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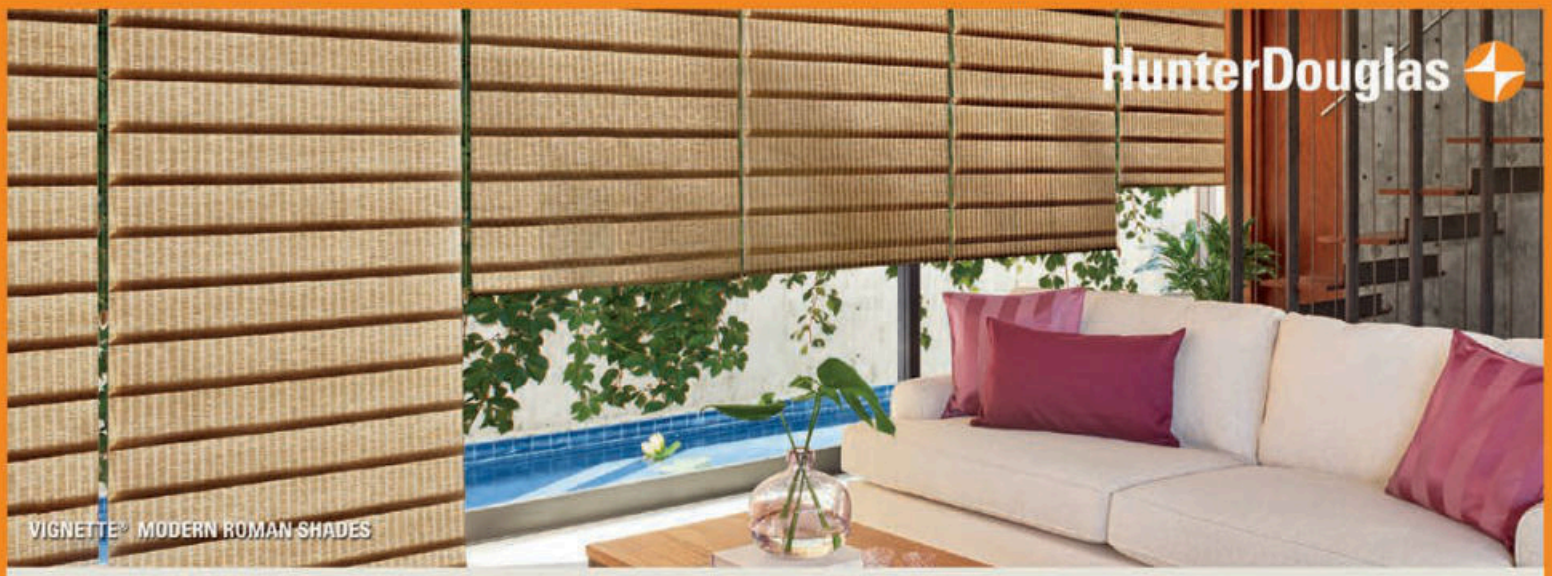
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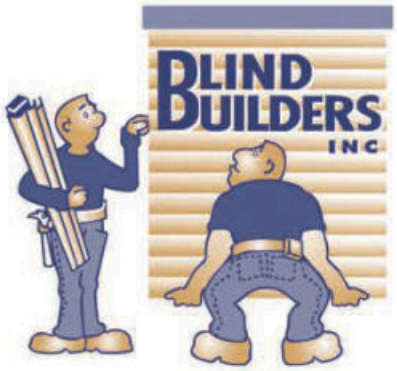


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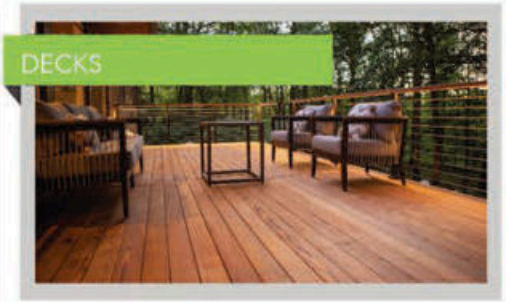












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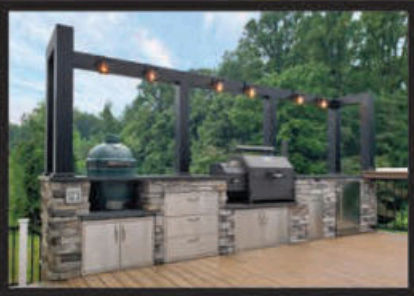


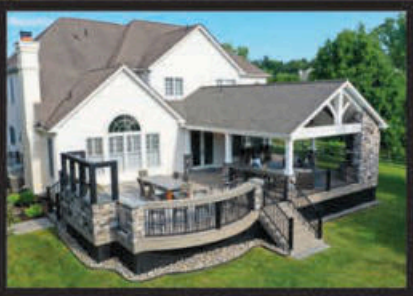
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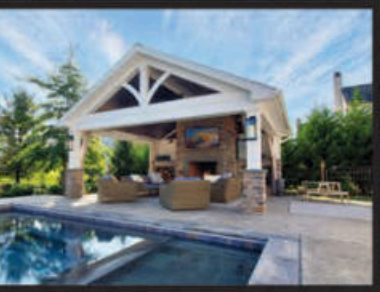
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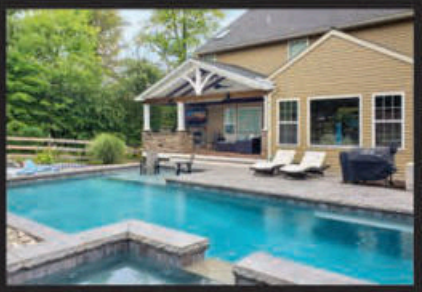
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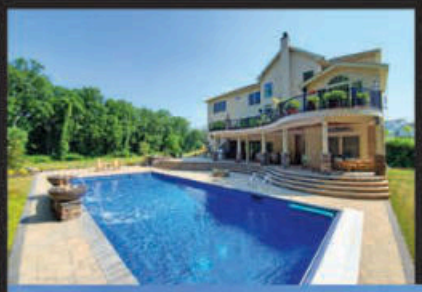
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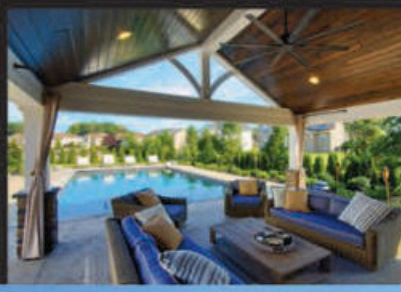
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Setting the TONE

