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Volume 23, Issue 6



Fresh Flooring

The factors to consider when choosing your next floor

ASK THE EXPERT



Gehman Design Remodeling

Bold bathroom renovation

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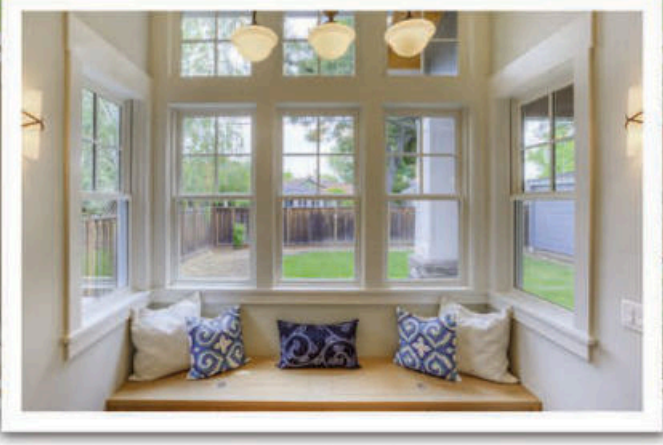
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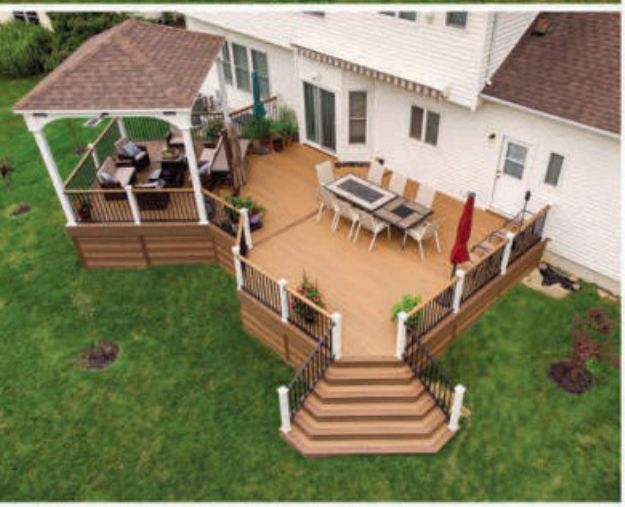
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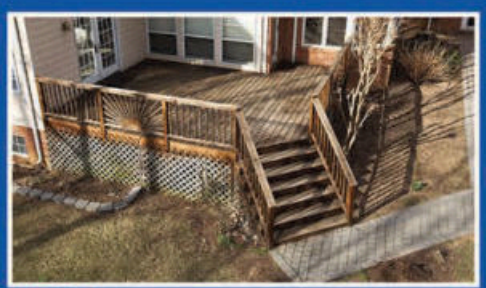


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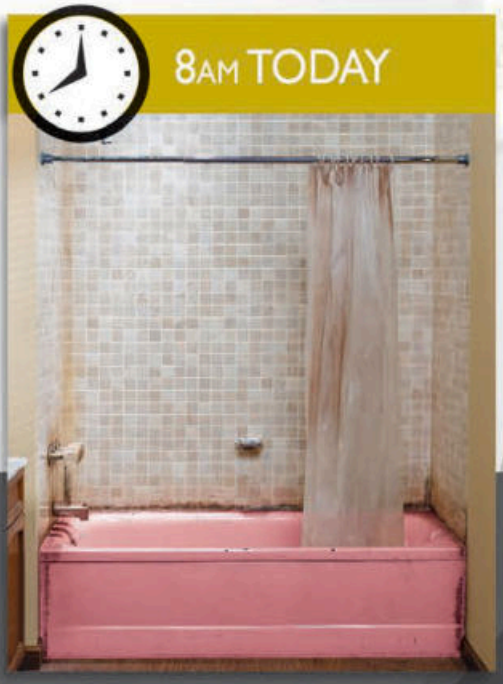
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PUBLISHER
Edward P. McCartney

EDITOR
Peter Proko

ASSISTANT EDITORS
Matt Cosentino, Madeleine Maccar

CONTRIBUTING WRITER
Amy Kodrich

CREATIVE DIRECTOR
Hank Alspach

PRODUCTION MANAGER
Brian Mikulski

DESIGNERS
Alex Bianco, Abby Lurty, Jay Urbaniak, Lisa Zollinger

ACCOUNTING DIRECTOR
Darlene Versak

SALES DIRECTOR
Lindsay Gonzalez

SALES MANAGER
Jim Romano

NEW BUSINESS DEVELOPER
Chuck McKane

MARKETING CONSULTANTS
Kristine Di Nardo, Rochelle Dodge, Frank Liantonio, Julian Rosado, Lori Vorgang, Amy B. Weiss

