," he says. "A little bit later into the fall, winter pansies will make an appearance and provide color late in the season and another big push in the early spring."

Caring for the lawn

The hum of lawn mowers and weed wackers is usually part of the soundtrack of summer, but it is recommended to keep up with regular lawn maintenance in autumn as well. The weather will usually dictate when it is time to stop for the year.

"It's important to keep it regular and do not cut it short before the winter," Cording says. "When I was young my dad always had me cut it real short before the winter but that's the worst thing you can do because it robs the plant of all its nutrients, which are in the green part of the plant. So cut it at the same height through Thanksgiving."

He adds that renovations to the lawn during the fall produce the best results because of the weather and also less competition from weeds like dandelions and crabgrass. Experts suggest thatching, aerating and seeding be done in the early portion of the season.

"September through mid-October is ideal as temperatures are on the decline, creating a more favorable environment for cool weather turf varieties such as fescues to germinate," Pasquarello says. "Having this completed by mid-October also ensures the newly germinated lawn blades have sufficient time to mature and harden off prior to winter setting in."

"Lawns will benefit greatly from fall aeration with combined overseeding and an application of lime," adds Scott Nickett, owner of Nickett Landscaping. "This will break up the clay compacted soils and allow airflow down in the soil, allowing for better root growth for new and existing grass."

Leaf cleanup and other tips

Most homeowners realize the necessity of raking and collecting leaves during the fall, but some will try to get away with the task just once or twice. This could have a negative impact on the lawn.

"I think people tend to do one general cleanup and if the leaves continue to fall, they figure they can clean them in the spring," DeMato says. "That's not a great idea because leaves sitting on a lawn throughout the winter will kill the grass, so you want to make sure you do two or three cleanups throughout the fall season and one at the end. You want to keep as many leaves off the grass and around your plant material as possible. When it snows and rains and you have clumps of leaves around your lawn, you're going to see a lot of damage in the spring when everything melts and starts to grow again."



DeMato and Pasquarello both stress that this pertains to any hardscaping as well, because piles of leaves left on patios, for example, can lead to staining once winter weather sets in and the material starts to decay. Leaves in flower beds, however, might actually be beneficial in acting like a mulch, Cording explains. In fact, he is a big proponent of mulching in the fall, even though most people consider it a spring activity.

"You want to protect your plant roots over the winter from freezing and not having moisture, so a good shredded, hardwood bark mulch protects the roots of the plants over the winter and next year it will hold down weeds, and it also insulates it," he says. "Obviously, the ground is still going to freeze, but it keeps it at a more even temperature. Most shrubs in our area have what we call surface roots—they don't grow down real deep, they grow along the surface. So having mulch over the top protects them and helps tremendously. Mulch is one of the most underused tools that horticulturists have."

Some experts suggest that fall is too late to be pruning, but others say selective, careful clipping can be done.

"Fall is a good time to prune back and shape most specimens of evergreen and deciduous trees and shrubbery and perennials," says Diane Marrazzo, outdoor design specialist and co-owner of Marrazzo's North River. "Pruning too late into fall may leave an unsealed wound open, causing the tree to lose moisture through the winter, potentially leading to infection or demise come spring. Deciduous trees can often be pruned well into winter without any consequence come spring. Preparing your landscape for winter also preps it for new growth come spring."

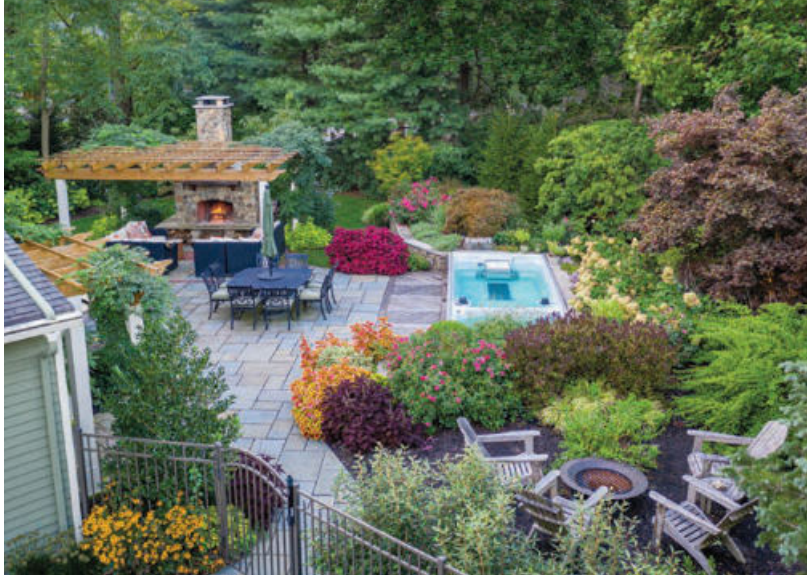
Rose bushes are another example of a specimen that can be pruned, and some people will cut back ornamental grasses.