It's easy to see how hardscaping contributes to the overall feel of your outdoor space.

BY LIZ HUNTER

When it's time to add some life to your yard, you may immediately think of blooming flowers and shrubs, but some of the best elements are of the non-living variety: hardscaping. Walkways, patios, retaining walls, fire pits, outdoor kitchens and countless other accents can bring the ideal balance to the landscaping of a home. But choosing the right material requires professional insight.

"Hardscaping is an essential element to the overall look of a property because it can cohesively bring together your home with the outside environment," says Reuben Stoltzfus, owner of EWBN. "Without hardscaping, landscaping falls short because it lacks structure. Flowers, plants and trees can soften hardscaping. Outdoor living is vital to the overall function of your home. A combination of hardscaping and landscaping can most definitely define the vitality of your outdoor living area and the overall look and feel of your property."

TRUST IT TO THE PROS

Although some homeowners may think they can tackle a hardscaping project on their own over the course of a couple of weekends, there are some things only a professional can address.

"With outdoor living projects one of the most important aspects of the overall project is having a proper foundation. Without it you could see water build up, or even your patio becoming uneven over the years," Stoltzfus continues. "Water management often has its own permit aside from other permits required by townships. Of course, each township has specific requirements, but without professional water management it's a big area [of concern] with even getting the project started and then passing final inspection. It is best for the homeowner and the property to go with a professional."

When meeting with potential contractors, Michael Tarleton, owner of TLC Landscaping, says it can be easy to spot the inexperienced. "You'll know if someone knows what they are talking about, whether or not they are well-versed in natural stone walls and different types of materials. It's simple to figure out if they've done it before," he says.

John DiJiosia Jr., owner and president of Plymouth Nursery & Landscape Co., says working with natural stone is a lost art. "It's rare to find people in this business who are skilled in the art of



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Reuben Stoltzfus, EWBN

Setting the TONE

natural stone. Stonemasonry as a trade originated in Italy, which is where my family is from. My father learned it from his father," he says. "They've passed down the art of dressing a stone—shaping it by hand, chiseling it to create the desired shape—and then setting it individually. It's a lot more time-consuming."

NATURAL OR NOT

All materials have their place in outdoor living, and while some are best used in certain projects, it ultimately comes down to client preference and budget.

"I think natural stone can be used in a variety of circumstances, whether the home is 300 years old or new," says DiJiosia. "Aesthetically, some people like a modern look and in some cases, manufactured stones have a modern feel as opposed to old world, natural stone. However, with that said, flagstone can be used successfully in a modern design."

Budget comes into play, he continues. "On average, a project with natural stone will be at least 30% more than using manufactured stone, and that's not because of material costs, it's the time and labor to install it."

In terms of style, Tarleton confirms that trends are leaning modern. "People want a smoother, classic look and are moving away from rustic looks."

And while Tarleton "can make something beautiful with whatever material a client wants, whether it's pavers or bluestone," he does have some advice and preferences of his own to recommend. One being not to use bluestone around a pool. "Bluestone is going to get very hot, so you may not want to be walking on it barefoot in the summer. For that I would recommend pavers or a different natural stone. Pavers do fade over time, but natural stone stays consistent over time," he says.

He recommends natural stone for walkways, and for driveways he likes asphalt. "We can finish off the driveway with a paver border that adds beauty and polishes it off," Tarleton says.

If a homeowner does go with pavers on their project, Stoltzfus says, "There are many different paver design patterns to choose from when it comes to the layout of pavers, like herringbone, running bond, and basketweave. EWBN works with Newline Hardscapes, a division of York Building Products. Anything from Newline has a lifetime warranty, which is another reason we love the line."

DiJiosia says homeowners may also want to consider thermal flagstone. These are cut into uniform thickness and treated with a thermal method that leaves a smooth surface on the stone. It also creates a more uniform color and texture of the stone if the naturally quarried variegation of the stone isn't preferred by the homeowner.

As the popularity of stone sitting walls and fire pits and fireplaces shows no signs of waning, hardscaping companies continue to invest in innovative products to bring these to life.



"People continue to look for ways to create gathering areas in their backyards for entertaining in small groups," Tarleton says. "In the realm of fire pits, outdoor kitchens and fireplaces, we're seeing a lot more things happening."

DiJiosia says EP Henry offers fire pit kits that come in a few standard varieties of round or square, and several colors.

"Retaining walls, patios and fire pits are products we create using Newline Hardscapes," says Stoltzfus. "A popular choice from our customers is a curved sitting wall that borders part of a fire pit and large stepper steps. Both make a statement, but also are a functional part of the overall design."

For sitting walls, DiJiosia says there are a couple of ways they can be constructed. One is building the wall entirely out of stones, or with the use of stone veneer over a cinder block structure.