ACCOUNTANT
Max Haggerty

DIGITAL MEDIA DIRECTOR
Leigh Stuart

PUBLISHER EMERITUS
Bob Doran

EXECUTIVE PARTNERS
Gerry Haggerty, Edward P. McCartney

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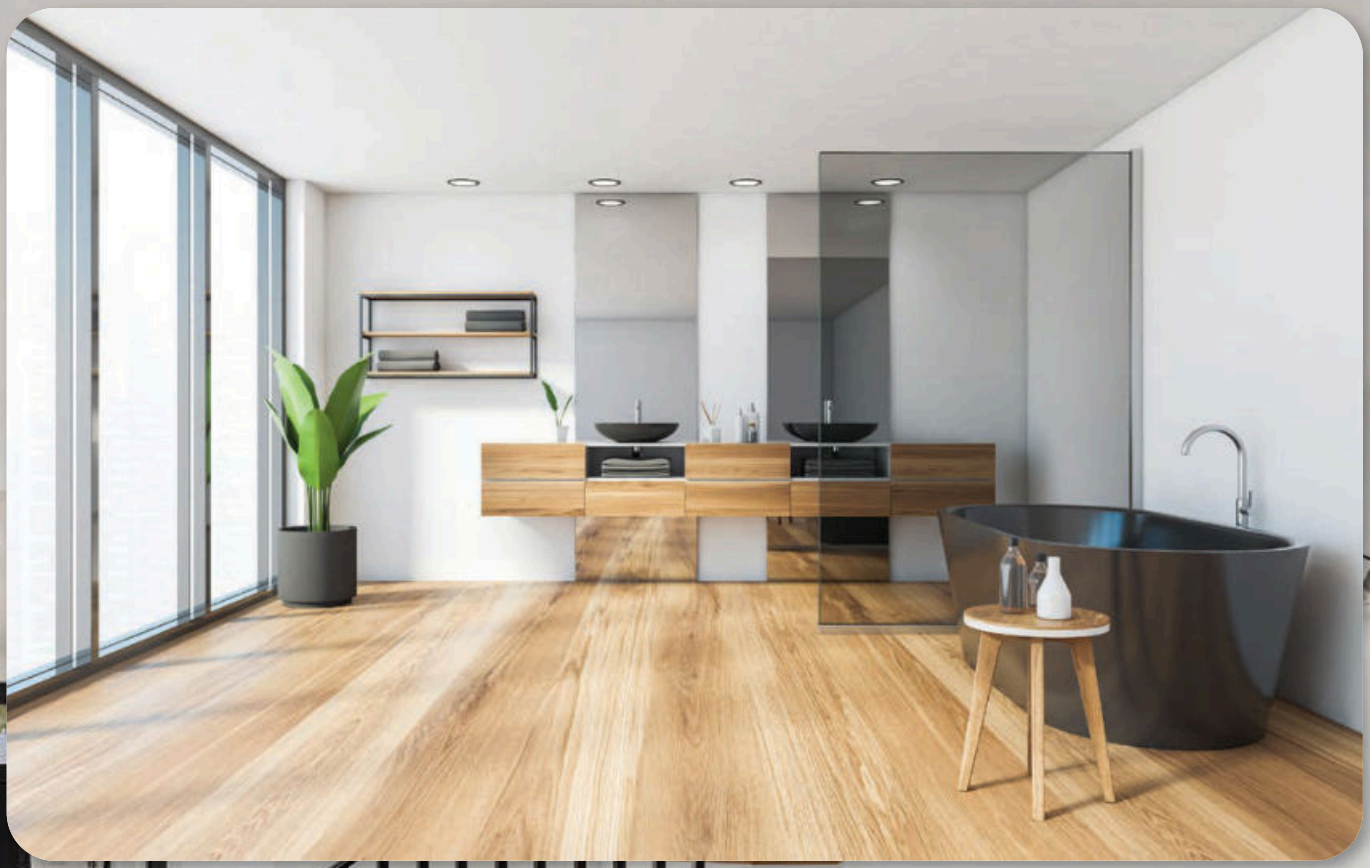
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Fresh Flooring

by **Peter Proko**

WHEN IT COMES TO CHOOSING YOUR NEXT FLOOR, THERE'S PLENTY TO CONSIDER BASED ON USAGE, LIFESTYLE AND OTHER FACTORS.



ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS TAKE A LOOK AROUND YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD TO NOTICE THAT HOME IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS CONTINUE TO BE ON THE RISE. Ever since the pandemic forced folks to spend more time inside the four walls of their home, renovation has become top of mind for many as they look to transform their space and make it more functional for today's lifestyle. But no matter if you're having the kitchen of your dreams built, updating an outdated bathroom or perhaps finishing the basement, all of these projects have one thing in common: the need to choose the right flooring.

When it comes to flooring options these days, there is no shortage of styles to choose from, whether you're looking to add fresh carpeting, lay down some hardwood or add luxury vinyl plank to freshen your design.

Choosing the right style largely boils down to a matter of preference, but one should also make an informed choice based on surrounding lifestyle factors. Do you have small children? What about pets? Are you looking to update the floors in a high-traffic area? By discussing these factors with a professional, they can determine which style of floors best suits your home.

"Talking with the customer to find out their needs, asking questions and educating them on the options available is necessary to help them make the best choice for their flooring project," says Jeff Stirling, owner of Creative Floors and More.

"Lifestyle is a huge factor," agrees Mike Junker, manager, Maro's Floor Covering. "Active families with pets are best served with waterproof, easy-to-clean vinyl floors or lower pile, more durable carpet in the most lived-in areas like family rooms and basements."

We spoke with Stirling, Junker and more of the region's leading flooring experts to get a better sense of what homeowners need to consider before making the right choice for their household.

On the Carpet

When it comes to carpeting, Stirling says plush is the most popular style choice, but admits there are patterns in a low pile that sell quite well, too. "It's really a personal preference," he says, before cautioning that a homeowner needs to read between the lines when it comes to the different grades of carpeting available.

"Homeowners should be wary of low pricing in carpet, and really all flooring products," Stirling says. "If the price is low, the quality is low and it will not last."

Junker also offers careful words of advice for those in the market for new carpeting, namely with regard to paying attention to how the carpet is constructed.

"Homeowners should consider the fiber that different types of carpets are made of. Nylon, wool and polyester can all be good choices, depending on desired appearance, durability and cost," he says.

And because the carpeting in your living area can take more abuse than the rarely walked-on carpet in a guest room, it may be wise to opt for higher-grades in the spaces that are more heavily used.

"Higher-end carpet is a great choice for stairs and hallways, and often family rooms, where durability and visual impact is desired. [Alternatively], bedrooms and basements are often areas where a mid-grade

Fresh Flooring

carpet can make sense" says Junker.

Elmer Stoltzfus, owner of Heritage Floors, says homeowners should not only consider quality carpeting when making their selection, but also make sure they are choosing high-quality padding for underneath as well.

"Padding is very important. The thought that a carpet is only as good as the padding underneath it is not entirely accurate, but it's close," he says.

When it comes to color choices, beauty is in the eye of the beholder. While neutral tones remain the primary choice for many who look to seamlessly blend multiple elements of the home, some are opting for multi-toned patterns that offer their own look and appeal.

"Multi-colored textured patterns are extremely popular for all areas of the house, especially in high-traffic areas. … Neutral tones will always be popular, but stripe patterns are also very [in demand] right now," says Junker.

Stoltzfus adds that he's seeing customers continuing to gravitate toward plush carpeting, but acknowledges other styles also have their place.

"The trend I see is customers mostly choosing plush carpets, but more multi-colored options rather than a solid color. We do sell some pattern carpets, but it kind of seems like people either love them or hate them," he says.

Walk the Plank

Of course, carpeting is not desired by everyone. In fact, many prefer the warmth of hardwood floors, or the convenience and aesthetic appeal of luxury vinyl in areas like the living room, kitchen and dining room. Some others may opt for laminate or porcelain tiles in bathroom areas and so on.

Gilmar Marcelino, owner of Victorian Floor Finishing, has been in the business since 2009 and has installed his fair share of hardwood floors over the years. But he's also been a trusted resource when a homeowner is looking to have their existing floors refinished. Not only will it clean and help further protect the floor, but it also gives homeowners the opportunity to change the stain. This is particularly desired when a homeowner recently purchased the residence and is looking to add their own touches to the house or perhaps during the move they ripped up old carpeting to be replaced and happily discovered a hardwood floor underneath.