"All perennials should be cut back once the first couple frosts set in and cause the surface vegetation to die back," Pasquarello says. "I actually leave my ornamental grasses up all winter long as the light tan blades and seed heads still are an added interest. Fall is also a great time for corrective pruning as once the leaves fall off the plants it makes it much easier to see the branching structure and evaluate."

Beginning or planning new projects

Autumn's temperatures also make it perfect for adding hardscaping elements and crews will often stay busy through the end of the year.

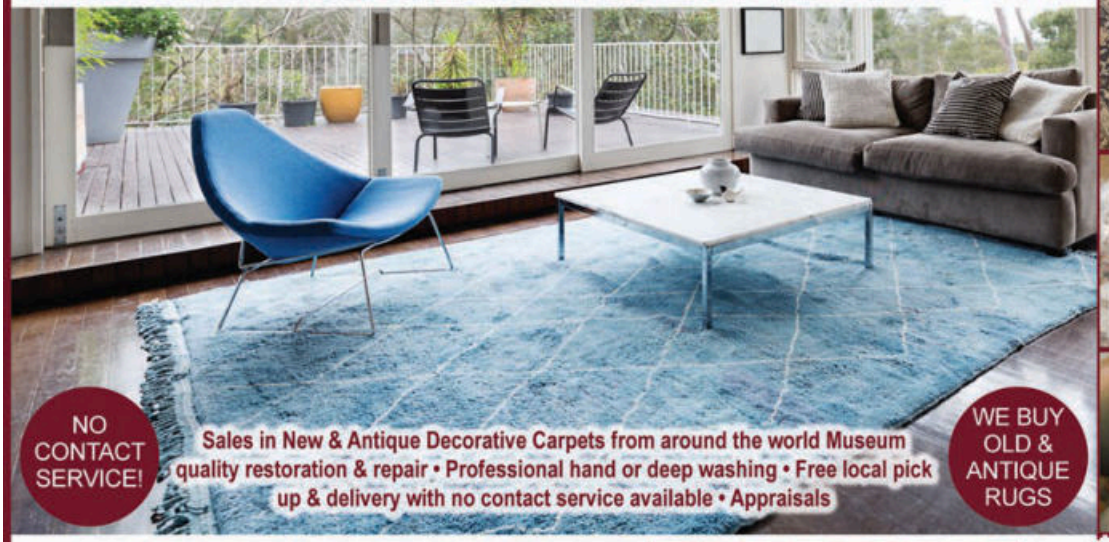
"The ground gets a bit harder as the cool weather sets in so it's a little easier to do outdoor projects such as patios," DeMato says. "The diggings and excavating is not as messy during the fall season. We do outdoor projects until the ground freezes, which can be as late as mid-January. As far as materials go, you tend to get a little



Top image courtesy of CLC Landscape Design. Image at left courtesy of Rock Bottom Landscaping & Fencing

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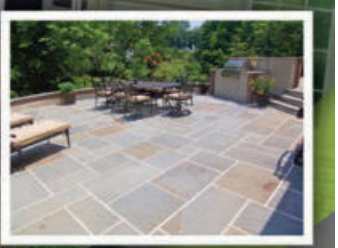
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bit better prices in the fall season. The garden centers, brick suppliers and fence suppliers tend to discount materials they may want to push out the door before the end of the season."

As homeowners assess their properties following the summer, Nickett points to a number of different projects that can be completed before next season.