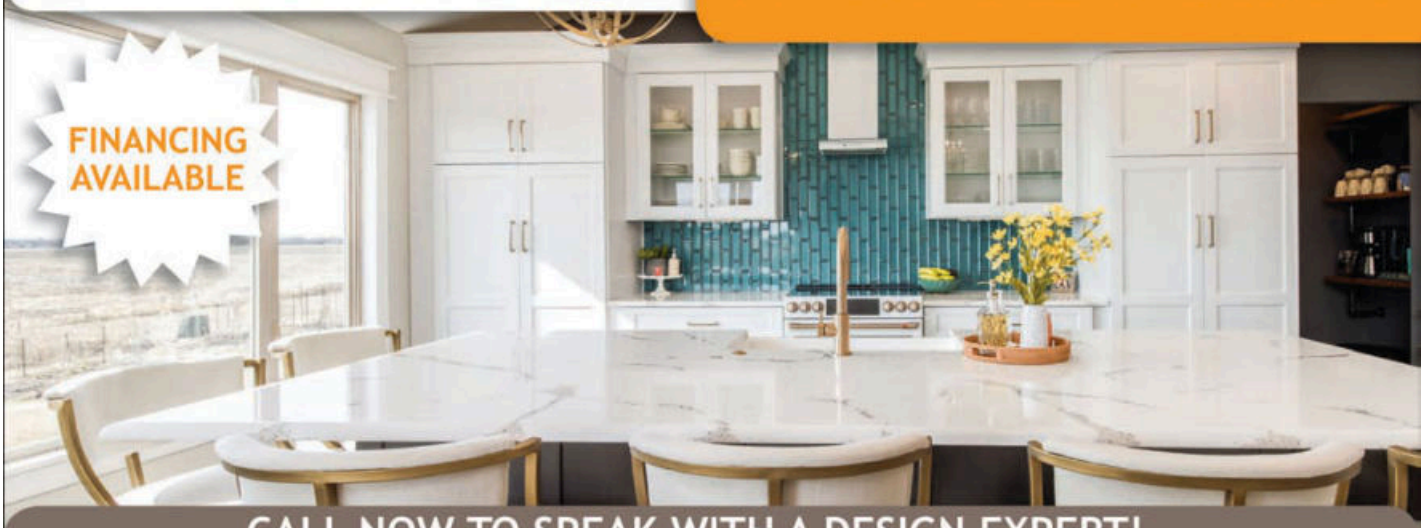
"The entire interior would be cinder block and then stone veneer would stick onto that to create the look you want. It's not necessarily less expensive to do it that way because the application of stone veneer has more steps, but it can sometimes be easier to work with," he says. "It comes down to the availability of the stone you may want."

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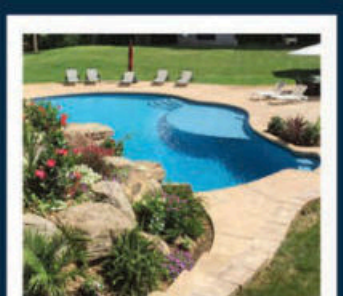
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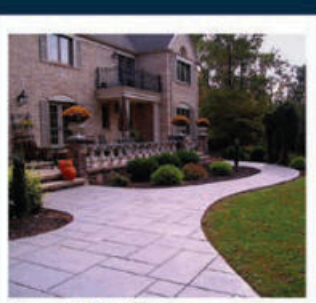
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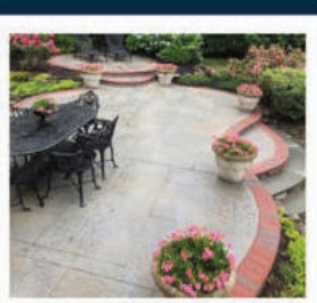
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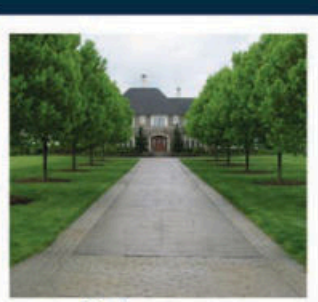
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Setting the TONE

Bogdan Pop, principal of Transylvania Concrete Coatings, says concrete is susceptible to the freeze-thaw cycles, which cause it to crack and deteriorate over time. With a coating, Pop says they first prep the slab by filling the cracks and then pour the polyurea coating over, which has elasticity to move with the expansion in spring and summer and contraction in the winter.

"This coating is especially good for pool decks," says Pop. "It reflects UV rays so the coating does not get hot on feet as concrete would and we can put in an additive to make it more slip resistant. It's also good for patios, front porches and driveways."

The product is available in a wide variety of colors and textures and can be customized to clients' requests. Not only that, Pop says there is minimal disruption to a customer's life during installation. "In most cases we can complete the project in one day and the surface is typically ready for foot traffic within three to five hours after installation," he says. H&H

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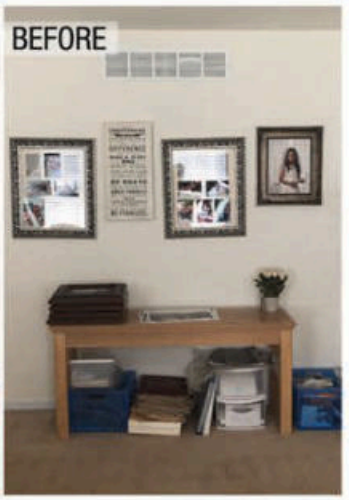


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ask the expert
by Liz Hunter

Gehman Design Remodeling

THE PHRASES "AGING IN PLACE" AND "AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES (ADA)-COMPLIANT" HAVE BECOME COMMON in the construction industry's vernacular, but there's another term to consider, says Dennis Gehman, Master Certified Remodeler (MCR).