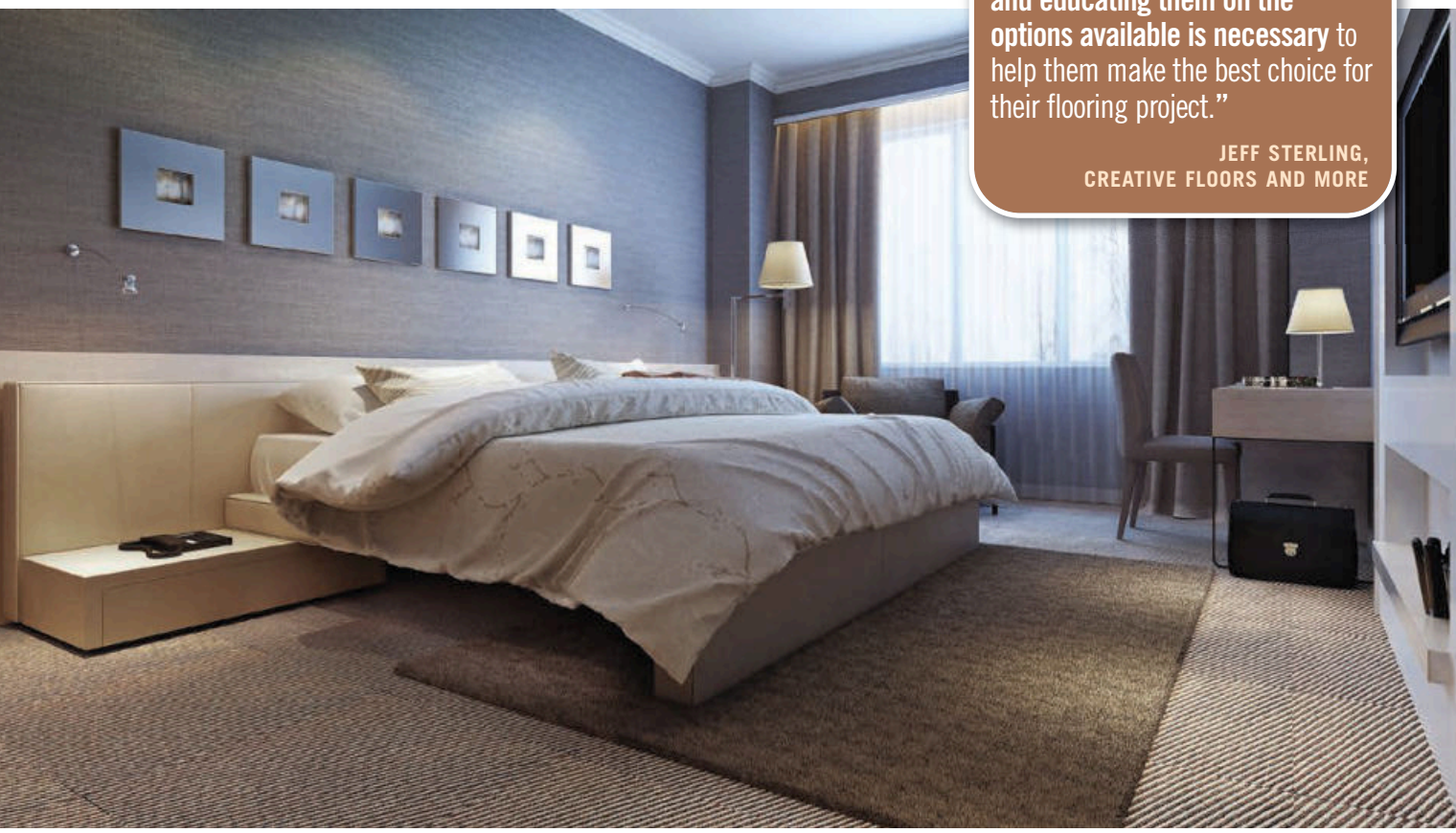
"The main purpose of sanding [down to the bare wood] is that when we remove all finishing, we can apply any kind of color or stain available," says Marcelino. "A homeowner is always looking to update the color of the floor to match the kitchen cabinets, match with some furniture or with new paint on the walls. That's the majority of the reasons why the customer goes through with sanding and finishing the floor. It brings [the floor] to life and makes it look brand new."

And perhaps the most talked-about flooring these days is luxury vinyl plank. It's being utilized in rooms throughout the house and is attractive because of its color options, durability and affordability.

"Luxury vinyl plank is by far the most popular choice these days," says Stoltzfus. "It has the lead over other types of flooring by a pretty good margin. There are a large amount of different styles and colors available."

"Luxury vinyl tile has grown in popularity with homeowners for many reasons. Recent advances have allowed the patterns and

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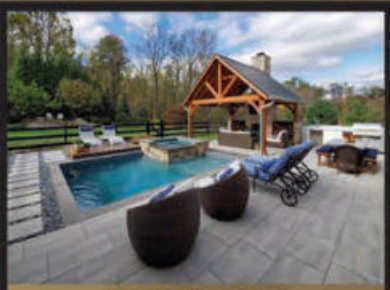
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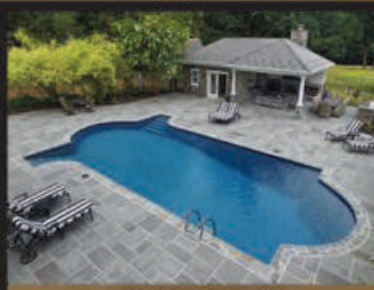
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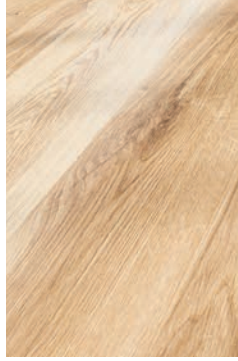
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feel of real wood to be replicated on vinyl plank/tile. This has allowed modern [vinyl flooring] to be not only durable, but also beautiful. In addition to this, the ease of installation has made it a rising star in residential flooring," says Anthony Sterl, of Sterl Kitchens Co. Inc.

"It's a great floor that has been on the market for a while and it doesn't look like it's going anywhere because everybody likes it," adds Marcelino.