"All projects can still be planned in the fall," he says. "We are still booking new plant designs as well as plant renovations, and new hardscape projects like walls, walkways and patios are still being installed before winter. One of our biggest projects that is booked in the fall is lawn drainage remediation. With the decrease in temperatures and less daytime sunlight, the lawns stay wetter for longer. Fixing lawn drainage will result in a useable lawn, better lawn growth, no water in the home/basement and cleaner dog paws."

Even if the actual construction is not being done now, it never hurts to begin the design phase and the process of acquiring any necessary permits from the municipality or homeowner's association. Getting on the landscaping company's schedule before it fills up in early spring is another bonus.

"Spring projects seem to be at a distance, however, with the shortage of materials, pavers, natural quarry stones and lumber [along with] booked schedules, now is the time to consider scheduling with your landscape contractor or building contractor for your desired spring needs," says Marrazzo, who emphasizes that a key element for outdoor projects is coverage. "I always say, shade is a commodity—please plant a shade tree. Dedicate the tree planting for a loved one and commit to the care of that tree for years to come. Or plan for the on-site construction of a pavilion for your outdoor space."

In the end, planning ahead in the fall with an experienced professional can pay major dividends when the warmer weather returns and homeowners want to enjoy their outdoor space.

"We're licensed landscape architects and we have a saying: 'Great landscapes start with great ideas,'" Cording says. "If you want these beautiful landscapes that you see on Instagram and in magazines, it comes with planning and coming up with great ideas. We have several architects who work on every plan to come up with a synthesis of ideas, because we feel that's better than just one person's ideas. Then we obviously follow the town's guidelines for setbacks and lot coverage, etc. Sometimes it takes months and months to do the design and get the permits. If somebody is looking to do a project that requires permitting or designing, you can't start that in the spring—you've got to start now." H&H

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3 Popular Misconceptions About Kitchen Cabinet Refinishing

The true story I'm about to share with you could reignite the love affair you once had with your kitchen.

When my brother Ivan and I were growing up in Pennsylvania, we used to watch Pop build cabinets out in the barn.

I guess that's what inspired us to continue in the construction trades. Ivan headed west to build tiny homes in Colorado, and I was soon building full-size custom homes in Montana.

We loved it out west, but after a while wanted to be closer to family.

Ultimate Cure For The "Dull Kitchen Blahs"?

Right about that time, we heard stories about how a radical new technology for refinishing cabinets was literally transforming lives.

Yes, I know that's a bold statement. But imagine muddling along with a dark and dull kitchen for years. Then, within a matter of days, waking up to a bright and beautiful kitchen *every... single... day*. It was something an otherwise happy homeowner could truly cherish for years.

Our Eureka moment was when it dawned on us that if we went into business together, providing this valuable service to folks in the southeastern PA area, we could enjoy living close to family once again.

The problem was, many of the homeowners we talked with had it all wrong about cabinet refinishing. Here's what we heard:

"It's Messy"

Dust over everything… Rude contractors taking over your home for weeks… Having to clean up every day after they go home… These were just some of the concerns we heard. And rightly so, based on some of the old methods, or relying on general house painters.

The beauty of the special process we discovered is that our crews are in and out within a week. A typical schedule looks like this:

- An hour or so at pickup
- One day refinishing the cabinet boxes
- An hour or so to reinstall the drawer fronts and doors

We keep the dust down to a bare smidge using our special "wet sanding" process. Even at that, only the box surfaces are done in the home. Sanding and coating the drawer fronts and doors (which is where most of the grime is) happens in our shop.

So other than a careful removal and reinstallation process, there's very little disruption to normal routines at home. (And if I may brag for a moment, customers say our cabinet professionals are some of the nicest, most respectful workers they've ever met!)

"It's Too Expensive"

There's no denying, refinishing cabinets requires a considerable investment. Typically in the neighborhood of three to five thousand dollars or more depending on the size of the kitchen. The benefits, however — both immediate and for years to come — far outweigh the one-time investment.

Financially speaking, you can expect to recoup 70% or more of your investment in the value of your home at resale or refinancing. Perhaps far more important though is *how you'll feel* in your own home every day. After all, it's where you live. Waking up to a bright and beautiful kitchen can really make a difference.