"Universal Design. This term encompasses people of all ages and all abilities," says the president of Gehman Design Remodeling. "I'm among the baby boomer generation and most of us don't like to be reminded of some things related to our age and abilities, so I think Universal Design has a softer tone, and it really does work for anyone, and helps us keep in mind that people don't want their home to look like a hospital or physical therapist's office. With Universal Design, there are ways to achieve a nice look without it being institutionalized."


Dennis Gehman, MCR, president

Universal Design can range from small modifications—grab bars, lighting and door levers—to bigger projects, including zero-entry showers or changing floors from carpet to tile or hardwood. Gehman says these changes are often an afterthought in home building, many of which are not even required in building codes for new construction. We spoke with him about the growing demand for Universal Design and where homeowners might want to incorporate it, whether for themselves or close family and friends.

HOW PREVALENT ARE REQUESTS FOR UNIVERSAL DESIGN AND DO YOU SEE IT GROWING?

Prior to COVID we were experiencing regular requests. During COVID I think it became even more of a consideration as some generations blended their living arrangements to lessen the emotional toll of quarantining alone, but not everyone felt comfortable having the work done. And I do see it growing, especially when you consider there are approximately 10,000 baby boomers turning 65 every day—and that includes me this year—so it's on a lot of people's minds.

IS THERE ANY LEVEL OF PRIORITY TO MAKE CERTAIN CHANGES BEFORE OTHERS?

It really depends on the individual. Sometimes we find people are living by themselves and some activities aren't as safe as they can be, but they don't want to spend the money. It can be wise to involve their adult children to assure them that the changes are worth it for peace of mind. … If someone is already seeing a doctor or occupational therapist, they can lend their medical advice on what things are going to work well. If it's gotten to the point where they need a walker, maybe we make the doorways wider if the need eventually comes for a wheelchair, or put light switches a little lower so they can be reached. It's important to think in advance.

WHAT ARE SOME AREAS OF THE HOME WHERE YOU MIGHT SUGGEST INCORPORATING UD?

- **Bathrooms:** In this space, I would recommend grab bars. These should be available to help a person using the toilet and getting out of the shower or tub. Traditional towel bars won't work if a person is falling and reaches to grab it—it may break or pull out of the wall. There are decorative towel bars that are structurally rated as grab bars, so they have a nice aesthetic. Additionally, if stepping into the tub is difficult, we can install a zero-entry shower, which has no threshold or curb to step over.



- **Light switches and handles:** Changing door knobs to lever-style handles can be better for dexterity, and it's similar for light switches where we might recommend a touch switch versus a toggle that has to be pushed up or down, and these are relatively simple changes.
- **Flooring:** If you're beginning to struggle with walking, and even if you have a cane, you're likely dragging your feet, and carpet can make it more difficult. Area rugs are trip hazards. We would recommend changing to a hard surface, whether that's linoleum, hardwood, tile or the very popular luxury vinyl tile/planks.
- **Lighting:** Our eyes get dimmer as we age so we need more light, and that might be served by increasing the brightness in the bulbs (within safety parameters) or connecting lights to smart apps without any rewiring. You could even connect an app from your car that opens the garage when you arrive home and turn on exterior lights and some interior lights as you enter the house.

WHAT ABOUT MODIFICATIONS ON THE OUTSIDE OF A HOME, SUCH AS A RAMP?

Thinking about a ramp can turn people off, because we've all seen the obstructions outside a home that aren't pretty, but serve a purpose. We can be creative. For example, in my home, we placed a ramp in the garage into the home and it's not seen from the outside. There are also portable ramps that are lightweight. You also want to think about the width of sidewalks for a wheelchair.

WHY SHOULD A HOMEOWNER CONSULT WITH GEHMAN DESIGN REMODELING ON THIS TYPE OF PROJECT?

I have previously held a Certified Aging-In-Place Specialist (CAPS) designation, and we currently have someone in the office who is a NARI-designated, UDCP (Universal Design-Certified Professional). We've had experience with these projects, and we're always attending trade shows and reading industry publications to learn about new products and ways of doing things. We believe a conversation about UD can open people's eyes and we'll work as a team to figure out what is right for each individual. H&H

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H&H SHOWCASE by **Matt Cosentino**

Beautiful Inside and Out

Using integrated design, the team at **Amazing Decks** can take the heart of the home and extend it to the backyard with a stunning, usable outdoor space.



As they approach their 32nd year in business, it would be easy for Amazing Decks co-founders Bill Wilson and Keith Fry to become complacent in their work or to rest on their accomplishments from three decades in the industry.

But anyone who encounters the pair soon realizes that the opposite is true. They continue to be passionate about designing and building backyard oases that their customers can enjoy for years to come, and they can draw on their vast experience to avoid common pitfalls.

"When you've been in business this long, it becomes easy, because we've already made the mistakes and we've learned from them," Wilson says. "We were part of this industry long before it became what it is now. We watched it change from people just having a simple wood deck to now adding a space that can be amazing. It's a lot of fun and we love helping people out."

The philosophy at Amazing Decks centers on the idea of integrated home design. This comprehensive approach aims to extend the heart of the home to the outside, creating a large, livable space that can be utilized for everything from a big graduation party to a simple family get-together.

"There's a fine line between a project that gets used and a project that never gets used," Wilson says. "It would be heartbreaking at the completion to have a homeowner say, 'I wish we would have done this or that.' That's why the design is crucial. It has to be inviting; people want something that feels personal and something that will help them relax."