In addition to attributes like being waterproof and free of scratches, luxury vinyl is designed to last. For instance, the flooring carried at Sterl Kitchens is actually rated for light commercial use. "That means it is much heavier that what is used in residential [properties]," says Sterl. "Our flooring also has at least a 30-year warranty and depending on the product, some may have a lifetime warranty."

Marcelino has seen his clients install luxury vinyl in a wide variety of spaces on the first floor, the second floor, in sunrooms, etc. "Today you can get the oak look, a pine look, a cherrywood look; I see all kinds and it looks like real hardwood," he says. "And the maintenance is much less. Even if you have a pet or small kids, you have nothing to worry about because that floor is meant to last a long time. … I haven't done any replacements for existing homeowners because of issues with [a vinyl] floor."

No matter which floor suits your style and preference, homeowners are best served to find a trusted professional to help guide them in their selection. And as is the case with most things in life, you get what you pay for, and sacrificing quality to save a few dollars could wind up proving more costly in the long run.

"All flooring products are not equal," says Stirling. "There are many different qualities of flooring in each category. This means different price points as well. Low price and quality do not go hand in hand. Homeowners should keep this in mind when shopping for flooring." H&H

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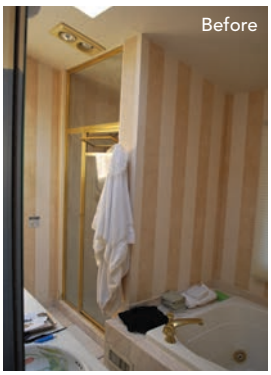




RENOVATION INNOVATION

A sleek and chic bathroom renovation earns Gehman Design Remodeling national acclaim.

Renovating a bathroom can be a daunting undertaking. In the hands of a skilled team of professionals, however, the results can be remarkable—even award-winning. This was the case for one local family, whose bathroom redesign by Gehman Design Remodeling not only suited the family's needs, but also earned the firm a national Contractor of the Year award from NARI, the National Association of the Remodeling Industry, in the "Residential Bath $50,001 to $75,000" category.



Gehman Design Remodeling transformed a cramped, poorly flowing space into a bright and airy oasis to provide a respite from the day for the homeowners. A shower framed in garish gold was removed to make space for a glass-walled, zero-entry shower featuring a floor with a linear drain, while a new freestanding tub replaced its outdated predecessor. Above, a thoughtful skylight filled the room with the warm glow of natural light.

"The bathroom was definitely very dated," says Dennis D. Gehman, a Master Certified Kitchen & Bath Remodeler and president of the Harleysville-based firm. "The homeowner wanted pretty much the same amenities but wanted the room to look more open. The freestanding tub, versus the big platform tub, makes things feel open. The vanity, as well as the toilet and seat in the shower, are wall hung, so that floating appearance offers more space between those things and the floor."

In addition, a sleek and smartly hidden recessed linen closet offers much-needed storage without taking up valuable floor space.

It wasn't just updated fixtures contributing to the new air of openness in the room. The bathroom was just one room among many in a whole-home renovation, so Gehman's team had the freedom to move a non-loadbearing wall one and a half feet into the adjacent bedroom. As a result, the bathroom gained additional square footage.

"We were able to move the wall that the sinks were on to give a little more room in the bathroom," Gehman shares. "The clear glass shower, with the visual that you can look right through it, helps things look more open, too."

So far, the bathroom renovation has earned Gehman Design Remodeling not just one but three awards, as the firm was able to expertly highlight not just facets of the improved space but also how they overcame the challenges they faced along the way. One major hurdle: getting a 420-pound freestanding soaking tub up to the home's second level. It took four men carrying the weight up exterior steps, and the removal of a narrow door, but Gehman's team prevailed. The addition of the zero-entry shower floor presented its own challenges, which the team solved by cutting tapers into the top of the floor joists.

The shower's unique entry and sloping floor optimize water drainage. In addition, one-piece walls provide a departure from classic tile-and-grout options.

"The shower walls are something unique," Gehman shares. "They fit the trend we're seeing, with homeowners wanting to move away from tile walls in showers. These walls are one piece, top to bottom, so there is less grout and caulking [required]."

While Gehman's firm has won awards yearly since 1996, he says this year's honor is particularly special because it centers on a residential renovation rather than a commercial one. When asked to what he credits the long history of his company's success, Gehman does not hesitate to answer: "It's a good team."

"We've got a good group of people," Gehman says. "We've been blessed with longevity and loyalty. We have a lot of people who've stuck with us. We have someone who has been with us 28 years, another 26, and a handful between 20 and 26. That's certainly part of it."

Homeowners, too, play a vital role. Gehman says his firm has been fortunate to "work with homeowners who have good taste and really want something nice."

"The reality is, we can have ideas, but if the client doesn't like them, it doesn't matter," he adds. "Our role is to ask a lot of questions of the clients and listen closely."

Perhaps most importantly, the company-wide passion for craftsmanship has set the firm apart for all these years. As Gehman says, "I think it comes easier to us because we enjoy what we're doing." H&H

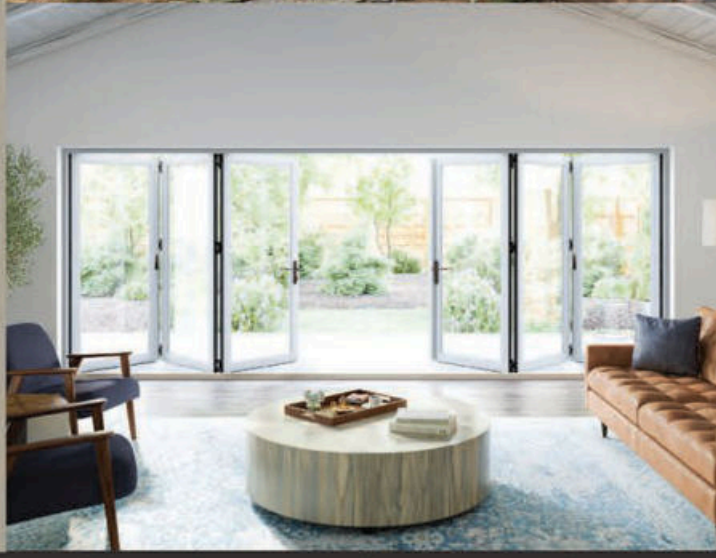
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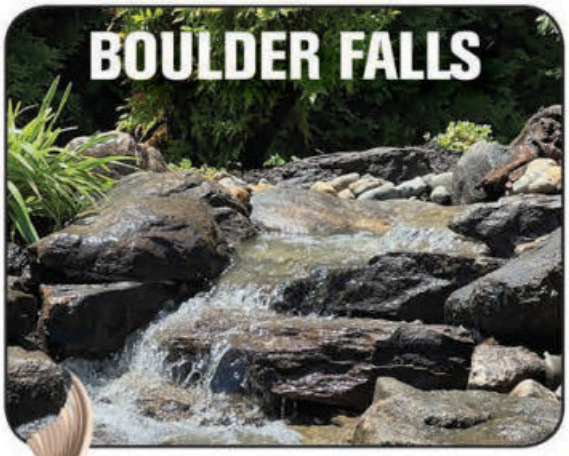
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ask the expert