And who knows.... With your gorgeous new cabinets, you might even save money by cooking everyday meals and entertaining at home more often!

"It Won't Last"

YES — All of the terrible things you might imagine about paint peeling, chipping and cracking are 100% true and accurate… UNLESS, that is, the refinishing is done PROPERLY!

If you're going to paint cabinets yourself, or hire a local painting contractor who doesn't specialize in painting cabinetry, it's certainly reasonable to expect problems. If the surfaces aren't prepared adequately... Or if the coatings aren't applied correctly… Or the right combination of coatings isn't used…

Unfortunately, there's a LOT that can go wrong. And the average homeowner or painting contractor who doesn't meticulously follow a proven system can easily miss a critical step leading to disappointing results that can last for years.

Durable cabinet refinishing requires that each piece is cleaned thoroughly to get every spec of dirt and grease and grime off. Each surface must be sanded to a dull finish to prepare it for coating. Then finally, a specialized combination of coatings that work together to create a film strength equal to or exceeding factory baked-on enamel must be applied.

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We look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,
Dave Fisher, Co-Founder
Chameleon Cabinet Coatings



An Energy-Efficient Exterior

Is your home ready for the winter ahead?

by **Lindsey Getz**

With colder months just on the horizon, now is a great time to start thinking about energy-efficient upgrades to your home's exterior. When you make these changes, you not only help reduce energy loss (which equates to dollars back in your pocket), but you also do your part in reducing your environmental impact.

"The main culprits of energy loss are through the attic space since heat rises—but also through inefficient windows and doors," says Adam Parnes of Global Home Improvement. "The first step for an energy-efficient home is to make sure your attic is properly insulated and then tackle windows and doors. In addition, to lower energy bills, new thermal windows can really change the comfort level of a room. We recommend replacing the windows in rooms most often used such as bedrooms or family rooms."

Wayne Liss, owner of New Look Builders, Inc., agrees that attic space is a major source of energy loss. It can also happen around poorly insulated walls, poorly sealed windows and doors, leaky roofs and poorly maintained HVAC systems and appliances.

"With winter just around the corner, it would serve homeowners well to replace poorly insulated windows and doors now," he says. "Look into replacing your roof if it is more than 20 years old and leaking. Also look into adding sufficient insulation to the attic and having your HVAC system serviced."

Another area of the home that is sometimes overlooked but really important in winter months is the chimney. Denise Davis, office manager for Davis Brothers Chimney Sweep & Masonry, says that cleaning your chimney ahead of those colder months when you'll be using it is a very important safety precaution.

Most chimney fires are a result of neglect and a chimney that has not been cleaned regularly enough, she says. Sometimes birds will make a nest in the chimney, unbeknownst to the homeowners. This can block up the chimney and possibly even cause carbon monoxide to leak back into the home.

A properly cared for chimney can also have positive energy ramifications—and prevent problems.

"A proper cap on top of the chimney will also limit water damage and increase efficiency by preventing heat loss," Davis adds. "Sometimes homeowners have cracks in their chimney that they don't realize. That's why ongoing inspections and chimney maintenance are so important."

NEWER PRODUCTS ON THE MARKET

One of the benefits of upgrading various elements of your exterior



is that many of the products available today are made with energy efficiency in mind. This is different from products of the past.

Parnes says that they recommend the new fiberglass window and door options because they not only add energy efficiency and comfort to a home, but they are also aesthetic upgrades. They'll boost curb appeal and add wow factor. Parnes says that Global Home Improvement recommends Infinity Fiberglass Windows and Doors from Marvin, which he says are eight times stronger than vinyl and will outperform and outlast wood windows.