To achieve this goal, Amazing Decks puts a great emphasis on the planning stage. While some potential customers will ask for estimates over the phone or through email, it is important for the designers to personally visit the site and get to know the homeowners.

They will ask questions regarding the size of their family, how often they entertain, whether they plan to add a pool, etc.

"We're interviewing them just like they're interviewing us," Wilson says. "Our initial meeting is very easy-going. We get to know the client and find out how they're going to use the space. Then we're able to tie everything together and design something in the backyard that they're going to use. It doesn't have to be expensive; it just has to be designed right."

Amazing Decks has often been called upon to fix mistakes by other companies that did not design a backyard space properly. Wilson and Fry are determined to design a space that will not only work now, but in the future, should the homeowners want to add to the space or decide to sell the home.

The many successful jobs the company has completed also tend to stand out in the neighborhood.

"Our designs are unique," Wilson says. "We do a lot of curves—we have the equipment to curve boards, so a lot of our decks are free-flowing curves. We also integrate other materials, like paver patios or bluestone. Maybe the backyard doesn't just call for a deck; maybe it calls for a combination of the two. Even though we're a deck company, we have to be honest with the customer and tell them what will work best.

"We can do patios, walkways, plantings, outdoor low-voltage lighting, grilling stations and fireplaces. Shade is huge as well—every outdoor project should have some sort of roof structure for people to sit under and get shielded from the sun."

As one of the first companies to install maintenance-free composite boards, Amazing Decks has a longstanding relationship with Trex, perhaps the most well-known name in the industry.

"That's not to say we won't work with another manufacturer, but we are primarily a Trex dealer," Wilson says. "We've been using Trex ever since we started the business. They always come out with new products, but the product we're using now is approximately 11 years old, the Trex Transcend line, and it doesn't seem like anyone has ever been able to compete with it.

"I like how durable it is; you can drag a chair across it and it won't scratch. If you spill something on it, you can just wipe it off. Some products will scuff and scratch, but Trex doesn't. If you look at a Trex deck that's five or six years old, it looks like we just installed it."

With the right materials and the right design, a deck built by Amazing Decks can make a major difference, both now and in the future.

"We had a customer who just bought a new house, and we had put the deck on his old house," Wilson says. "There were four other houses on his street for sale, so he was nervous about putting the house up. But it sold within two weeks of hitting the market. He had offers from every person who saw the house, and they all said it was because of the deck. That was a proud moment. It wasn't extravagant, it was just designed right." H&H

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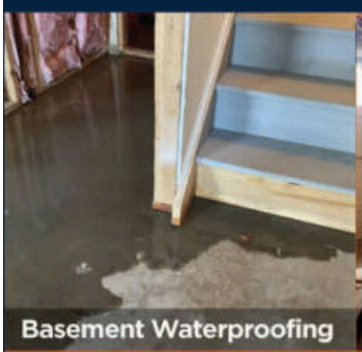
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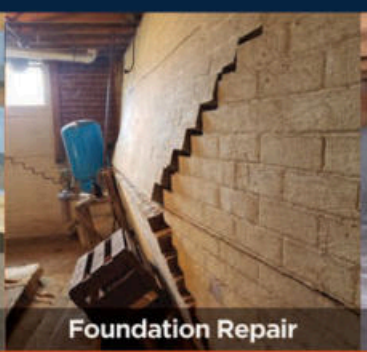
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The Big Potential

OF SMALL BATHROOMS

by Madeleine Maccar

Hall bathrooms, guest baths and powder rooms might not have the space to accommodate all the flashy splashes of personality and luxury that a main bathroom can, but area experts have lots of advice for and insight into making the most of those less-used lavatories.

Everyone wants to turn their main bathroom into a lovingly detailed, spa-like escape featuring all the amenities and coordinated color palates that elevate the home's most in-use bathroom into an opulent retreat.

But what about powder rooms, hall bathrooms and guest baths?

While a home's smaller spaces might present some limitations their larger counterparts don't, there are still plenty of options for upgrading and refreshing your smaller or less frequently used bathrooms without sacrificing style, space or superior construction.

"I don't really consider them any differently because, regardless of the size of the project or the location of the project, the detail and the quality should always be the same," says Anthony DellaPia, president of Floors Just for You. "Whether it is a powder room or a luxurious master bath, we treat them equally."

"Unless you're trying to redo all your sewer lines, it's really the same thing as working on a larger bathroom," agrees Santiago Lima of Lima's Handyman.

DellaPia and a few of the region's other bathroom redesign professionals recently spoke to *House & Home* about how they approach these projects and advice for homeowners looking to focus

their attention on homes' smaller washrooms.

Same Quality, Different Mindset

It is crucial to approach those smaller projects with the same degree of care, attention to detail and desire to deliver a dazzling finished product for each and every client, though there are obvious limits and differences that come with redesigning a bathroom that isn't the main bath, the latter of which is used almost exclusively by the heads of a household.

"There is a different approach that's not necessarily based on size as it is the usage," notes Doug Mottershead of McHales Inc., a certified designer who's been with the company for 16 years. "Typically, it's a couple who's using the master bath, and not many other people are going into it; a hall bathroom is used by their children, whether they're small children or adult children; and the powder room is used by everyone, including guests."

"I've seen a lot of projects through the years and, in most cases, when people have hall bathrooms, they're primarily used for children or guests, and there's a big division between a personal bathroom that you use for yourself and your significant other versus one that's used by the kids," agrees David Cerami, owner of HomeTech Renovations. "The mindset is, do you take your kids to a five-star restaurant? Most people are looking to do their hall baths a little more reasonably rather than making the major design statement they would with their master bath."