Burke Asphalt

QUALITY WORKMANSHIP IS SOMETHING THAT HAS LONG RUN IN PATRICK BURKE'S FAMILY. It all started back in 1960 when his grandfather started Burke Asphalt and, over the years, began sharing his years of expertise with his son, who would in turn eventually pass those tools of the trade down to his grandson. As a third-generation contractor, Burke is keeping that legacy alive as he now heads up the family business.

During his years on the job, Burke has run into a lot of customers with similar questions about asphalt care and maintenance, so we wanted to ask him about some of the things that homeowners should know. Here he shares his answers to some of the more common things he's asked and offers advice for anyone considering sealing or resurfacing their driveway.

SHOULD A DRIVEWAY BE SEALED WITHIN THE FIRST YEAR OR TWO?

The answer to that is a little complicated, depending on what sealer is used. If you prefer water-based sealer, you have to wait at least a year in order to seal a new asphalt driveway. For an oil-based sealer, you can seal it as early as right away to make sure the driveway is saturated with the natural oils in asphalt. Most people think you have to wait at least a year for either sealer, but it is only true of water-based sealers.



ARE THERE DIFFERENT TYPES OF ASPHALT?

Yes, generally the stone size is different in the main types of asphalt. Driveway top, which is what we put on residential driveways, is primarily 9.5mm stone. For some commercial parking lots we sometimes use 19mm, which shows a little less wear for heavier equipment or trucks. If you're going to be paving in two layers, we use 25mm for the under layer and 9.5mm for the top.

HOW OFTEN SHOULD A DRIVEWAY BE SEALED?

Driveways tend to need to be sealed when the pavement is devoid of any tar, which leaves it gray. This is usually around two years, depending on weathering and how much traffic it gets.

WHAT IS BETTER, A WATER-BASED OR OIL-BASED SEALER?

In terms of better for asphalt, oil based is much better for the longevity of the asphalt. But it is much more expensive as it penetrates completely into the existing asphalt, whereas water based does not penetrate and mainly sits on top like a blanket coating. For this reason, most people think water based is a thicker product viscosity wise. They are actually about the same. Water based is definitely better for older and more worn asphalt as it will hide some blemishes and cracks that oil based will not. It is also less expensive.

WHAT ARE COMMON SIGNS YOUR DRIVEWAY NEEDS RESURFACING?

You will start to see alligator areas, which are several cracks all together that lead to slight sinking in some areas on your driveway. You will also see some of your cracks start to become full separations, which means that the asphalt has completely separated all the way to the stone underneath.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF RESURFACING?

Resurfacing is the practice of overlaying a new driveway over a settled old driveway using what is called modified driveway mix. That is essentially 9.5mm top asphalt that has been modified to get into the cracks and crevices of the old driveway so you don't have to tear up what you have. This service saves the homeowner quite a bit of money and gives the same result as tearing up and starting new. There are exceptions, such as pitch concerns and water drainage concerns, which may make certain projects unqualified for a true resurfacing.