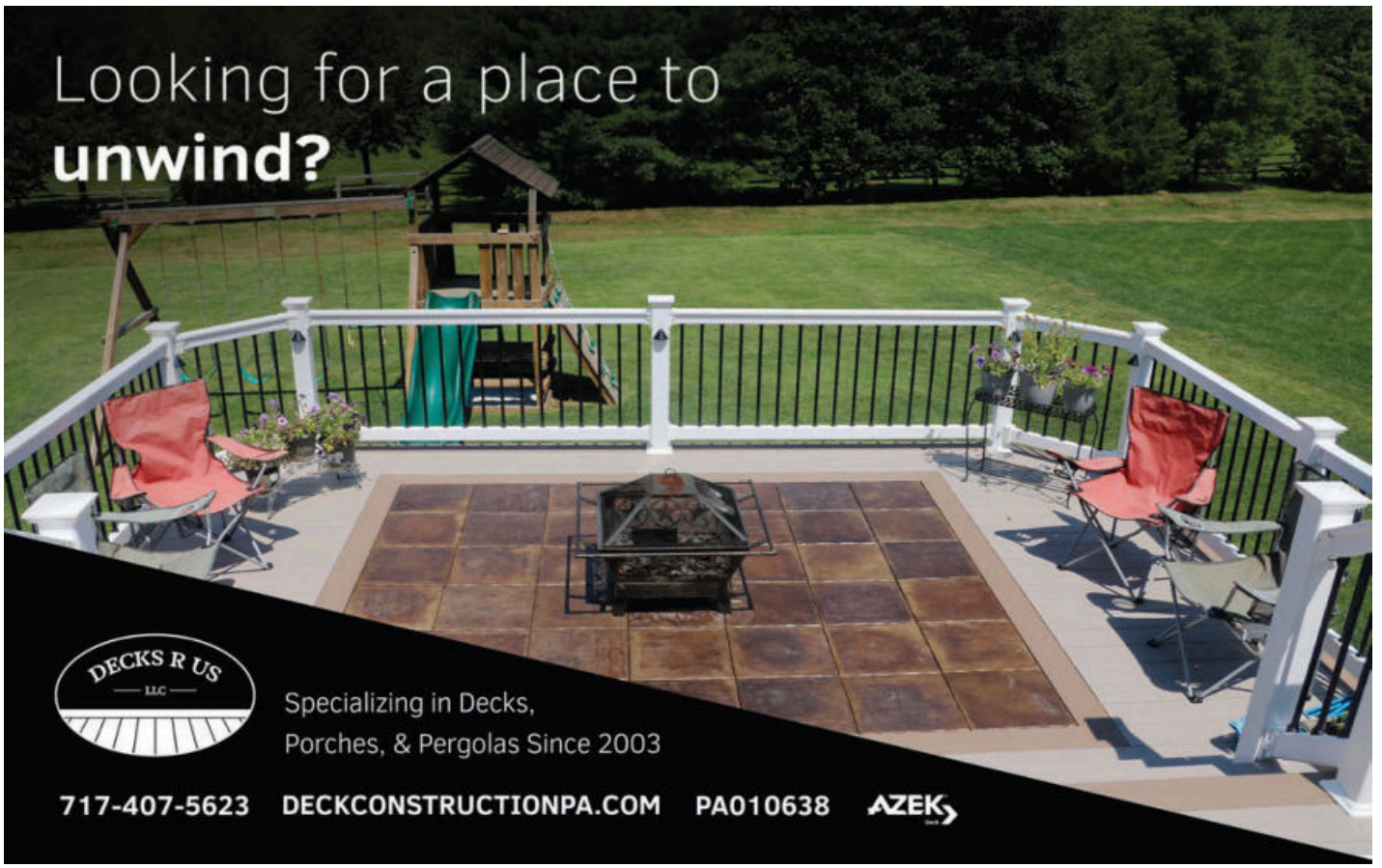
Liss agrees that the products available today have also come a really long way. He says that there are new windows, doors, insulated siding, energy-efficient solar shingles and energy-efficient appliances available—all of which are helpful in preventing energy loss.

There are also great options for attic insulation, Liss adds. Just a little bit of extra attention to this area of your home can go a long way in boosting its overall energy efficiency.

Roofing has also evolved—including the way in which they are installed. Mike Iannelli, co-owner of M&J Roofing, has been seeing the same problems emerge in roofs again and again.

“We find that the older generation of roofers didn't put a water and ice shield on the house and didn't put ventilation on the roof. That's huge right now,” he explains. “Without that ventilation, the humidity builds up and causes condensation and damages the shingles, which decreases their lifespan. We also found that they would use 15-pound roofing felt, which is almost paper-thin and doesn't provide enough protection between the structural wood and the shingles.”