Contractors are quick to note that when homes are built, their half-baths tend to be designed with streamlined piping and architectural configurations in mind, rather than occupants' ease of use and design flourishes. Since those bathrooms are often basic, builder-grade quality, renovations can range from adding individually selected adornments that reflect a homeowner's taste to improving their overall quality of materials.

"Most builders, when they build a home, they're not building it for state-of-the-art design: They're building it for how quickly and inexpensively they can produce one bathroom, so changing out a bathroom usually means more of an upgrade than people realize," Cerami says. "When the homeowner moves in, they're enamored with their new home and not thinking about how their bathrooms were built, or understanding that the materials that were chosen are typically less than what you would want to select if you were to design it yourself or were advised about other alternatives than what you inherited with your home."

"It can be a challenge because you have to take time to re-pipe in for a new shower or a new tub or a new toilet, or move the toilet out of the way in order to get a nicer layout," adds Lima.

Making the Most of Small Spaces

Before a project can even begin, taking stock of the entire home to ensure a harmonious redesign is paramount.

"People will go on Pinterest or home-design websites and say, 'I want this style,' and it can be





very pretty, but, as a designer, you have to tell them why it doesn't go well with their home—you don't want a bathroom that overpowers the house," says Guy Ndandji, owner of F+S Kitchen and Bath Design. "You want a bathroom proportional to the look of you overall home."

The very nature of home remodeling projects makes each job as unique as the homeowners, their lifestyle, their tastes and the changes they're looking for.

"It all depends on the customer when it comes to things like hall bathrooms and master bathrooms," Mottershead points out. "There's two different approaches: Some customers want to put their money in the master bathroom they use every day. Others, since the master bathroom is only for them, they don't care about it as much, so they focus on the guest bathroom."

"You are a little limited with selections of fixtures just because you don't want to overpower a smaller area," DellaPia adds. "A lot of people are looking for more durability because they usually are the bathrooms for kids, and it's more of a simple design and basic finish than the exotic ones you'd see in a master."

For guest bathrooms and powder rooms, those lesser-used spaces present an opportunity to showcase statements pieces that pop but might not be practical for everyday use.

"My advice to customers, when it's their master bathroom and a hall bath as well, is not to put a vessel sink in because it is a cleaning issue when you're using that bathroom every day before you go out and every night before you go to bed—they're hard to clean around," Mottershead explains. "The only place I'll ever put those in would be a powder room because, in a powder room, since everyone sees that, you're kind of trying to put your best foot forward, from a classy-design approach."

With storage at a premium, there are plenty of ways to creatively maximize small bathrooms' space without compromising their aesthetics. Vanities are still in-demand and options like recessed niches offer unobtrusive storage spaces, too, though shelving remains a popular, easy choice.

"You can only put one pound of sugar in a one-pound bag, so what we need to do is take advantage of the existing space," says Cerami. "We can give them more storage space with recessed medicine cabinets, an upgraded vanity that would offer a little bit more convenience in terms of storage, or a toilet-topper sort of cabinet—or we can build something custom in our shop, if necessary."



"If you go from a tub to a standup shower, you can gain way more space in your bathroom because the shower base is smaller, reducing almost two feet of space that a tub would need," adds Lima. "That way you can add some shelves in that space you get back right next to the shower for things like towels and storage."

If more square footage is what a homeowner is looking for, eliminating in-bathroom closets is an increasingly common solution.

"If there's a way to make a bathroom bigger, people always want to make it bigger," Lima continues. "If they want to have a linen closet in the bathroom, they'll get rid of that closet, which is what we normally do."





Since these types of bathrooms rely more on interior lighting than natural sunlight, choosing those fixtures is an important decision. Sconces can provide an upgrade that not only add some character to a small bathroom but also create more natural light for shaving and makeup application, while opting for overhead ceiling lights rather than above-vanity ones can brighten up those spaces, too.

"We'll go in and see a very basic light over a vanity, or we won't see lighting over the showering or tub area, so we'll upgrade those designs," Cerami says. "We frequently include additional moisture-resistant recessed lighting over bathing areas as well."

Trust the Professionals

Every project starts with a client who's eager for a change, but it's best that they're placed in professional hands. It might cost more to bring in the experts but it's a small price to pay for not only avoiding even costlier mistakes but also ensuring that you don't wind up with a project you've thrown a significant amount of money at and ultimately regret.

"The kitchen is the most expensive project within a home, followed by the bathroom," says Ndandji. "You have to make sure that you hire a true professional because a fly-by-night contractor who's not skilled enough will be a problem. People who have been in the industry for a long time have the experience to bring a quality design to any kind of client."

Checking out contractors' showrooms for a hands-on comparison of options is one of the many benefits of trusting the professionals, while marrying their expertise with your taste to get a result that you love and will last is another.

"The customer can't necessarily relay to me exactly what it is that they have in their head, so it's up to me to ask the appropriate questions to draw out that information," Mottershead adds. "The best designer for your bathroom is you, not me. I'm the tool you use to get what you want but you are the person who has to live with it every day." H&H