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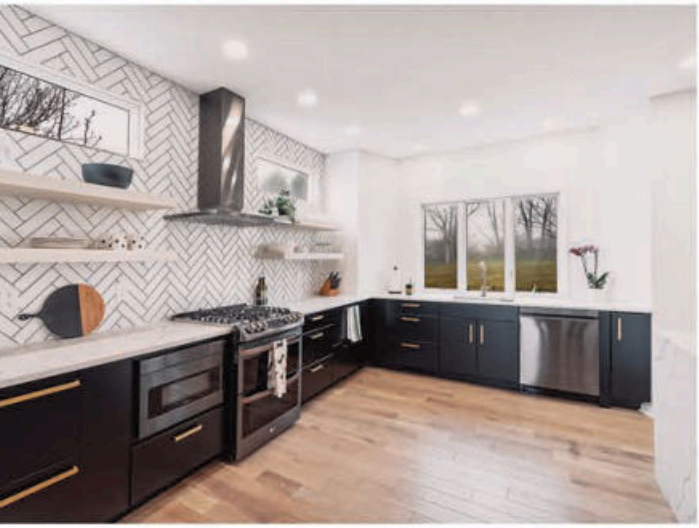
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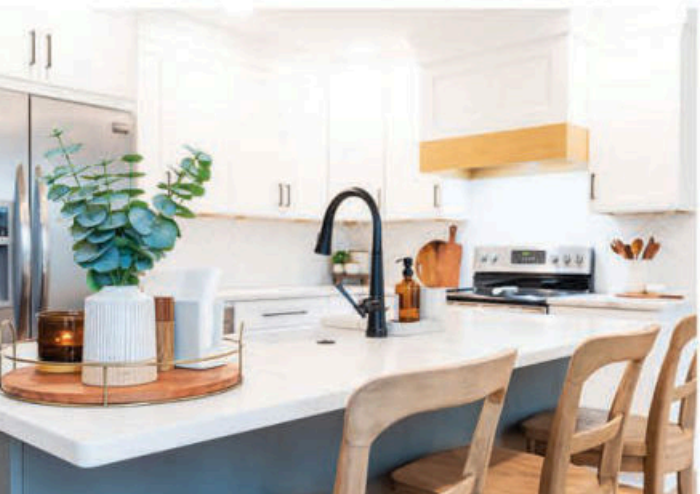
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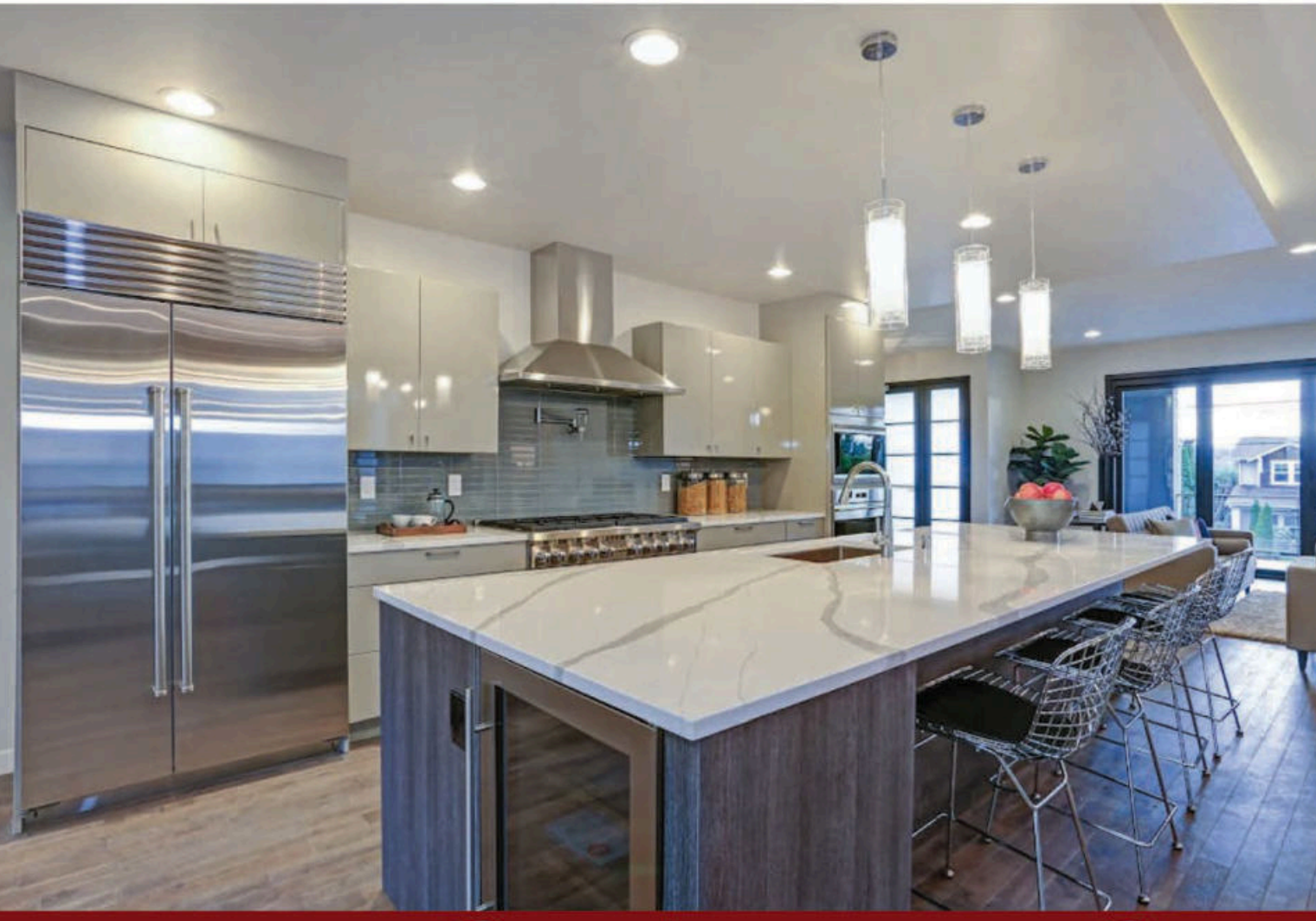
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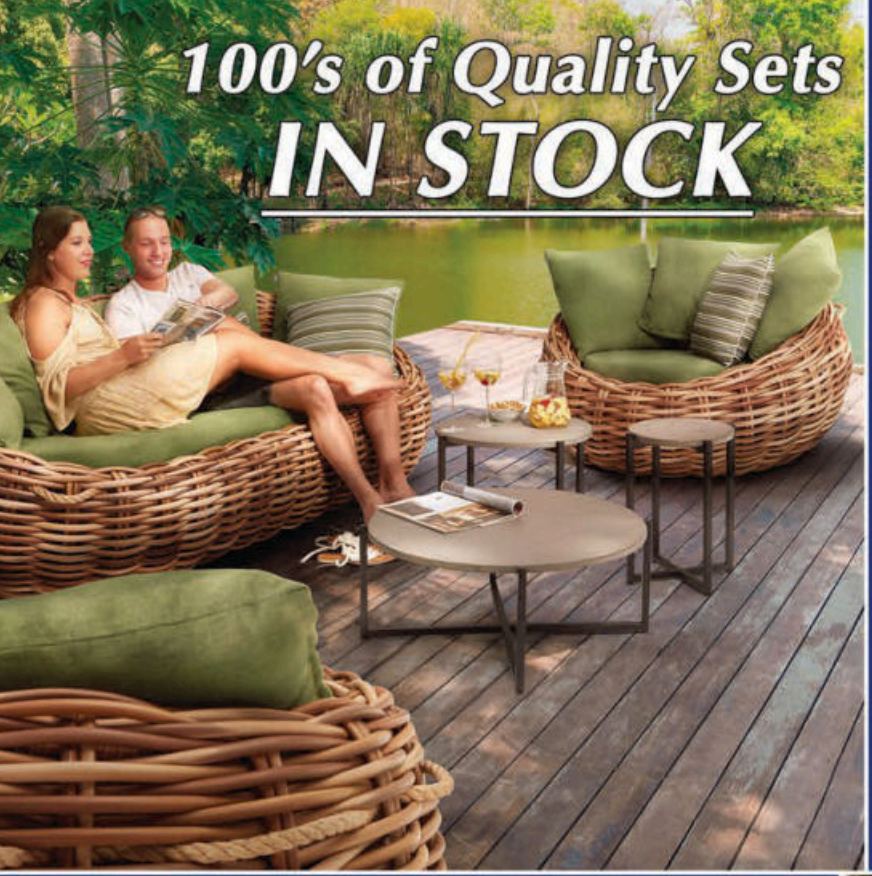
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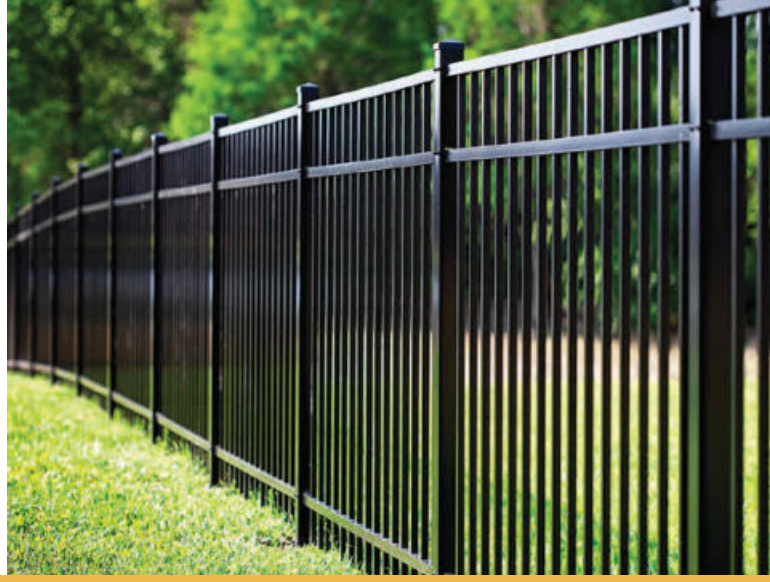
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H&H FENCING