If a new roof is necessary, homeowners should know if it is being installed with all the





proper protections. "Our process from start to finish includes roof deck protection with GAF Deck Armor, which is used under the shingles and provides protection from wind-driven rain and trapped moisture; leak barrier, starter strip shingles, Cobra attic ventilation and ridge cap shingles. We leave nothing overlooked," he continues.

Iannelli says that M&J also has a siding service and uses Alside vinyl siding, a brand that the company trusts.

CHOOSING THE BEST CONTRACTOR

When it comes to making any of these upgrades, choosing the right contractor for the job is important.

"Do your research and discuss any concerns that you may have with an expert," Liss advises. "Lastly, be wary of high-pressure sales tactics."

Iannelli adds that his company only uses employees on staff—not subcontractors.

"I have four supervisors, all with extensive roofing experience and they are on-site for every job and available to the homeowner at all times," he explains. "We stand by the proven materials we offer and take no shortcuts."

MAKING A WISE INVESTMENT

While taking these proactive steps is an investment on the front end, they can also save money (plus hassles and headaches) in the long run. These additions will also increase the value of your home.

Parnes sums it up: "Rather than wait and let another season go by with your home wasting valuable energy, you can have upgrades completed that will get your home ready for the winter." H&H

RESOURCES

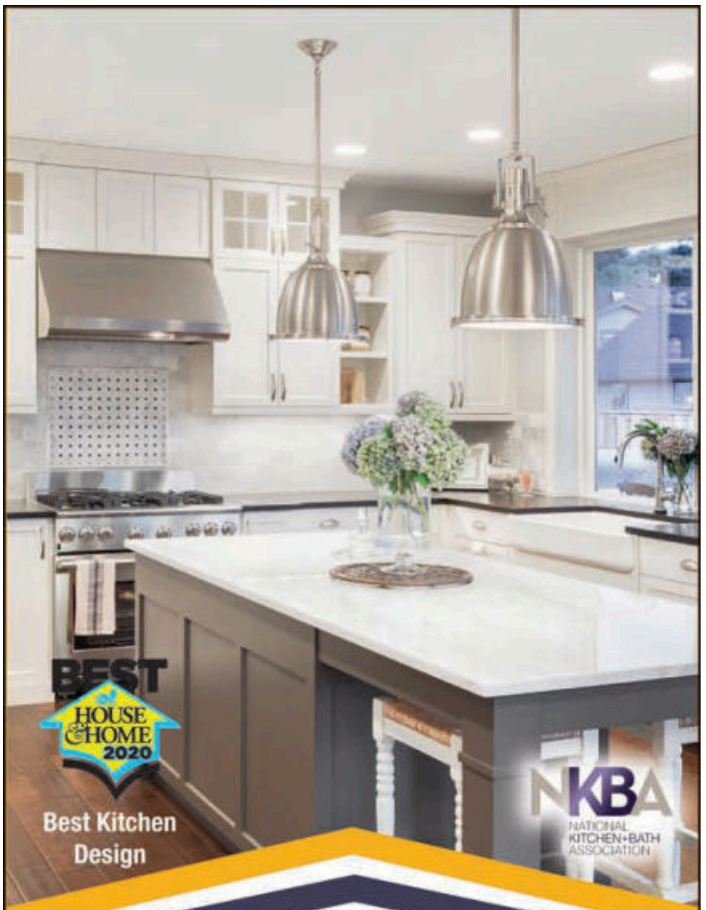
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Heating UP

The key to staying comfortable this winter is making sure your heating systems are running properly.

by **Peter Proko**

WITH THE SUMMER SUN ALL BUT FADED AND OLD MAN WINTER RIGHT AROUND THE CORNER, the cooler temperatures and gloomy weather will see beach blankets replaced by throw blankets as people move indoors for warmer conditions. Which means it's beyond time to find out if your heating or fireplace system is in need of service. Too often an afterthought, homeowners tend to neglect routine maintenance only to come face-to-face with much larger issues that may approach the point of no return.

According to Farrel Shuster, president and owner of Family Heating & Air Conditioning, semiannual checkups would go a long way into preserving your heating system.