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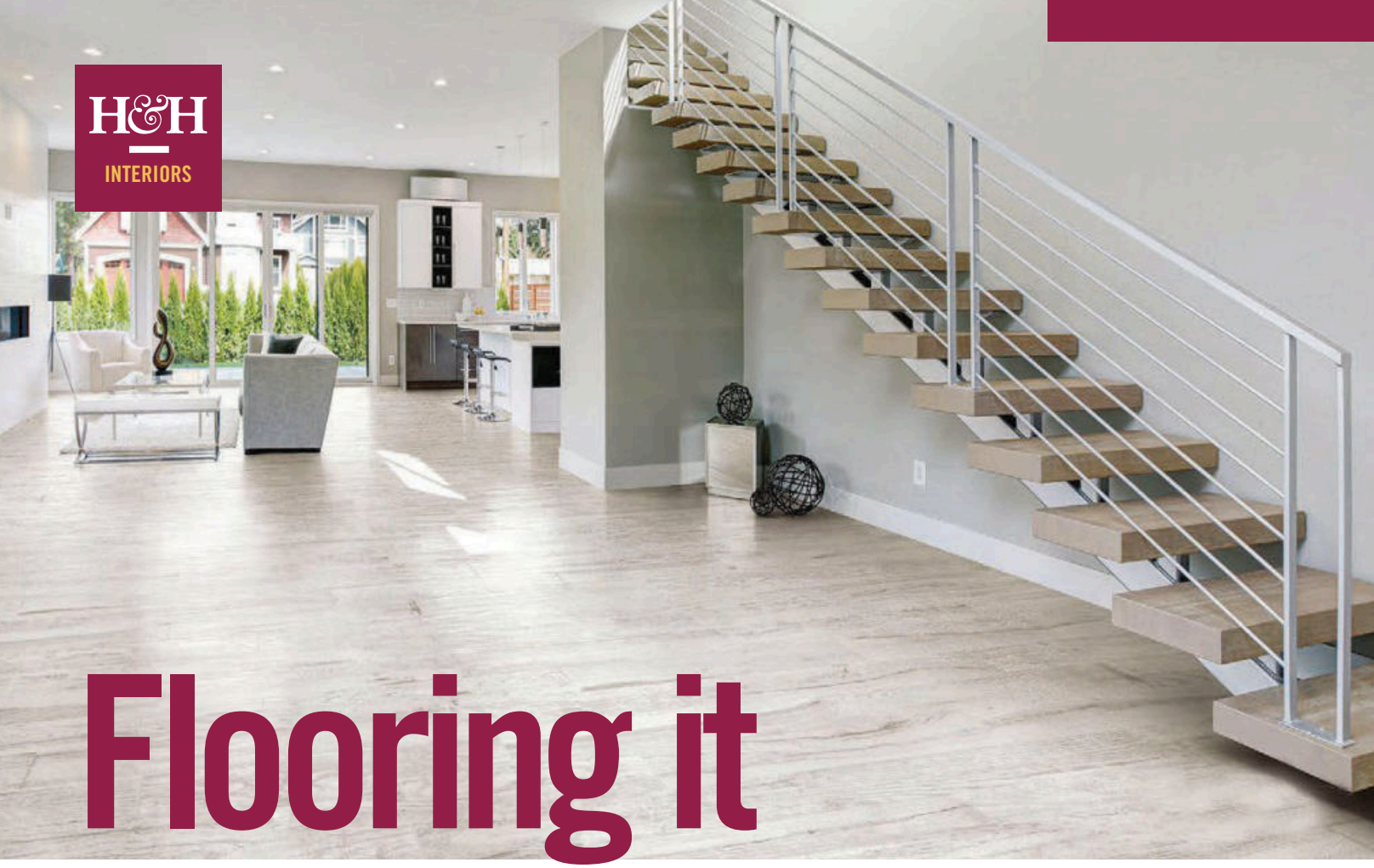
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Flooring it

From hardwood to luxury vinyl and more, homeowners have plenty of flooring options to fit their needs and budget.

by **Matt Cosentino**



When most people dream about renovating their homes, their minds automatically drift to the exciting aspects of the project, whether it's the cabinetry and countertops in a kitchen, the vanity and enlarged shower in a master bathroom or the bold new paint colors in a living room. One piece of the remodel that might get overlooked at first—but is of critical importance, no matter what the space—is the type of flooring to choose.

Flooring options have advanced dramatically over the years, and a wide variety of selections are now available to fit varying budgets and lifestyles. An update to one room or an entire level of a home can make a world of difference, even on its own without an accompanying renovation.

"People are definitely home more [since the pandemic started in 2020] and it's been very busy with projects," says Julie Ward, showroom manager and design consultant at Renaissance Ceramic Tile & Floor. "Updating the flooring, whether it's the whole floor or just a bathroom floor, brings your house back to life. With many different flooring options and colors it has a big impact."

House & Home spoke to local experts to learn more about the different options and the pros and cons to each.

Finding the best fit

To help customers determine the type of flooring that will best suit their needs, industry professionals first try to find out as much about their lifestyle as possible.

"The first question we ask is how active is their household? Do they have children or pets? Do they entertain a lot?" says John Schwendiman, flooring general manager at Bucks County Wholesale. "Once we get those answers, then we can steer them in the right direction."

Yasu Yamauchi, owner of Yasu Floors LLC, offers several different types of flooring and will make recommendations based on his experience.

"It depends on the situation in the house," he says. "Last week we did a house where I proposed vinyl because the [homeowner] had a pool and he comes into the house wet. When water comes into play, hardwood is not a good option. It all depends on the client. I try to see what the client likes and sell them whatever they want."

Dennis Gehman, president of Gehman Design Remodeling, first asks if the flooring is for one particular space or multiple rooms. Before making his suggestions, he also needs to understand the budget the homeowner is working with.

"Most people would love to do real hardwood everywhere and/or real tile," he says, "but that can be crazy expensive."

Options upon options

As Gehman notes, hardwood is still a popular choice for those who can afford it. Yamauchi is often tasked with reviving hardwood floors, perhaps if a customer has purchased an older home where the original flooring had faded.

"A lot of people are looking for sanding and refinishing their floors," he says. "This week I already did a 60-year-old hardwood that was under carpet and we brought it back to life. But sometimes it can just be two or three years old and the client doesn't like the color anymore and wants to change it."