OUTDOOR ESSENTIALS

The right type of fence can be the finishing touch on a beautiful backyard, but homeowners should understand the pros and cons of different materials.

by **Matt Cosentino**

There is perhaps no more exciting realm of home improvement than the outdoor living space, whether plans include a resort-style pool, beautiful landscaping or a covered deck with a fully loaded kitchen and bar area. One aspect that is not always top of mind but is equally important as the bells and whistles is the type of fence that surrounds it all.

Homeowners may have different reasons for installing a fence on their property, and recognizing their priorities goes a long way in determining the style and type they should ultimately choose.

"More often than not a homeowner is looking for a fence because of pets and children, and these days I feel like more pools are going in than ever before, so once a pool is in the equation a fence becomes mandatory," says Robert Hook of Progressive Fence & Railing, located at the Jersey Shore. "Privacy is also a huge factor for most folks, which is why the vast majority of fencing you will continue to see is [6-foot-high] privacy. Most customers want something that is low maintenance, but they also want something strong that can stand up to the abuse of the wind and elements, which is extremely key when working [on] one of the islands in South Jersey."

The popularity of home improvement shows on television and the influence of social media mean that homeowners are often more educated than in the past, but meeting with a professional fence contractor can certainly provide even more valuable information.

"A lot of times, especially nowadays, people know what they're interested in, what type of fence or style," says Tom Hibbs of





Great Valley Fence. "But I will guide them through the process depending on if they need more privacy, if they prefer more of an open look, if they're concerned about pets or kids. … Most [towns] have adopted the international pool code, which is called the BOCA code. Anybody who has a pool or is thinking about getting a pool down the road would want the fence to meet that code, so that's something I also make sure to mention."

House & Home spoke to several local professionals to learn more about the factors to consider when shopping for a fence, the different types on the market and why customers lean to certain kinds over others.

Vinyl is final

Over the past decade or two, many residential neighborhoods in the Northeast have become dotted with white vinyl fencing. The appeal lies with the durability and low maintenance required of the material.

"Most of our jobs are vinyl," says Danny Leslie of Superior Fence & Railing. "It's maintenance free, it doesn't rot, it doesn't have splits, it doesn't have cracks like wood, it's easier to pressure-wash once a year than staining wood, and it looks good too. It comes in different colors—white, tan, adobe, gray—and we have a wood-grain vinyl. … Are you going to keep getting someone to stain your [wooden] fence or replace a post when it's cracked? Buy vinyl, it's final."

Hook agrees that vinyl is the go-to option for most customers and will continue to be because people do not want to spend the time and money to care for a fence made of other materials, such as wood. He also sees the colors and decorative elements improving each year.

"Colored and wood-grain vinyls have been around for quite some time actually, but there are always new additions being added by our suppliers," he says. "There are definitely some newer and very popular styles that have emerged in the past few years such as horizontal privacy and horizontal semi-privacy fencing. It's a very nice and subtle change from a typical fence using vertical boards or pickets, so it catches your eye.

"There is definitely a big demand right now for almost anything that is slightly different than the norm, whether that is changing the style and specs of the typical fence, mixing and matching colors and even slightly different materials into the equation. There are so many variations when it comes to vinyl, you really have almost unlimited options to choose from."

Hibbs adds that fencing that makes the property stand out is popular at the moment, though it may come with a higher price tag.

"Some people will get different colors but a lot of times it comes down to cost," he says. "There are standard color upgrades—like beige, gray or clay—that won't be nearly as expensive as a custom color. But if they want a custom color to match the siding of their house, for example, like brown, green or orange, those colors can be done but it's a lot more expensive.

"Wood grain is another possibility, but that's going to be on the expensive side too. They have wood grain finishes like mahogany, walnut and a natural color."

Even with those possibilities, the downside of vinyl is that it may not fit as nicely with the natural beauty of the landscape. But in the end, the low-maintenance factor usually seems to win out, and Hibbs offers a suggestion for cleaning a vinyl fence.

"I actually don't recommend powerwashing," he says. "It's a lot softer on the PVC to just use a hose or to hand-wash it with environmentally friendly soap and just wipe it down. They will get some grass and dirt on them, but if you powerwash, it could actually affect the integrity of the outside of the PVC. … It's actually a petroleum-based product, so if you powerwash the outside you could create pores in the material that would promote mold growth."

Complementing the natural beauty

Leslie often finds that customers in wooded areas prefer fences made from spruce or cedar because of





H&H FENCING

their ability to blend with the natural surroundings of the property. Hibbs agrees but warns that unlike years past, wooden fences are not much cheaper than vinyl, if at all.

"It offers the natural look but lumber is still more expensive right now," he says. "Ten or 20 years ago, because they were still refining PVC and getting used to it as a fence product, PVC was a lot more expensive than cedar. But since the pandemic, lumber prices went up. Some of the standard lumber, like pressure-treated, spruce or fir, those prices came down, but cedar is still relatively expensive."

Hook believes there is a market for wood fences, however, and has started to see the prices get better the further we move away from the pandemic.

"Wood fencing in my opinion has actually come back in a big-time way, at least in the areas that I work in," he says. "You've had years and years of nothing but vinyl seemingly popping up, but the reality is that a beautiful cedar fence may simply match a customer's home and property infinitely better than vinyl will.



"Unfortunately, the market and the cost of lumber has skyrocketed since the beginning of COVID, but things have already begun to normalize. And while the costs of lumber went up, nearly every other material available experienced increases that were substantial, from wood to vinyl, aluminum, steel, composites, etc. Right now, the cost of a vinyl fence versus a good-quality cedar fence is very comparable, so it will come down to how that fence accents the property and its surroundings."