"Ninety percent of the failures we see, the heater is going to go in the wintertime and the air conditioner in the summer," he says.

Shuster likens the situation to buying a brand-new car, but still having the need for an oil change to maximize efficiency and avoid more costly repairs down the road.

"For some reason, people don't accept that and try to get away with things and I see it cost them tons more than if they would actually spend the money to make sure the efficiency is there and the parts are not going," he adds. "It's been said that 60% of residential systems are not installed properly."

Jeff Olewine, general manager of C&C Heating & Air Conditioning, also feels preventive maintenance is of the utmost importance.

"Heating and air systems have many components and annual checkups often catch potential breakdowns before they happen in the extreme winter or summer days," says Olewine. "Systems that are not maintained typically have higher rates of failures and issues."

Aside from the age of the system, there are other warning signs for consumers to watch for like frequent breakdowns and a noticeable increase in operating costs. But, when it comes down to determining whether your heating system is in need of being simply repaired or in fact replaced, only an expert will be able to truly tell after examining things and running a diagnostic test.

These days, those replacing their heating systems are increasingly gravitating toward higher-efficiency systems. Over the past decade, HVAC systems have become more technologically advanced and residents are eager to reap the benefits of upgrading their equipment while also keeping rising energy costs down.

"Customers are savvier; they are doing [their own] reading and investigating," says Shuster. "[A new system] is an investment and they want to know how they can reduce their bills and what are some options to make their home more comfortable."

Because there is no one-size-fits-all answer, it is vital for homeowners to seek the professional advice of a skilled and trusted industry professional. A system that is not sized properly, for example, will run inefficiently and cause higher operating costs—even if it just came out of the box.

And with the pandemic putting a renewed focus on indoor air quality, people are looking to improve the conditions inside their homes, especially during the winter months when respiratory viruses are more prevalent. Each home has a certain amount of air changes per hour and that information can be used to calculate how to capture airborne particles to

create the cleanest environment possible.

Olewine says the main things to consider when looking to improve one's indoor air quality are ventilation, purification, filtration and humidity. "There are products and solutions which can improve air quality in different ways and can help provide a healthier environment for you and your family."

Of course, a smooth operating furnace isn't the only way to turn up the heat to help fight off winter's chill. Besides creating a place to cozy up with loved ones, a fireplace also provides wonderful ambiance and more modern systems can easily become an extension of one's décor.



And there are plenty of options available to suit any household or style preference. While wood-burning fireplaces have a nostalgic vibe to them, the overwhelming number of folks looking to either install a new system or replace an existing one are opting for gas, according to Jen Kester of Kester Fireplace.

"We all can appreciate the traditional wood-burning fireplace, but the problem is they are considered a negative for your house because they heat the room you are in while syphoning the heat from the rest of your house," she says.

According to Kester, vent-free gas log sets are extremely popular at the moment. They are designed to go into an approved wood-burning device and provide an economical solution for bringing more heat into the home without changing the look of your fireplace. And energy-conscious consumers will appreciate the fact that they are 99.9% efficient. Conversely, direct-vent gas fireplaces are only around 70% efficient.

For those wondering if they should



Heating Up

replace or convert their existing fireplace system, Kester says you'll want to consider these key factors: efficiency, damage and safety. Whether it is wood, gas or electric, depending on the issue, then it may be most cost-effective to change the system for something more updated.

"Sometimes it is more beneficial to upgrade to a current efficient system, which will reduce costs over time," says Kester. "If needing to replace a bunch of parts on an older system, the cost of those parts could end up being close to the cost of a new system. … It is very important to have your fireplaces serviced routinely" to stay ahead of potential issues that may arise in the long run.

While fireplaces are not just for the living room any longer, and are now commonly found in bedrooms, basements and backyards, Kester says the pandemic has certainly spurred a number of homeowners to install new systems inside the home.

"With more people working from home and converting unused spaces into their new office, having a heat source to be more comfortable during the day has also been popular," she says. "We've had many customers say that they've always wanted to add a fireplace to their home and now is the best time for them to do so."

No matter how you plan to keep warm this winter, having a trusted professional assist you is the best way to ensure you don't get left out in the cold. **H&H**



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