In homes where young children and pets are present, however, hardwood might not be the best selection, regardless of price. Those clients need something that is easier to clean and maintain.

"A strong material these days is luxury vinyl, whether that's luxury vinyl plank, which looks like a wood board, or luxury vinyl tile, which obviously looks like tile," Gehman says. "That will be a fraction of the cost of real hardwood or real tile and the durability is definitely there for general wear and tear as well as with animals."

"A lot of people now are going with the luxury vinyl products just because they're cleanable, water-resistant and scratch-resistant," Schwendiman agrees. "For families with pets and kids and active lives, it holds up a lot better than the hardwood. With hardwood, you get a better return on your investment than vinyl, but it's not as durable as the vinyl."

Manufacturers continue to take the luxury vinyl planks to a new level, mimicking the look of wood without the hassles. Even the pros sometimes have a hard time noting the difference between vinyl and real hardwood.

"The image that they're printing on these tiles is incredible," Ward says. "Every time something new comes in, it almost feels like wood grain or like you could get a splinter from it even. It's hard to tell what's real and what's fake anymore."

Yamauchi opines that laminate flooring resembles real hardwood even more than vinyl, although there are drawbacks.

"The vinyl is waterproof on top, waterproof at the bottom, it is slip-proof and it doesn't scratch," he says. "If you drop water on top, it just stays there and doesn't go under, so you can just wipe it off. Laminate consists of recyclable wood pretty much, so it absorbs water. Water goes in and the laminate expands. I

Photographs courtesy of Renaissance Ceramic Tile & Floor





H&H INTERIORS

don't do a lot of laminate, unless the client is going to take care of it and really likes the way it looks. It looks way more like wood than vinyl, but when it comes to water it's not good."

Schwendiman believes that laminate manufacturers are addressing the water issues recently, and it does have the advantage of being much more affordable than vinyl.

Ward's company sells a lot of porcelain tile as well, which is also a strong option for cleaning purposes. Natural stone requires more maintenance but is popular for kitchens or master baths.

Carpet is still used, mainly in bedrooms, offices or a finished basement, but Schwendiman says homeowners with allergies are getting away from it since it traps dust and hard surfaces are easier to clean. Gehman also points out that carpet can be a tripping hazard for seniors.

"For aging in place or ADA compliance, smooth, hard flooring is the best."

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smooth, hard flooring is the best," he says. "People talk about slipperiness and that's a consideration, but by code and actually by law, flooring materials need to meet a certain slip resistance qualification before they can go out to market. The most common [falls] are in a bathroom where it's a little wet or just inside a door where you're coming in from outside. There are some that are better than others but all must meet a minimum qualification."

Trends and popular colors

One major theme in recent years is to keep the same flooring throughout an entire level of the home, rather than, for example, using carpet in the living room, hardwood in the kitchen and tile in the bathroom.

"People don't want to break up the rooms, they want that open feel," Schwendiman says. "So they'll continue the flooring throughout the whole first floor or second floor instead of breaking it up. Some people still opt to put ceramic in the wet areas like kitchens, bathrooms and laundry rooms in case there is a leak. But the luxury vinyl can withstand all of that wetness."

"Consistency is a big thing with a house," Ward adds. "If you can run your floors all the same, it's going to make it feel bigger and more consistent versus having all these different floors throughout the home."

As for color, Ward says neutrals are always a big request, such as whites, grays and taupe. Gehman sees the wood tones coming on strong, but the trends always seem to change quickly.

"Gray is still in high demand with beige coming in second," Schwendiman says. "In the hardwood arena, it's the white oak natural or real light colors and wide planks. Next year it will probably be dark again. Very few manufacturers have actual colors like blue or red or green, they're all one form or another of gray or beige."

No matter what colors or styles customers think they want, Schwendiman advises them to visit a showroom and get a feel for the options in person as opposed to on a website. He has been in the business for 30 years now and even he is constantly amazed at what is out there.

"It was all carpet and hardwood when I started," he says. "Sheet vinyl was on its way out when I started, then laminate came into play, and now luxury vinyl has taken over a big chunk of the market share. But laminate and carpet are making their way back. You have to keep the ratio of what people want in the store. People don't use sheet vinyl anymore, so we only have one display of that compared to 15 or 20 displays of luxury vinyl. People should definitely come in and see the samples."H&H

RESOURCES

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BucksCountyWholesale.com

Gehman Design Remodeling
Harleysville, Pa.
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GehmanRemodeling.com

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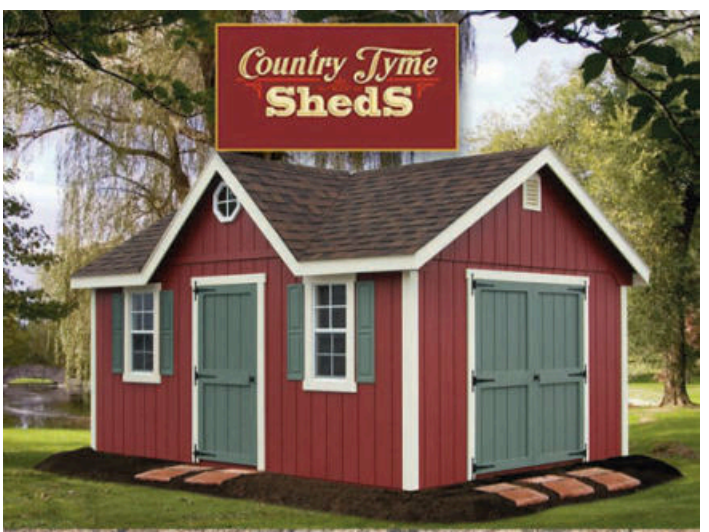


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