Hook always recommended vinyl when he first broke into the industry about nine years ago and still does plenty of jobs with it, but has become partial to wooden fences.

"[I]n my opinion, there is a huge market for cedar fencing and other hardwoods such as ipe, which when completed and maintained, simply cannot be matched aesthetically," he says. "Of course, it has to fit the property and the customer's home, but I have developed a true and sincere appreciation for not just the look of wood fencing, but for the time and skill involved in building it, especially when it is a custom design."

Aluminum and other options

While chain-link fencing is still heavily used in commercial applications, it is not as common in the residential space as it was 30 years ago. Black aluminum or steel fencing does have its benefits, however, and is often utilized around a pool.

"One of the largest pros for both aluminum and steel is that the fencing is very un-obstructive to your view," Hook says. "Very often it is used surrounding a pool where the customer may already have a fence on their property line, but then the aluminum is installed immediately around the pool as a secondary line of defense for children. Since the posts and pickets are very slender, it doesn't block your view, it simply blends into the background. In many other occasions where customers have their property lines landscaped and planted heavily, well, they want their landscaping to be a highlight of the property. In those situations where privacy isn't a factor and a barrier is needed, it's the perfect solution."

Hibbs adds that just using aluminum around a pool rather than the whole property is a good way to save money, or if it is used in conjunction with a vinyl fence, it can give dogs a place to run around without getting near the pool. There are some negatives, however, particularly in a coastal setting.

"The biggest con to both is that no matter what, metal does not fare too well in a salt-air environment," Hook says. "Without a doubt, steel will eventually rust, aluminum will pit and oxidize, and



at some point will need replacement. Now, on the plus side there are a ton of different manufacturers out there, and many offer products with substantially upgraded powder coatings that are designed for a salt-air environment. That being said, they obviously won't last forever, but is there anything on your home or property that will?"

Hibbs says split-rail fencing with welded wire can be an inexpensive option to keep smaller pets and children in the yard, and can also be used to meet pool code. He also suggests black woven wire as a way to keep other animals out.

"We've done some work like that specifically for deer enclosures," he says. "Some years ago it became a big thing to very easily put up posts and attach deer netting. But the deer would get stuck in it, so our recommendation for deer enclosures would be to go a minimum of 10 feet high and to use the woven wire, which is a very strong, agricultural-grade wire. If deer happen to run into it, they'll just bounce right off and not get snagged in it."



Finishing touches

Just like automation has been a critical piece of other systems in the home, it has carried over to fences as well. Hibbs says remote-controlled gates have become quite popular with his customers, who enjoy just being able to open and close it with the push of a button.

He has also seen some homeowners put their own personal stamp on their fences by incorporating their initials and decorative elements into the gate or adding finials to the pickets.

Whatever the project might entail, if the goal is to get a fence installed in time for summer, it's important to act quickly.

"If someone is thinking about getting a fence, they should definitely be shopping around now, because the longer they wait between now and June, the busier any fence company is going to get," Hibbs says. "It tends to slow down in the fall … but March through June is definitely when I fill the schedule out pretty fast."

Leslie stresses the importance of finding a company with the best warranties on materials and labor. And while some handy homeowners may think they can tackle the fence installation themselves, it's probably best left to a professional, Hook adds, because of issues like grade changes, working around irrigation and landscaping, and drilling through masonry.

"There is an awful lot that goes into a fence installation, whether most folks realize it or not, and it's a very difficult thing to get right without proper experience," Hook says. "Plus, if you decide to do the work yourself and a warranty issue arises because you didn't install the materials properly, then you're going to be out of luck. A company like ours is an authorized distributor and installer of these products so not only do we warranty our labor, but then the material warranties by more of our suppliers are in the 25-30-year range because an authorized professional did the installation." H&H

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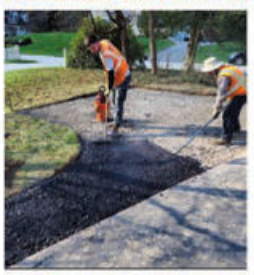
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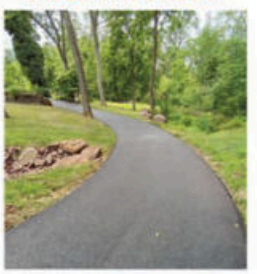
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Blinds, Shade and Shutter Factory is inviting you to visit its state-of-the-art showroom and explore the possibilities for your home.

A Shade Above

Blinds, Shade and Shutter Factory invites you to visit their state-of-the-art showroom, featuring the area's most extensive collection of window coverings from Hunter Douglas and other industry-leading brands. Conveniently located at 404 Easton Road,Warrington in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, customers can browse through a wide variety of working models, styles and patterns alongside an expert design team.

"We have the best of the best," says Owner & Operator Bob Silver, who has spent his career building and maintaining the family business set by his great-grandfather, now in its fourth generation with his son, Jordan. "Until you've been here, you haven't seen anything! There are so many various display options that you really have to come into the showroom to see all of the different physical working samples, how they operate with the different lift systems, and the latest in motorization and home automation."

Whether you are shopping for a single window treatment, purchasing a new home, or seeking a solution to a complex design challenge, Blinds, Shade and Shutter Factory has certified professionals with the right knowledge and expertise to help you put it all together.

"New home construction is actually the perfect time to visit and plan your designs, especially if you are considering motorization," says Silver. "There's also the concern with privacy. We have so many customers come in worried about having little or no privacy in their new home. To help combat this, we provide FREE temporary shades for every window in your order. These white, light-filtering shades easily attach to your glass and can deliver the privacy you need until permanent treatments are installed. In addition to your free temporary shades, we are also offering a $200 voucher for all new home construction orders."

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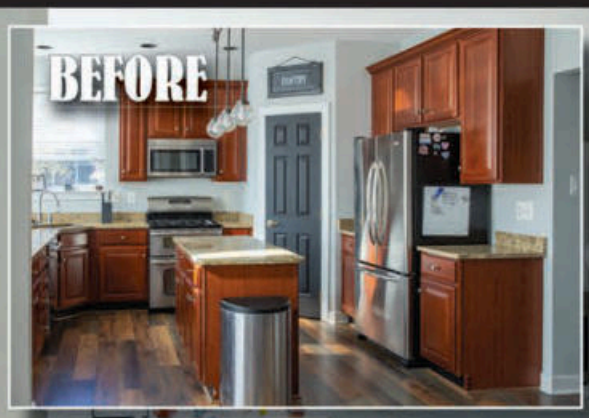
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